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## LITERATURE, LAW AND PSYCHOANALYSIS

# The Insanity Plea in *The Butcher's Wife*

Lung-Lung Hu

Dalarna University, SE  
llh@du.se

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In 1983, Li Ang, a Taiwanese writer, adapted a case about the killing of a husband, committed by Zhan Zhou Shi in Shanghai in 1945, into the novel *The Butcher's Wife* (1983). The case is also recorded in *The Hearsay in Shanghai* (1955) written by Chen Ding-Shan. *The Butcher's Wife* depicts a woman who, due to her traumatized childhood and psychological condition caused by her husband and neighbours, kills her husband, a butcher, and dismembers the body the way he does pigs. Li Ang's novel tries to offer a legal explanation to exonerate the butcher's wife, Lin Shi, through a plea of insanity. In this article, I will compare the case of Zhan Zhou Shi both in the media and in *The Hearsay in Shanghai* with *The Butcher's Wife* to illustrate Li Ang's reinterpretation of the case and explain how Li Ang goes beyond the insanity pleas that strengthens a stereotypical image of insane female offenders.

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## 1. Introduction

In Chen Dingshan's (陳定山) *The Hearsay in Shanghai* (春申舊聞 Chun Shen Jiu Wen),<sup>1</sup> there is a story about a murder case in Shanghai in 1945, which supposedly came from the author's memory and from a series of media reports. A woman, Zhan Zhou Shi (詹周氏), whose name before marriage was Zhou Xianhui (周賢惠), killed her husband Zhan Zian (詹子安),<sup>2</sup> a butcher, and dismembered his body with a butcher's knife. However, the plot of the novel is not the same as that of the real case, as Nicole Huang states:

*The Hearsay in Shanghai* was published in 1954 and is a collection of personal memories and uncanny news about Shanghai. However, you will soon discover that history is ambiguous if you read it as a history of Shanghai (2011: 15).

Even if Chen Dingshan believed that what he wrote was real, memory and facts could be distorted and reconstructed over time or by consciously or subconsciously misreading the media report. Therefore, even if he did not fabricate the story of Zhan Zhou Shi's case, it is understandable why there are so many discrepancies between his writing and the reports in *Shen Bao* (the most trusted newspaper in Shanghai in 1940s),<sup>3</sup> which are supposed to be closer to the facts. To give some examples of the way the story is fictionalised, the husband, who is a butcher in *The Hearsay in Shanghai*, was actually a used-goods salesman and a travel agent, and the knife Zhan Zhou Shi used to kill her husband was in fact a kitchen knife in the real case.

In 1983, Li Ang, an influential Taiwanese writer, adapted the murder case, based on the story she read from *The Hearsay in Shanghai*, into the novel *The Butcher's Wife* (《殺夫》Sha Fu). Li Ang won the grand prize for

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<sup>1</sup> In Chinese聞 (hear, wen) can be translated into 'news', but I translated it into 'hearsay' since the stories in this book do not really match the originals. The text of the murder case in this article is quoted from the 2016 version. About Chen Dingshan, see Huang (2014).

<sup>2</sup> In *Shen Bao* the husband's name is Zhan Yunying (詹雲影). See *Shen Bao* (21 March 1945: 2).

<sup>3</sup> *Shen Bao* is called *Shanghai News* in English. Its full name in Chinese is 申江新報 (*Shen Jiang Xin Bao*). I will only use the reports from *Shen Bao* when I discuss Zhan Zhou Shi's case.

medium-length novels, which was held by *United Daily News* (聯合報 Lian He Bao) since 1979 (the prize for short novels started from 1976; the prize for medium-length novels was added in 1979), with *The Butcher's Wife* in 1983. The novel is set in a small town, Lugang (鹿港), in Taiwan. It depicts a woman, Lin Shi (林氏), who, due to her traumatic childhood, as well as psychological illness caused by her husband and neighbours, kills her husband, Chen Jiangshui (陳江水), who is also a butcher like the husband in *The Hearsay in Shanghai*, and cuts open his carcass in the same way he slaughters pigs. Lin Shi is sentenced to death by the law.

*The Hearsay in Shanghai*, the media reports and the trial reported in *Shen Bao*, and *The Butcher's Wife* offer different explanations for why a woman would kill her husband. In this article, we will learn how this influential “husband-killing” case, from *Shen Bao* to *The Hearsay in Shanghai* to *The Butcher's Wife*, was transformed over time through writings which reflect different ideas about the crime and the perpetrator. Most importantly, my argument will highlight how and why the insanity plea is deployed in Li Ang's literary writing to exonerate a woman who has been sentenced to death by the law.

## 2. Insanity in a Chinese Legal Context

According to Shen Jiaben (沈家本, 1907) in *大清刑律草案*, the origin of the law about insane people who commit crimes can be traced back to the Han dynasty. Many dynasties in Chinese history had a law which specifically stated how the authorities should deal with an insane person when they are a threat to themselves and/or to others, as well the commutation of the punishment after a crime has occurred. Shen Jiaben (1907: 8) said:

According to the *Han Code*, if a *kuangyi* (狂易) person kills someone, the punishment should be reduced [...]. *Kuangyi* means “madness changes the nature of a human being” [...]. A criminal law in the Yuan dynasty shows that a mentally-ill patient is not guilty even he beats someone to death. The *Tang Code* and the *Ming Code* do not specify the fee of the funeral of the

deceased. The law was made in the time of Kangxi (康熙) that a mentally ill patient who kills should be sentenced according to the law of “killing by error” and needs to pay 12.42 tiles of silver for the funeral of the deceased. In the 20<sup>th</sup> year of Qianlong (乾隆), quarantine and custody became a principle [...].

Insane criminals were treated as mental patients who should be quarantined by the government or by the patient's family for the rest of their lives in order to protect others. According to *Ta Tsing Leu Lee* (大清律例, Great Qing Legal Code) in the Qing dynasty, if insane people hurt or killed themselves or someone else, the local government and his or her family were jointly responsible for them (*Ta Tsing Leu Lee*, section CCXCII: 313–315). Occasionally, after they were cured, they could be released in specific circumstances, such as if the patient's parents needed his or her support. Therefore, the idea that insane people can commit crimes is not new to Chinese law or to Chinese society; what has gradually developed is a modern method of medical examination, which was introduced to help the Chinese legal system determine whether a person is insane and the degree of insanity. However, Zhan Zhou Shi's case was not defended with reference to insanity.

In the next section, I will try to explain why the plea of insanity was not used in Zhan Zhou Shi's case and how the case was defended based on the court report in *Shen Bao*.

### 3. The Defence in the Real Case

In *Shen Bao*, Zhan Zhou Shi was first depicted as an adulteress who killed her husband with her secret lover. Due to many Chinese women in the time of the early Republic still being confined at home, with no contact with others, and not involved in any economic activities outside the family, the crimes that women committed were mostly domestic. These included infanticide, unfilial behaviours (such as disobeying the orders from parents-in-law and striking husband's relatives), stealing from neighbours, extramarital affairs, and, possibly, killing a husband with the help from a lover (Wang, 1993). Based on the description of Zhan Zhou Shi in *The Hearsay*

in *Shanghai*, the implication of adultery in *Shen Bao*,<sup>4</sup> and some negative images of females that recurrently appear in literature (such as Diao Liu Shi (刁劉氏) mentioned at the end of *The Hearsay in Shanghai*), women were stereotyped as adulteresses in such cases.

Zhan Zhou Shi was sentenced to death in the first trial during Japan's occupation of Shanghai in 1945. There was a re-trial of her case in 1946; however, she was still given the death penalty due to the cruelty of the way she murdered her husband (*Shen Bao*, 16 March 1946: 3; 10 September 1946: 4). She was sentenced to death in the re-trial; however, her execution was never performed. After many appeals and trials, the sentence was reduced to 15 years' imprisonment (Huang, 2011: 17). The re-trial was reported in *Shen Bao*, in which we are able to see her lawyer's defence strategy. Her lawyer applied Articles 273,<sup>5</sup> 249,<sup>6</sup> and 57<sup>7</sup> in the Criminal Law, as well as Article 284.<sup>18</sup> in the Old Criminal Law (in *A Compilation of the Laws of the Republic of China*) to save Zhan Zhou Shi from death. To summarise, her lawyer argued that it was not a premeditated murder. Zhan Zhou Shi killed her husband impulsively out of anger, which was caused by the way her husband treated her, not because she

<sup>4</sup> An article in *Shen Bao* (March 26, 1945: 2) reported that the police had arrested Zhan Zhou Shi's lover He Xianhui (賀賢惠) and that there was a rumour that there would be a walk of shame for Zhan Zhou Shi in public, which is mentioned in Chen Dingshang's writing. In traditional China, there would be shame parades before criminals being executed. The purposes are to: 1) humiliate criminals; 2) let people vent their anger; 3) make an example.

<sup>5</sup> A person who being justly angered and thereupon kills another shall be punished with imprisonment for not more than seven years. An attempt to commit an offence specified in the preceding paragraph is punishable.

<sup>6</sup> A person who opens a grave and mutilates, abandons, insults, or steals the corpse shall be punished with imprisonment for not less than three and not more than ten years. A person who opens a grave and damages, abandons, or steals the bones, hair, burial articles, or cremated remains of a deceased person shall be punished with imprisonment for not less than one and not more than seven years.

<sup>7</sup> When sentence is imposed, all circumstances of the case shall be considered, and special attention shall be given to the following items to determine the severity of the sentence: 1. Motive for the offence; 2. Purpose of the offence; 3. Provocation at the time of the offence; 4. Means employed to commit the offence; 5. Living conditions of the offender; 6. Conduct of the offender; 7. General knowledge of the offender; 8. Ordinary relations between the offender and the injured party; 9. Danger or damage caused by the offence; 10. Conduct of the offender after the commission of the offence.

<sup>8</sup> A person who commits a homicide shall be punished with the death penalty if: 1. Crime of homicide is pre-meditated; and 2. They dismember or damage the body. The law is also applied to the attempted murderer.

wanted to swindle insurance money or to run away with her secret lover. Besides, the way and the reason for why she dismembered her husband's body was intended to allow her to easily dispose of the body parts after death, which was not an inhumane torture executed while the victim was still alive. The court record reported in *Shen Bao* is:

A killing must be premeditated for it to be a murder according to Article 284. Section 1, Subsection 1 in the old criminal law. Therefore, a murder has to be an action thoroughly planned before its execution. If the act is impulsive, the killing is not a murder, even if the victim and the appellant have a long-term conflict, which is only a remote cause of the case but not a proof of murder [...]. Therefore, the case is definitely not a murder [...]. Besides, the purpose of dismembering the body is to dispose of it. It is inadequate to compare it with other cruelties such as opening the carcass and gauge out the heart [...]. In addition, the mistreatment the appellant had been receiving, which was intolerable especially to a vulnerable female, was the cause of her extreme action [...] (*Shen Bao*, 17 September 1946: 5).

The defence attorney also tried to make Zhan Yunying, her husband, take most of the blame. In addition to stating that he was a drunkard, a gambler, a pimp, and a wife-abusing husband, Zhan Yunying was also described as a traitor to his country. For this reason, the lawyer argues that Zhan Zhou Shi killing him could be considered as a benevolent action done for the public:

After [Zhan Zhou Shi] married Zhan Yunying, she barely managed to tolerate his angry temperament. Things got worse after the fall of Shanghai, he became addicted to gambling, and had been doing poor business [...]. He did not take care of his family, and only came home, at midnight, once or twice a month [...]. When he left, he took everything worth pawning. Every time [Zhan Zhou Shi] tried to reason to him, [she] would be beaten brutally [...] (*Shen Bao*, 17 September 1946: 5).

There had been several insanity cases since the 1930s. So why did the lawyer not defend her with an insanity plea? It may be because the insanity plea was not that prevalent or precise and women like Zhan Zhou Shi would not be considered as mentally ill in the 1950s. The most sensible reason is that the law, in order to maintain social order, needed her to be punished because she broke the rules of marriage.

Chinese law in the period I am examining sought to regulate women's sexual and moral behaviour. In *Ta Tsing Leu Lee*, there are few sentences regarding husband-killing cases:

If the guilty wife shall contrive with the adulterer to procure the death of her husband, she shall suffer death by a slow and painful execution, and the adulterer shall be beheaded. If the adulterer kills the husband, without the knowledge or connivance of the wife, she shall suffer death by being strangled (*Ta Tsing Leu Lee*, section CCLXXXV: 307).

"A slow and painful execution" is the most severe punishment, *lin chi* (凌遲). The guilty wife is killed by her skin being sliced and her flesh being pulled off piece-by-piece. Even if it is the adulterer murdering the husband, the wife, since her infidelity is apparently the cause of her husband's death, will be still sentenced to death by a less torturous way (by strangulation). Further, even if a woman's husband mistreats her, she cannot issue a divorce (which is usually issued by the husband) and cannot even touch him because only husbands can beat wives according to the law. If a wife strikes her husband, the law (*Ta Tsing Leu Lee*, section CCCXV: 341–43) will punish her severely, even if she has a justifiable reason, and the husband can file for divorce to the magistrate of the district of jurisdiction. Even though at the end of the Qing dynasty the traditional law had been modified several times and there were new criminal laws passed in the period of the early Republic,<sup>9</sup> we can see that the old patriarchal ideas were still influential and dominant – a woman who killed

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<sup>9</sup> 1912年4月30日《暫行新刑律》(北洋政府)。1928年3月10日《中華民國刑法》(舊刑法,南京國民政府)。1935年1月1日《中華民國刑法》(新刑法)。

her husband must be sentenced to death even if she has been abused. Thus, she was not allowed to be mentally ill and be freed due to her either temporary or long-term mental illness. Since the insanity plea, as the only way to exonerate Zhan Zhou Shi in a traditional society, was not applied in the real case, Li Ang placed it in her later revisionist writing about this story in order to show an oppressed woman and to explain why the wife should not be sentenced to death.<sup>10</sup>

#### **4. The Insanity in the Trial, *The Hearsay in Shanghai*, and *The Butcher's Wife***

In fact, insanity was mentioned in the re-trial. Zhan Zhou Shi, in the cross-examination, once mentioned her state of mind:

Question: Why cut [the body] into 16 pieces?

Answer: After I had killed him, it seemed someone whispered "cut him, cut him" in my ear....

Question: How could you kill a man as tall as Zhan Yunying?

Answer: My soul was not on me, it was possessed (by ghosts); I did not treat him as a human when I killed him, it was like I was killing something else...  
(*Shen Bao*, 17 September 1946: 5).

Zhan Zhou Shi concluded that her action was due to demonic possession, which is a supernatural phenomenon that is far less verifiable than psychological conditions. Even if the lawyer did not defend Zhan Zhou Shi with insanity, the idea of an insane woman, as well as the fact that she was abused by her husband, was still recorded and

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<sup>10</sup> Many female intellectuals thought the reason why Zhan Zhou Zhi was sentenced to death was because women were considered as an inferior species. Feng Yun-Zhuang's article "Women's Hearts" published on *Shen Bao*:

it is a snobby society in which only humans can beat dogs; once dogs fight back and bite humans, then it will be treated as an unforgivable rebellion [...]. Zhan Zhou Shi's husband killing case was more eye-catching than the cases of men killing their wives for their mistresses, since women have been considered as an inferior species (*Shen Bao*, 14 December 1947: 9).

written down by Chen Dingshan: "Her action can only be explained by psychological illness. After she watched her husband killing pigs, she got a terrible symptom of having illusions" (2016: 59). Even though, as Huang states, "Chen Dingshan's fictional writing was not about to depict Zhan Zhou Shi as 'a married woman who is oppressed in traditional society'" (2011: 19–20). *The Hearsay in Shanghai* aimed to record the uncanniness and the popularity of the case as a piece of true crime writing; nevertheless, Chen Dingshan's writing inspired Li Ang to have a stronger focus on woman and mental illness in *The Butcher's Wife*.

In Li Ang's novel, set in the 1950s and written in the 1980s, Lin Shi's murder of her husband could not be justified by his domestic violence given Taiwan's very traditional and conservative society. Therefore, Lin Shi, a representation of Zhan Zhou Shi, needs to be exonerated with insanity. In order to prove Lin Shi's insanity, Li Ang arranged several plot devices that foreshadow the crime. The most gruesome scenario that eventually makes Lin Shi insane happens when Chen Jiangshui, her husband, brings Lin Shi to the slaughterhouse and makes her watch as he butchers pigs and throws the intestines at her:

In the dim yellow light she saw the sharp gleaming knife in his hand as it plunged into the gullet of a pig, followed by a prolonged raspy squeal and a great deal of blood gushing out of a wound. The scenario was repeated over and over again. Finally, when all the screams had died away and the blood had stopped flowing, Lin Shi watched Chen Jiangshui trace a downward motion with his knife [...], the abdomen of one of the pigs parted, and from inside, a mass of pulsating grey innards of varying thicknesses spilled out along with some dark-colored organs [...].

But then Chen Jiangshui came walking up to her with an armful of organs and intestines, which he thrust toward her without saying a word. Automatically, she reached out and took them from him.

With an agonizing scream, she keeled over backward before she even had time to toss away the things in her arms; her eyes rolled back in her head and a white began drooling from her mouth (Li, 2002: 134–35).

Li Ang's narrative derives from Chen Dingshan's description of Zhan Zhou Shi's case. If we examine Chen Dingshan's description, we remember that the husband was a butcher and that the knife Zhan Zhou Shi used to kill him was brought home by himself. This deviates from the true case in which the husband was a used-goods salesman and travel agent, and that the murder weapon was not a butcher's knife but a kitchen knife bought by Zhan Zhou Shi as a vendor for cutting braised-pork to sell. These changes make the story darker and more sensational, and also make the husband responsible for his own death since it was he who brought the knife back and directly incited Zhan Zhou Shi to use it. Chen Dingshan did not rewrite the facts on purpose to make the husband more responsible for his wife's action, but this rewriting indeed influenced Li Ang's writing. Li Ang made Chen Jiangshui's cruelty one of the reasons that provoked Lin Shi's illness and her crime. Therefore, not only is the husband more responsible for his own death in Li Ang's novel, but also in her narrative Lin Shi is not responsible for her actions since she has completely lost her sense of reality when she slaughters Chen Jiangshui. During the murder, Li Ang shows us Lin Shi's mental condition:

Lin Shi reached out and picked up the knife [...]. Lin Shi gripped it with both hands and stabbed downward [...]. Then it was a squealing, struggling pig with a butcher knife buried at an angle in its gullet, buckets of dark red blood gushing from the wound, the animal's body wracked with convulsions [...].

I must be dreaming, Lin Shi thought. There isn't so much blood when they butcher the pigs at the slaughterhouse. I'll open up the abdomen and see [...].

She reached in and scooped out a handful of intestines, all warm and long and tangled together [...].

I must be dreaming, she thought. I should cut off the head next. As she hacked away with the knife, she kept thinking, I must be dreaming [...]. Hacking, hacking, she reached the feet [...].

Finally, seeing that it had all been cut into pieces, Lin Shi sat down.... It'll all be over soon, and then everything will be fine, she thought (Li, 2002: 138–39).

She believes that she is dreaming and killing a pig, which means that she is not responsible for Chen Jiangshui's death because, in her mind, she is not attacking her husband but rather slaughtering an animal. Lin Shi is sentenced to death by the law, but she, along with Zhan Zhou Shi, is in fact rescued and humanised by Li Ang's writing. Li Ang is very successful, from a literary point of view, in exonerating Lin Shi from the social, moral, and legal codes which condemned her. But another question arises: who or what is responsible for Chen Jiangshui's death and Lin Shi's insanity? In the next section, I will reflect on the ultimate responsibility for Lin Shi's illness and her crime with the help of an interview (13 August 2018) conducted with Li Ang in response to my research on her work's ramifications.

## 5. The Ultimate Responsibility

Chen Jiangshui, as a representation and embodiment of a patriarchal society, is an easy target to blame for Lin Shi's insanity and the crime she commits. As we have seen, Chen Dingshan transformed the husband from a businessman to a butcher. Further, the attorney in the re-trial of Zhan Zhou Shi's case accused Zhan Yunying of being a domestic abuser and a traitor who directly caused his own death. All of these changes seek to make the crime more meaningful. We can also see some similar descriptions about how Chen Jiangshui drives Lin Shi insane in *The Butcher's Wife*. But I would argue that in general Li Ang did not stereotype and simplify Chen Jiangshui.

Chen Jiangshui, in fact, like his wife, is a man who had a traumatic childhood: Lin Shi witnesses her mother being raped, while a sense of guilt and terror caused by slaughtering pigs has haunted Chen Jiangshui since he reluctantly became a butcher due to poverty when he was a boy. Due to Chen Jiangshui's profession is related to "things filthy", such as death, excrement, and blood both in Chinese and Japanese traditional cultures, he is also a lower-class subject who has been oppressed and despised by society. In other words, he is also a victim who shows

signs of mental illness. He does not know how to release his anger and discontent accumulated all these years; the only way he attains satisfaction is through violence and crime. However, in contrast to the image of a butcher, Chen Jiangshui also saves his neighbour's life and shows sentimental feelings: for example, he saves his neighbour Auntie Ah-wang and shows his weakness to a prostitute, Golden Flower, in a brothel on the Back-street. It seems that Li Ang did not want to make Chen Jiangshui a villain who deserves to die even if he is the cause of Lin Shi's insanity. Therefore, I conducted an interview with Li Ang to clarify: "is Chen Jiangshui responsible for Lin Shi's insanity and his own death?" and "if Chen Jiangshui is not responsible, who is?"

In the interview, Li Ang specified that Chen Jiangshui does not deserve to die even if he is definitely the cause of Lin Shi's madness:

No one deserves to die. Chen Jiangshui is only a traditional and uneducated man whose occupation was considered to be at the bottom of the society in the past. What he does to Lin Shi, such as sexual abuse and letting her starve, which were common deeds that traditional husbands would do to their wives, does not make him deserve to die in a traditional Taiwan society. But his death is inevitable. Hence, this case is what the law cannot handle because no one is really responsible for it. Or, we can say that everyone is responsible. This case shows that the law cannot fix something like this even the law can find someone to punish (Li, 2018).

Li Ang shifted the focus to a larger social context by shaping Chen Jiangshui as a flesh-and-blood human being with a complex psychology and whose death exposes failures in the law. The larger context that drives Lin Shi mad and causes Chen Jiangshui's death is embodied in the descriptions of their neighbours, women who can only gossip about others as their sole meaning of life. "Lin Shi's neighbours," Li Ang said, "judge her by the prejudices on women in a patriarchal society; they think that she screams during sex is because she enjoys it, not because she is being sexually abused" (2018). One of Lin Shi's neighbours, Auntie Ah-wang, not only gossips about

Lin Shi, but also slanders Lin Shi's mother,<sup>11</sup> which is a crucial reason for why Lin Shi loses her mind:

"Like mother, like daughter." Auntie Ah-wang lowered her voice to heighten the conspiratorial effect. "Did you all know that her mother committed adultery with a soldier about ten years ago, and when Lin Shi's uncle rushed over to catch them in the act, they were coupled together so tight no one could pull them apart?" [...].

"So that's where she [Lin Shi] learned to scream like that!" [...].

"[...] daughter following in her mother's footsteps. What's the difference between a woman like that and those bitches (prostitutes) in Back-street?" (Li, 2002: 103–4).

Even if it is the neighbours who indirectly cause Lin Shi's madness and Chen Jiangshui's death by gossiping about Lin Shi and her mother, Li Ang also refused to shift the blame onto them. In the interview, Li Ang pointed out that they are only reproducing prejudices against women bestowed by society because of internalised misogyny. They are products of a society which thought that decent women could only obey their husbands and manage the household, and they can only attain satisfaction by showing off that they have more gossip than other female neighbours.

Even if Auntie Ah-wang and Lin Shi's other female neighbours support a violently patriarchal society, *The Butcher's Wife* does not blame the society built by men, or Chen Jiangshui would not be depicted as a victim of society. This novel attributes responsibility to a society built by all of us – both men and women – because we are not only produced by society, but we also reproduce the society that produced us. Therefore, *The Butcher's Wife* cannot be examined only from a feminist point of view, but in terms of a broader historical context. Indeed, Li Ang was illustrating issues that often occur to women but not only exclusively to women. The oppression from

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<sup>11</sup> Lin Shi's mother does not struggle and it is indeed a sort of consenting intercourse. But she is having a sex with the soldier for a bun he gives to her because she is almost starving to death since her late husband's property has been stolen by her brother-in-law.

society, hunger, death, sex, and more are human conditions from which no one, neither men nor women, can escape. These conditions finally crash down on the protagonist and cause Chen Jiangshui's death. As Li Ang mentioned in the preface in the English translation:

I cannot deny that I approached the writing of *The Butcher's Wife* with a number of feminist ideals, wanting to show the tragic fate that awaited the economically dependent Taiwanese women living under the rules of traditional Chinese society. But as I wrote, I found myself becoming more and more concerned with larger issues of humanity, such as hunger, death, sex. What I want to emphasize here is that the ultimate concern of a piece of "feminist literature" is, after all, human nature (2002, preface).

This discussion of the human condition is why *The Butcher's Wife*, in Taiwanese Literature, is an important work from both literary and legal perspectives. This novel not only uses insanity to exonerate a woman, Lin Shi, as a representation of Zhan Zhou Shi, who is oppressed by society and misjudged by the law. It also explores a profound idea about responsibility. The law is limited in only punishing someone who is legally culpable, but letting go those, such as the gossiping neighbours, who are logically, socially, and morally responsible for their act. Literature may have no power to punish someone who is legally culpable. However, literature does have the power to inform its readers that we are all responsible for a woman's mental illness and a man's death even if we are not the one who drives a woman mad or holds a knife to kill.

### **Competing Interests**

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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