

## Comicality in *Long Live the Mistress* and the Making of a Chinese Comedy of Manners

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### Abstract

This paper examines Wenhua Studio's 1947 film *Long Live the Mistress*, an exemplary collaboration between Sang Hu and Zhang Ailing, from the perspective of comedy of manners. More specifically, it explores how the script-writer Zhang Ailing has modified the Western model of comedy of manners in consideration of the film's targeted Chinese audiences. The analysis is divided into three parts. The first part discusses both Sang Hu's and Zhang Ailing's emphasis on comedy, analyzing in detail how the former's use of close-ups, mise-en-scène, and non-diegetic sound as well as the latter's application of techniques such as conflicts, coincidences, suspense, contrasts, contradictions, and twists in the storyline, have contributed to the film's comicality. The second part delves into some of Zhang Ailing's essays. It points out that both convincing characterization and attention to Chinese context, in Zhang's view, are key elements for great Chinese films. It also explains how Zhang's characterization in *Long Live the Mistress* can be seen as a parody of the May Fourth radicalism and traditional "talent and beauty" romance. The third part compares the comicality of *Long Live the Mistress* with the Hollywood screwball comedies, analyzing the film's various characteristics that make it a good example of Chinese comedy of manners. It concludes that Zhang's character-

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ization in *Long Live the Mistress* echoes with her fictional writing, as social-historical problems are omitted and individual experience highlighted. It, too, posits that comedy provides Zhang a form through which individual sorrows can be effectively articulated. It is within Zhang's desolate aesthetics and urban middle-class viewpoint that the comic vision of *Long Live the Mistress* should be understood. This understanding revises previous scholarship hailing the female protagonist Chen Sizhen as a triumphant embodiment of women's power.

**Keywords:** comicality, *Long Live the Mistress*, comedy of manners, Zhang Ailing, Hollywood screwball comedies

Existing scholarship on the emergence and growth of early Chinese cinema tends to be shaped by the wartime experience or the founding of the People's Republic of China. Consequently, a few works end the discussion before the outbreak of the second Sino-Japanese War (1937-45), or sketchily summarize the pre-1949 development.<sup>1</sup> The years in the second half of the 1940s thus remain understudied; comedies are especially so.<sup>2</sup> According to the Aristotelian tradition,<sup>3</sup> comedy is "an imitation of characters of a lower type—not, however, in the full sense of the word bad, the ludicrous being merely a subdivision of the ugly. It consists in some defect or ugliness which is not painful or destructive," contrary to tragedy which is "an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude" (Butcher 21, 23). In the rhetorical tradition, comedy has been regarded more believable and realistic, as Aristotle identified that the plot of comedies is constructed "on the lines of probability" (Butcher 35, 37).

Aristotle's speculation of morally imperfect characters as main comic figures and his emphasis on plausible plot are echoed in Zhang Ailing's film commentaries. As the scriptwriter of *Long Live the Mistress* (*Taitai wansui*), Zhang stated that she hoped to write a script meant to be forgotten. This corresponds to comedies being exempted from evoking pity and fear. In other words, comedy provides an arena for Zhang's concerns and exploits of the non-heroic petty urbanites. It, too, enables her to come up with a modified plotline with which the Chinese spectators can have immediate identification. This paper examines Wenhua Studio's *Long Live the Mistress* as a "comedy of manners." The main questions to be explored include: how can we appraise works dealing with domesticity like *Long Live the Mistress*? Is the film's highly individualized vernacular middle-class vision "purposeless" because it lacks instructive function as some critics have claimed? What narrative strategies of Zhang Ailing contribute to the comic ingredients of her script? And finally, how is the comicality represented cinematically, and what are the reasons for the elaborate plots and enthusiastic reception of this film? Several scholars have credited the film's "progressive"

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<sup>1</sup> The former include Laikwan Pang's *Building a New China in Cinema: The Chinese Left-wing Cinema Movement 1932-1937*, Zhen Zhang's *An Amorous History of the Silver Screen Shanghai Cinema, 1896-1937*, while the latter is represented by Paul Clark's *Chinese Cinema: Culture and Politics since 1949*.

<sup>2</sup> Yingjing Zhang's *Cinema and Urban Culture in Shanghai, 1922-1943* has a slightly different cutting point, but the few years between 1943 and 1949 are still not covered. Poshek Fu's *Between Shanghai and Hong Kong* and Jubin Hu's *Projecting a Nation: Chinese National Cinema* tackle the few years between 1945 and 1949 only briefly.

<sup>3</sup> Aristotle's theory on comedy appeared incomplete. Lane Cooper's *An Aristotelian Theory of Comedy* (1922) and Richard Janko's *Aristotle On Comedy: Towards a Reconstruction of Poetics II* (1984) have attempted to reconstruct it. Both authors viewed *Tractatus Coislinianus*, an anonymous document first published by J. A. Cramer in 1839, as an important key to Aristotle's views on comedy. Jacob Bernays, however, considered the treatise a poor pastiche of extant *Poetics*.

portrayal of women as self-assured and competent,<sup>4</sup> but whether the female protagonist Chen Sizhen can be seen as proficient and triumphant deserves further scrutiny. An investigation of the film's comicality helps answer the question.

### *Long Live the Mistress as a Comedy of Manners*

Despite its Western origin, comedy of manners was appropriated by Zhang Ailing for her own aesthetics. A glimpse into her (and also Sang Hu's) concept of comedy is crucial for a deeper appreciation of Wenhua's comedy of manners films. Sang Hu developed his passion for comic films, particularly those by Charlie Chaplin, while he was young. For him, Chapin's films not only stood out in their comicality and razzmatazz, but also "made people feel a sense of desolation after laughing, or inspired people to think" (*Dianying tongxun* vols. 4 & 5 65). Later in his life, Sang Hu reshaped his idea on comedy, stating laughing is both a means and an aim and comic films must make their audience laugh (Sang 137). In an interview, he further expounded that a good comedy should bring out bitterness in laughter.<sup>5</sup>

Similar to Sang Hu, Zhang also stressed the power of comedy, especially its significance in the theater. In "*Qiuge he Wuyun gaiyue*," Zhang elaborated on the theatrical impact of comedy. She stated:

Ordinary audience would feel if a film is not tragic or satiric, then it would not be too profound or meaningful. In this circumstance, comedy producers cannot avoid feeling "awkward." This is probably a major factor for the difficulty to make good comedies. Audience nowadays look down on comedies, but cannot refrain from their nature of "laughing," and thus there are excessive laughter-making scenes in tragedies . . . the director [of *Qiyue*] appears to be struggling between the two poles of happiness and sadness . . . The same combination of comedy and tragedy appears in *Wuyun gaiyue*, but the effect is greatly different. The comic elements of this film spontaneously evoked our tears; so that the audience were not unable to tell the tragedy

<sup>4</sup> William Tay argued that women in *Long Live the Mistress* appear proactive, whereas men are often controlled and dominated by them. Therefore, this work demonstrates the decay of traditional patriarchy. Chen Zishan concurs with Zheng's opinion but points out that such an elevation of women's power is only limited to middle-class families. Chen goes further to compare Chen Sizhen with Cao Qiqiao and Bai Liusu, concluding that all of them are symbols of matriarchal power despite the ways they express their self-governance awareness being drastically different. Following this line, Fu Poshek hails this film as a pioneering example of "women's films" (*nuxing dianying*) in China, and Peggy Chiao praises its "interrogation of the traditional marriage and big family system, and rebellion against the existing moral suppression."

<sup>5</sup> See Lu Hongshi and Zhao Mei's "Sang Hu fangtan lu" (Record of the Sang Hu interview), 6 (1996).

is simply an accident event without deliberate arrangements (comedies in general are all random and do not require thinking). (Jin and Yu 222-223)

What has made Zhang's opinion on comedy here remarkable is not so much her acknowledgement of laughing as natural but her insight into the coexistence of tragic and comic constituents. Comedy provides an effective channel to express the double aspect—bodily instinct and rational intellect—of human lives. This dualistic view on human's living condition is manifested in Zhang's opinion on Chen Sizhen. Zhang asserted:

Eventually she has a happy ending, but she is still not particularly happy. The so-called "bittersweet middle age" probably implies that there is always some sadness mingled in their [middle-aged people] happiness. Their sadness however is not completely without comfort. I very much like these few characters' "fushi de beiai" (sadness of the floating life). But it were "fushi de beihuan" (sadness and happiness of the floating life), then it would in fact be more pitiful than "sadness of the floating life," as it contains a feeling of vast vicissitudes. (Zhang, "*Taitai wansui tiji*" 378)

Hence, despite the story's abundant comic effect, Sizhen's life is not necessarily stress-free.

Like her wartime short stories, Zhang's script satirizes the manners and affections of Shanghai's middle-class, especially their pettiness, hypocrisy, infidelity, and calculation. The stock characters representing those weaknesses of common Shanghai urbanites are the self-sacrificing and tolerant housewife Sizhen, Sizhen's irresolute, and easily seduced husband Zhiyuan, and Zhiyuan's mistress Mimi, a party girl who chases one man after another with the same tricks. They represent stereotypical Shanghai middle-class characters, as none of them are "enlightened or perverse to an extreme," an application of Zhang's favored narrative style of "uneven contrast" (*cenci de duizhao*). Other characters are stereotypical too. The father signifies the stingy and calculating miser; the mother-in-law is picky and snobbish, and the younger generation appear spoiled and indecisive. Owing to the characters' weaknesses, the story bears strong resemblance to reality, and is able to "better represent the total weight of the times" (Zhang, "*Ziji de wenzhang*" 90).

Zhang's application of techniques such as conflicts, coincidences, suspense, contrasts, contradictions, and twists in the storyline primes this film's comic mechanisms of humor-by-embarrassment. The conflicts are unfolded mainly by Sizhen's three lies. The first one leads to the conflict between Chen's mother-in-law and the in-house maid, the second lie causes a false alarm within her family, and the third lie stirs up the misunderstanding between her mother-in-law and father. A good example of coincidence is the pineapple-buying encounter between Sizhen's brother and sister-in-law, which foreshadows their romance later on. The suspense is revealed from various movements of the characters (such as Shi Mimi's

putting her handkerchief to Zhiyuan's suit pocket as a hint of their affair) and the symbolic property such as the brooch. Throughout this comedy of manners, Sizhen has been thinking about buying the brooch. Zhiyuan buys it with an intention to give it to Sizhen. However, he takes the brooch out and plans to show it to his wife later. Thus, Sizhen only finds an empty brooch box, and puts the two film tickets found in Zhiyuan's suit pocket (a hint of Zhiyuan's affair) in it. The audience begin to wonder when and whether Zhiyuan would present the brooch to Sizhen. A stark contrast is yielded when the audience later find Shi Mimi is wearing the brooch.

The use of contrasts, contradictions and plot twists further engenders the dramatic irony of *Long Live the Mistress*. Irony forms part of the film's comicality, as the characters remain unaware of the incongruity between a situation and the accompanying speeches whereas the audience completely understand it. The ironies are mostly conveyed through Zhiyuan. For instance, he is eager to accompany Mimi to watch a film, but callously dismisses Sizhen's movie-watching proposal. He treats Sizhen coldly when he gets annoyed, yet becomes obsequious after Sizhen helps settle his affair. A salient example of ironies occurs in the scenario when Sizhen's father rushes out with an attempt to scold his son-in-law Zhiyuan for his affair. Being attracted to the party girl Lingling, Sizhen's father repeats not only Zhiyuan's mistake of infidelity of which he disapproves but also his own mistake made previously.

The most powerful plot twist takes place at the end of the story. At least three twists add to the climax of irony. The first is Sizhen's "wisdom" that nails down Mimi's false pregnancy. The second comes from the action of Mimi's husband who accidentally appears, as if a device of "deus ex machina" and efficiently solves the deadlock between Zhiyuan and Mimi. The last turn takes place in the finale when Zhiyuan and Sizhen overhear Mimi repeating her rehearsed "sad story" in order to win the sympathy of her new target. This ingenious twist not only echoes Zhiyuan and Mimi's encounter in an almost identical situation, but also creates a possibility of negotiation regarding Zhiyuan and Sizhen's divorce proceedings. It presents one blatant (targeted at Zhiyuan) and one latent (targeted at Sizhen) irony. The former is brought out by Mimi's lie as apparently her (fabricated) life story is not a secret but a trick played regularly in her gold digging. The latter is expressed through the twist regarding Sizhen's divorce plans.

The script's comic constituents were successfully "translated" into the film through the *mise-en-scène* and non-diegetic sound. Cinematography-wise, Sang Hu frequently used close-shots for dramatic effect. Examples include his magnification on symbolic props such as the broken bowl at the beginning, the newspaper report on the wreckage, and the brooch. These shots serve as part of the narrative,

creating laughable elements for the film too. By focusing on the broken bowl, the audience is invited to follow the sequence of Sizhen's unsuccessful attempts at concealing the truth (from covering it underneath the newspaper, and underneath the cushion, and eventually being found out). The second example with the wreckage is a still shot that stays on the piece of newspaper for almost ten seconds. The film has prompting music as if to "instruct" the filmgoers to laugh within these ten seconds.

Two remarkable instances lie in the brooch and Mimi's foldable fan. As Sizhen suspects Zhiyuan is having an affair from the empty brooch case (in which Sizhen symbolically places Zhiyuan's two film tickets—and later to be found by Zhiyuan after Sizhen proposes divorce), the next scene turns to a still shot of the brooch on a chongsam (also functions as a smooth shot change). Immediately afterward, the camera pans upward and the audience sees slightly moving sexy lips and then a puff of a cigarette, which leads to Mistress Shi Mimi's flank. This instance is forceful as the audience comes to understand, and are amused by, where exactly the brooch has gone.

The fan is also used ingeniously. It comes with two identical sequences, and in both the lens focus is a close-up of Mimi's seductive manner with the fan placed about her mouth. However, the second time (toward the very end), Mimi shifts her gaze from her anonymous listener to the lens directly as if she is talking to the audience. She further winks and smiles naughtily toward the audience so that the audience is invited to become her accomplice to laugh *along with* instead of laugh *at* her about her self-contradiction. Other examples of close shots take place in Sirui's gestures when describing the air turbulence he encounters, as well as Zhiqin's admiration for Sirui's brevity. During these scenes, the camera "stares at" the actor and actress. With close shots, the actor/actress' facial expressions become even more excessive and thus intensify the film's comicalness.

The film also inserts a few new scenes to maximize the funniness of this family drama, particularly by increasing the tension between its male characters. For instance, Zhiyuan's father-in-law sends Zhiyuan away impatiently when he tries to borrow money, but complains to his friend about his excess cash. Upset by his father-in-law's attitude, Zhiyuan objects to the budding romance between his sister and Sizhen's brother. Later in the film, Zhiyuan ironically repeats the same trick as his father-in-law by pretending he is not at home when people call in to borrow money from him.

The conflict between Zhiyuan and his brother-in-law Sirui is also dramatized. Meeting Sirui for the first time, Zhiyuan appears annoyed, as he has been rejected by his father-in-law. Sirui's comment on the danger of travelling by boat only irritates Zhiyuan further. Besides the identical sequence between Zhiyuan and

Sirui, a similar sequence in which Zhiyuan hurts his forehead and sighs that “only his wife treats him well in the world” is repeated. The second time he expresses this is in the lawyer’s office when filing their divorce. This leads Sizhen into tears and softens her insistence on divorce. Similar to Mimi’s repeating the same lines, Zhiyuan’s second attempt seems ostentatious. His striving to be sincere makes it extra sarcastic. Sizhen’s line “you should be more reasonable and don’t make a joke in front of a lawyer” is now repeated verbatim by Zhiyuan in Sang Hu’s recurrent use of close shots on Zhiyuan to enhance the irony. Oddly it is this disagreement and reversal of the role that provides the final proof of this couple’s delight in one another. The couple eventually see Shi Mimi repeating the same trick, culminating the humor of this work.

The costume and performance of the male characters, too, contribute to the film’s comicality, particularly Shi Hui who elicits laughs among the audience as early as his first appearance when he is pretentiously mediating. His voicing out exclamations such as “Ah!” and “Umm!” in a strange tone, with one hand holding a feather fan and the other a pipe, make him especially funny. He is a snooty and unnecessarily parsimonious father, as well as a self-made romanticist and easily seducible man. He delivers both parts convincingly if not exaggeratedly. His spraying cologne on his nearly bald head, quirky look in the Western suit (with derby hat, dandified bow-tie, and swagger cane, Shi Hui appears like a Chinese Charlie Chaplin), and showing off the latest dance step are all memorable sequences. Though not as dramatic as Shi Hui’s role, the comedian Han Fei’s performance of Sirui rehearsing his wedding proposal in front of a plant is equally laughter-eliciting. As for Zhang Fa, despite his uniform suit and tie outfit (embodiment of a typical white-collar man) and comparatively less expressive acting style, his pettiness and cheekiness in front of women still make him an amusing pivotal star in the film.

Sound effects, mainly non-diegetic ones, are another dimension that has enhanced the film’s comicality. On several occasions, the use of sound accompanies Sizhen’s laughter-arousing white lies to intensify the comic result or increase the contrast. In the forementioned lie with the bowl, every time Sizhen tries to remove the broken piece, there is background music coinciding with the visual image. Sizhen’s second lie about Zhiyuan’s means of travel comes with the same uplifting and cheerful tune when Zhiyuan boards and disembarks the plane. Similar to Sizhen’s lies, Shi Mimi’s purposely leaving a handkerchief with her lips mark in Zhiyuan’s suit pocket is carried out with funny melody. Later when Sizhen accidentally pulls it out, the same music appears but only to lead to the irony that Sizhen even decides to cover up Zhiyuan’s affair in front of the maid. However, the highlight comes from the mime sequence in which Ziyuan uses body language



to ask Mimi's husband to get the brooch back by offering his watch as reward. With the ear-slapping and Mimi's weeping sound, this male-only trade is comically completed with the lively body movements of both actors. The use of non-diegetic sound also works well with Sang Hu's use of montage to narrate Zhiyuan's setting up his company. Without the assistance of music, the whole sequence would be a mime. The background music in this case dramatizes Zhiyuan's happiness (in contrast with his earlier dejection), amplifying the film's comic irony.

Even without the humor emanated from the male characters, Sizhen's divorce proposal cannot be taken too seriously judging by her constant earlier self-sacrifices. The implied happy ending further consummates the comic effect of *Long Live the Mistress*, conveying lucratively Zhang's comic vision—there is always sadness in happiness. This perhaps explains why on the verge of divorce, Sizhen cries and laughs at the same time. Owing to those techniques and plot twists, filmgoers are able on the one hand to laugh along with the ironies and helplessness in Sizhen's life and on the other come to understand what Zhang terms "sadness of the floating life." Scholars have pointed out that female characters tend to be dominant in *Long Live the Mistress*. However, I would argue that even Sizhen's divorce proposal implies a quasi-feminist self-awareness; the belated pursuit of her subjectivity emerges only from her physical and psychological exhaustion instead of satisfaction. Even Mimi is a loser in this game, as Zhiyuan purportedly would turn over a new leaf. In this regard, the title of this film becomes not only ambiguous (does the "taitai" in the Chinese title refer to the first wife Sizhen or the affair protagonist Mimi?) but also ironic (the victory of Zhiyuan as he enjoys his affair while keeping his marriage). What survives after all is the imbalanced marriage in which the wife is tolerant, attentive, and self-sacrificing whereas the husband egocentric, dependent, and unfaithful.<sup>6</sup> Released in Shanghai in 1947, the year of Zhang's divorce with Hu Lancheng, there is perhaps another layer of irony in *Long Live the Mistress*.

### **Zhang Ailing's Market Awareness: More Plot Twists as More Chinese?**

From Zhang's essays, we can detect her broad knowledge of both Chinese and Hollywood films as well as her constant emphasis on the sense of audience. In "On Writing," Zhang stated that literary pieces are for everyone, calling writers

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<sup>6</sup> Lee Ou-fan has pointed out that an important aspect of Sizhen's role is to "repair" (*xiubu*) her marriage or "make up [her husband's] deficiency" (*buzu*). See Lee's "Zhang Ailing yu haolaiwu dianying" (Zhang Ailing and Hollywood Films).

to pay attention to readers' interests (Zhang, "Lun xiezuo" 234-235). When commenting on Liu Qiong's *Swallows Welcoming the Spring* (*Yan ying chun*), Zhang was concerned about Chinese film-workers' blind borrowing from the West to the extent that the Chinese context was neglected. She expressed: "there are not many Chinese elements in the film, which is rather worrying. Such a change has gone much further than "extracting the cultural essence from China and learning practical techniques from the West" (*zhongxue weiti xixue weiyong*) promoted by the Self-strengthening Movement. In "Song of Autumn and Cloud over the Moon,"<sup>7</sup> Zhang vented out her dissatisfaction with those writers who unvaryingly end their stories in a couple's separation instead of marriage, merely to follow the newly-imported realism. Although Zhang was less critical toward *Cloud over the Moon*, she was unimpressed by the film's imitation of Hollywood, especially its flirtatious characters, who are unconvincing in a Chinese context.<sup>8</sup> For Zhang, both credible characterization and consideration of local (Chinese) context are vital.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, a good film also relies on whether it can effectively analyze major issues of life through an attractive story (Zhang, "Jie Yindeng" 145).

Regarding persuasive characterization, Zhang pays heed to the portrayals of female characters in films. In *Borrowing Silver Lamp* (*Jie yindeng*), a commentary on two films *Song of Meiniang* and *Contending for Spring*, Zhang expressed her disappointment with the former's cliché depiction of deserted women and the latter's failure to convey the inner depths of its female characters. She later carried on to discuss the issue of female virtues by beginning with an ostensibly egalitarian suggestion that a wife can afford to be unfaithful, if her husband cheats on her first. Zhang, however, did not elaborate this female's "right" further. Instead, she stated that it is best not to exercise such a "right." Zhang's sympathetic yet comparatively

<sup>7</sup> The piece was originally published in English in *The XXth Century* 5.1 (July 1943) without a specific title. When translated from English (*Song of Autumn and Cloud over the Moon*) into Chinese later, the film titles in Zhang's essay *Song of Autumn and Cloud over the Moon* are respectively rendered as *Qiuge* and *Wuyun gaiyue*. However, the original Chinese titles of the films should be *Qiu zhi ge* (1943) and *Fuyun yanyue* (1943).

<sup>8</sup> Zhang specified that the use of a leather shawl is borrowed from *Daytime Wife* (1939), and the image of the middle-aged female character is similar to that of Carmen Miranda in Hollywood films. See her *Zhangkan* (Zhang Ailing's outlook), p. 219.

<sup>9</sup> Zhang's emphasis on "Chineseness" to some extent is related to the aims of the English monthly magazine *The XXth Century* established in 1941 in Shanghai. According to its editor-in-chief Klaus Mehnert, the targeted readers of this magazine were foreigners (particularly those residing in the concession area) sojourning in Asia during that time. Zhang's first English article entitled "Chinese Life and Fashions" for the magazine appeared in January 1943 (vol. 4, no. 1), while the last one "Demons and Fairies" in December 1943 (vol. 5, no. 6). For Mehnert, the difference between Zhang and her Chinese fellow countrymen lies in Zhang's "never taking Chinese things for granted. It is exactly because of her deep curiosity about her country that she has the capability of interpreting Chinese for foreigners." See William Tay's "Zhang Ailing yu *Ershi shiji*" (Zhang Ailing and *The XXth Century*) for further details about Zhang's involvement in the magazine.

conservative opinion is also seen in her reading of *Contending for Spring*, an adaptation of the Hollywood film *The Great Lie*. Despite her dissatisfaction with the film's superficial characterization, Zhang praised the family/clan-focussed Oriental spirit the plot delivers.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, in spite of Zhang's "gendered" (daily life, human interactions) vision, she did not go so far as to abandon all the traditional Chinese ethics or promote women's liberation.

Zhang did not conceal her disapproval of those writers' striving to separate their protagonists so as to endorse the fashionable May Fourth iconoclasm discourse in the aforementioned essay "*Song of Autumn and Cloud over the Moon*." She uttered: "Since the call for overthrowing the feudal tradition, Chinese people have finally overthrown the marriage scene as a finale too" (Zhang, "*Qiuge he Wuyun gaiyue*" 50-51). Zhang's reservation for the new marriage promoted by the May Fourth intellectuals is also seen in her "The May Fourth Anecdote: The Unification of Luo Wentao and his Three Wives," a story ridiculing a group of young people's failure to commit to monogamy. Similar to Luo's living with all his wives, Chen Sizhen in *Long Live the Mistress* attempts to convince the "pregnant" mistress Mimi to move in with Zhiyuan and herself.

If this ending serves as Zhang's response to the issues surrounding marriage and female virtues, then she undoubtedly offered a mild, even meek, one by concluding her story in "old-fashioned" great-unification. The unification of "talent and beauty" has been a popular narrative mode in traditional Chinese literature that often follows a plotline like this—private engagement in the garden, the talented man passes the civil examination, and the final consummation. Zhang's script, however, differed from this established mode of romance with her rather pragmatic outlook (if not distrust) of love and extremely mediocre characters bearing little or no resemblance to the talented scholar/beauty archetype. Zhang's characterization therefore becomes a parody of both, as it fits in neither the May Fourth radicalism nor the traditional mode. Despite Zhang's awareness of the popularity of the former at that time, she stuck to her own neither new nor old (or both new and old) vision in characterization. As a result, her writing is not a purely market-oriented exercise, but a revelation of both her aesthetic style (the desolation of life) and spectators' viewing habits (such as romance and well-written lines).<sup>11</sup>

There are primarily two types of female characters in *Long Live the Mistress*—

<sup>10</sup> In the film, the wife takes care of the baby borne by her husband's mistress.

<sup>11</sup> In "Xie 'Qingcheng zhi lian' de laoshi hua" (Honest Remarks on Writing "Love in a Fallen City"), Zhang declared in addition to expressing the desolated life, she would like to satisfy the tastes of the audience, such as beautiful romance, dialogues, color, poetics. She even foresaw the audience's "reaction (*yishi*)"—one must have self-awareness in hard times.

the playgirl and the housewife. The former, which represents the dazzling attraction of urban Shanghai, is best seen in the social butterfly/mistress such as Mimi and her friend Lingling, and the latter in the lead character Sizhen. Even with her seemingly ordered family life, Sizhen's marriage is not a fairy-tale but continuous problem-solving. To sustain the harmony of her family, she pacifies her maid, entertains her mother-in-law, lies to her father in order to assist her husband, and even stands out to settle her husband's affair. Despite her divorce proposal, she discovers that she would rather pardon her husband's mistake. Regardless of their playful life on the surface, the seductive and money-worshipping femme-fatales such as Mimi and Lingling are not in a better situation than the proper wife Sizhen.

Most of the women (Mimi, Sizhen, and Sizhen's mother) in this film bear the weakness of their husbands, whereas almost all the male characters are vulnerable. Sizhen's father is gullible and unfaithful. Despite his name, which literally means great ambition, Zhiyuan relies on Sizhen on several occasions from borrowing money to set up his company to settling his affair. As for Mimi's husband, he is at best a good-for-nothing idler who only dares to exercise his masculinity in front of Mimi or the guilty Zhiyuan. The (mis-)representation of male characters, as mentioned above, adds to the drollery of this film, exhibiting Zhang's lack of intention to institute a morality in her script.

Though this film evokes a site of critique concentrated on the gender representation in the urban Chinese family, Zhang toned down its potential social meaning. In "Preface to *Long Live the Mistress*," Zhang proclaimed that she purely wished to present a person like Chen Sizhen, and assumed more experienced audiences would probably not reproach Zhiyuan too harshly. For Zhang, Sizhen's behavior is perhaps not truly commendable except that she makes self-sacrifices voluntarily, and Zhiyuan's not completely deplorable (he somehow still cares about Sizhen).

As a self-conscious writer, Zhang was fully aware of the potential weakness caused by her common characters and moderate ending. Two lines in *Long Live the Mistress* hint at the Chinese audience's desire for dramatically sad stories—Sizhen's mother-in-law comments "the more tragic, the better" and Shi Mimi pretends: "I particularly enjoy watching tragedies . . . My life is really unfortunate. If it were to be made into a film, whoever watches it would cry." Apart from eliciting laughter, the overstatement of these lines can be read as Zhang's poking fun at the Chinese audiences' predilection for melodrama and the undue attention given to tragedy in modern Chinese theatrical culture. In both the script and the film, Sizhen informs her mother-in-law that the Yue Opera singer Yuan Xuefen is performing Xianglin Sao. Unfortunately, Sizhen's mother-in-

law has never heard of this character. Neither has Sizhen, as she comments: “I heard it is a new play, pretty tragic.” This yields a mockery of the realism trend represented by Lu Xun by suggesting that general audiences are not so much interested in the social implications behind, but almost instinctively enjoy watching the tragedy.

But then why did Zhang still go for a comic script and how could it be appealing to the Chinese spectators? I would argue the creation of those “nonextreme” characters and lack of legends in the plotline are due to Zhang’s attempt to capture daily life, and the comic effects yielded by the “intentional” coincidences and plot twists in *Long Live the Mistress* are to compensate for the “flaws.” In “Preface to *Long Live the Mistress*,” Zhang declared: “the trickiest problem of Chinese audiences is not their vulgar taste or poor comprehension, but the fact that they are too familiar with legendary stories” (*chuanqi*). Unfortunately, the plotline of *Long Live the Mistress* lacks the ebb and flow, and its characters are all (too) ordinary. Zhang thus apologetically pronounced that she hoped her “applying craftsmanship to replace legendary stories” can be understood. Zhang further revealed her interest in Maurice Maeterlinck’s concept of “drame statique” (static drama),<sup>12</sup> which proposed to decrease stage movement and used symbolism to represent invisible force, yet confessed that adding plots to keep the actors/actresses busy is inevitable. For Zhang, the necessity of more plots to accommodate the general audience’s tastes is “not an example to be emulated,” and “it is because of this, it is even more a Chinese style” (Zhang, “*Taitai wansui tiji*” 378).

### The Making of a Chinese Comedy of Manners

Does demand for “more plot” really imply more Chinese? In addition to offering escapist entertainment, why would spectators go to see a film like *Long Live the Mistress*? Is there any “national (Chinese) characteristic” in the story that has contributed to the film’s enormous popularity? One possible way to answer

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<sup>12</sup> The ideas were elaborated in Maeterlinck’s *The Treasure of the Humble* especially the section on “The tragical in daily life.” Most of Maeterlinck’s earlier static plays, often gloomy and iconoclastic, have a theme of “man subject to a fathomless Will, caught in the web of Destiny and searching relentlessly for Truth.” (See Mahony 23). They usually “lack dramatic crisis, exploit the non-directional structure of waiting,” display “unity of setting,” and even the dialogue offered is “intentionally indistinct, imprecise, and apparently static” (Kane, 28, 30). Zhang’s accentuation on common people and desolation resonate with Maeterlinck’s rejection of heroism and pessimistic outlook of life in his early period. Her increasing plot twists however is opposite to Maeterlinck’s idea as he pronounced plot and event are vital in a theater of action but not in a static theater.

these questions is to compare and contrast this film with the Hollywood-style comedies produced in the first half of the twentieth century. Few scholars have pointed out the impacts of Hollywood films on Zhang Ailing. Sadō Tadao for example drew parallels between *Long Live the Mistress* and the German director Ernst Lubitsch's sophisticated farce *The Marriage Circle* (1924), noting that Sang Hu is a fan of Lubitsch's films (Sadō 76-77). Other critics associated *Long Live the Mistress* with the popular Hollywood "screwball" comedies, which appeared on the scene in the 1930s.<sup>13</sup>

There are similarities between *Long Live the Mistress* and the Hollywood screwball comedies, such as the focus on the love conflict/battling process of a (mismatched) couple, juxtaposition (of all male and female, capable and incapable), coincidences and chance encounters in the plot. Nevertheless, we can identify the "additions" of certain primarily Chinese themes in *Long Live the Mistress*. The conflict between mother and daughter-in-law, and the calculative families/relatives of Sizhen and Zhiyuan offer striking examples. Zhang's special concern for ordinary people and relatively less cynical depiction of her characters further differentiate *Long Live the Mistress* from the Hollywood comic mode. *Long Live the Mistress* accounts an ordinary housewife's life. It is set in the most common locale—Shanghai's *nongtang* where Zhang claimed "there can be several Chen Sizhen in just one house." In contrast, most of the screwball comedies were played out against settings of sheer affluence (a Connecticut estate or a Park Avenue penthouse), properties (elegant clothes, cars, and furniture), and lines (witty and inventive repartee).

Unlike the Hollywood version in which the fables of love often masquerade as hostility or are instigated by a woman with aggressive and even eccentric personality, Sizhen appears ultra considerate, and her energy is primarily invested in supporting her husband and assisting other family members. Besides, Zhang's approach to her characters seems more neutral if compared to the American screwball comedies that generate interest from subverting class conflicts and in

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<sup>13</sup> In his "Zhang Ailing de 'Taitai wansui,'" William Tay identified that certain parts of the film are very similar to the Hollywood screwball comedies. Tay also offered his definition of "screwball comedy," which is "to ridicule and dissect candidly and with a slightly detached attitude the family conflicts or love problems of the middle-class (or rich) people." Similar connections were also drawn by Peggy Chiao in her "The middle-class drama tradition since the orphan island period – Zhang Ailing and *Long Live the Mistress*," Kong Qingmao in his *Zhang Ailing Zhuan* (Bibliography of Zhang Ailing), Leo Lee (*Shanghai Modern*, 276-279), and Fu Lizhong's "Zhang Ailing de dianying shidai" (Zhang Ailing's movie era). There are some similarities between comedy of manners and screwball comedies. The main concerns of the characters in both are often sex and money, and the interrelated issues of marriage, adultery and divorce. In this paper, "screwball comedy" refers to the Hollywood genre that flourished in the decade between the onset of the Depression and the end of World War II, and this form of comedy is understood as a more fast-paced, clownish and farcical variation of the comedy of manners.

which the pampered upper-class are frequently castigated. Zhang's insightful reflection on the "sadness of floating life" facilitates the audience to contemplate upon how the situation in which Sizhen lives has transformed her from a young lady to a "narrow-minded, stingy, and vulgar" middle-aged woman. Thus, film-viewers can better appreciate Zhang's reasonably objective treatment of life (both happy and tragic, or neither completely happy nor truly tragic). This moderate and balanced attitude toward life of Zhang contributes to the aesthetic merit of *Long Live the Mistress*, differentiating Zhang's comic script from the unbalanced or eccentric (the meaning of the slang "screwball") American screwball comedies.

Zhang's viewpoint on human existence as a mixture of happiness and sadness is traceable in the depiction of family relationships in *Long Live the Mistress* where the tensions and conflicts between characters are largely portrayed within traditional Chinese ethics (such as the relationships between husband and wife, mother and daughter-in-law, and father and daughter) and morality (fidelity, chastity and filial piety). By incorporating those familiar subject matters and issues, Zhang enhanced her script's *gushixing* (story appeal) and offset its lack of highly demanded *chuanqi* in *Long Live the Mistress*. Apart from interpreting *chuanqi* as romantic or legendary storyline in general, the term is also a form of traditional Chinese fiction (the popular tales of marvels in the Tang and Song Dynasties) and operatic drama derived from the *nanxi* in the late 14<sup>th</sup> century. It stands out by elaborate turns in plot and marvellous story.

The traditional Chinese narrative modes also rely heavily on those devices to increase their *gushixing* to attract and please the audience. One can therefore argue that the copious unexpected plot turns (such as Sizhen's white lies), coincidences (the pineapple-buying scenario and the ending), and contradictions (Sizhen's father) have made *Long Live the Mistress* somewhat "Chinese." However, it would risk being oversimplified to pin down Zhang's narrative as an exclusively Chinese one. Instead, I would propose to consider Zhang's mode a result of stylistic hybridity, and a negotiation of Zhang's personal aesthetics and her targeted audience's tastes. It is also an eclectic cinematic model synthesized with the Hollywood screwball comedies and Chinese family relationships and ethics. And because of its cultural modifications, *Long Live the Mistress* becomes well justified as a "Chinese" comedy of manners.<sup>14</sup>

In an institutional context where filmmaking was restrained by the censorship

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<sup>14</sup> Leo Lee once argued that although Zhang's cinematic modes may have been inspired by the Hollywood comedies such as *Bring up Baby* (1938), *The Philadelphia Story* (1940), and *The Lady Eve* (1941), they were also localized with Zhang's "adding" Chinese constituents like family values and ethics to them. See Lee's *Shanghai Modern*, 276-279.

and Chinese cinema in constant competition with foreign ones to secure a theater timetable for screening,<sup>15</sup> the number of Chinese films made during this period continued to grow. This hints there was still an increasing demand for Chinese films. It also leads to a speculation that Chinese audiences consumed the Chinese and Western films for different purposes. In the midst of political interregnum, I would argue the anomalous popularity of *A Spring River Flows East* owed to its melodramatic plotline and appeal to Chinese patriotism,<sup>16</sup> whereas Hollywood films appealed to the Chinese audience more with their spectacular, technical novelty, and even comicality. *Shenbao's* advertisements can be used to support this view. Throughout 1947, the advertisements for films by Chaplin and Laurel and Hardy suggested the relatively long-term screening of those assumingly popular comic films.

Bret Sutcliffe has pointed out that Chinese films were often marketed both *against* and *within* Western films. For instance, Shi Dongshan's *Eight Thousand Li of Cloud and Moon* (1947) was advertised as "recommended for all those who enjoy Western films," while Li Pingqian's *Mother and Son* (1947) boasted its "social realism, addressing problems close to home" (Sutcliffe). If a general perception of Chinese films at that time was "serious," "easy to relate to" and Western films "entertaining," "exotic," then what about "entertaining" and "easy to relate to" films epitomized by *Long Live the Mistress*? Viewing against the post-war marketing strategy, *Long Live the Mistress* can be said to be as artists' makeover of Chinese melodrama tradition with a distinctively comedic mode. Its rather localized version exhibits a cinematic modification synthesizing Western influences and the Chinese post-war context.

In *Long Live the Mistress*, the focus on daily life and non-extreme petty urbanites deserves special attention. Drawn to a social/critical realism imperative, most writers either paid less attention to the ways of the thinking of the petty urbanites or adopted an intellectual perspective that tends to instruct the common people from above.<sup>17</sup> Shying away from "big" historical issues and inflated

<sup>15</sup> Based on statistics published in 1948, 48 out of 162 films produced between 1945 and 1948 met with censorship of some kind. See Cheng Jihua, Li Shaobai and Xing Zuwen's *History of the Development of Chinese Film* (159). See also Bret Sutcliffe's article "A Spring River Flows East: 'Progressive' Ideology and Gender Representation."

<sup>16</sup> *Gone with the Wind* and *A Spring River Flows East*, sometimes referred as "the Chinese *Gone with the Wind*," are comparable historical epics set during wartime. Both center on the heroine's struggle during the chaotic years, although Scarlett in the former strives to find love and Sufen's suffering in the latter offers a contrary to the moral decay of the KMT sympathizers and a symbol of the nation's endurance. *A Spring River Flows East's* box office in the early post-war years was remarkably better than *Gone with the Wind*, which was likely because of its call for Chinese nationalism.

<sup>17</sup> Ng Mau-sang has pointed out that leftist critics had coined the term "petty urbanites" (*xiao shimin*) to reflect their perception of this community of people as conservative, unenlightened, and with a taste for



melodramatic modes, films like *Long Live the Mistress* successfully developed with thematic and stylistic differences. Zhang was a writer adroit in capturing the petty urbanites' comical or ridiculous situations with her non-judgmental, non-imposing albeit detached stance. However, even though social and political anxieties may become easier to manage through laughing, the audiences of this film were not provided with a utopia to reconcile their deprivation in reality or an old moral/social order to which to return.<sup>18</sup> The world in which Sizhen and other characters live is neither perfect nor unliveable. Zhang's "moderate" approach marked the noticeable difference between *Long Live the Mistress* and the preferred melodrama mode during the 1930s and 1940s characterized often by "rhetorical excess, extravagant representation, and intensity of moral claim" (Pickowicz 301). Although Sizhen may be seen as an embodiment of traditional female virtues, Zhang hardly intended to educate the audience by praising her protagonist's self-sacrifice.

Even the comparatively "modern" women like Shi Mimi and Lingling do not appear as advocates for independence. Mimi's half-serious request for Zhiyuan to marry her proves that she is also tied within the familial network. Mimi and Lingling indeed fail to insinuate a progress to liberation as they both simply exercise the same man-hunting pattern. Instead of "gathering comforting visions of an old society nor to extol visions of a new one" (Gunn 230), *Long Live the Mistress* focuses on *the present* in which the anxieties of different Shanghai dwellers are frankly, even harshly, revealed. Zhang did not expound whether the divorce is processed as planned, yet the film settles it with a happy ending at the cost of Sizhen's embarrassment. In the film, her determination for divorce is so painfully testified that eventually she withdraws from it. With the lawyer's comment that such divorce farce is simply a common repertoire, the film conveys a sense of acid irony unclear or even absent in the script.

If *Long Live the Mistress* contains some comforting effects facilitating the audience to manage their anxieties, then it is achieved by evoking self-awareness in the specific socially insecure and politically conflicting times. In this light,

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things popular (*su*). See his "Popular Fiction and the Culture of Everyday Life: A Cultural Analysis of Qin Shouou's *Qilaitang*," 150, 151.

<sup>18</sup> This is dissimilar from the screwball comedies as the genre has usually been seen as blithely evasive responses to economic catastrophe between the height of the Depression and the beginning of World War II. For example, in the foreword of Duane Burge and Robert Milton Miller's *The Screwball Comedy Films: A History and Filmography, 1934-1942*, Arthur Knight stated screwball comedies were "the perfect escapist entertainment." Though agreeing comedies could help moviegoers "escape from their poverty into the happy world of luxury," Ed Sikov pronounced there is no evidence that Depression filmgoers liked comedies and musicals more than melodramas (16). See Sikov's *Screwball: Hollywood's Madcap Romantic Comedies*, 16.

laughing and forgetting are not a decadent or escapist sign but a reasonable antidote to the bittersweet floating life and historical uncertainty. If the Hollywood screwball comedies can be seen as a product made out of the bleak life in the 1930s and at a time when the censorship was more rigid than before,<sup>19</sup> then *Long Live the Mistress* as a Chinese comedy of manners can be considered an expedient creation out of the urban culture in Shanghai, within a context of the KMT's monopoly, and in contrast with the prevalent political melodrama. Even if there had not been a censorship or the civil war, Wenhua comedies bear another historical imprint—that of the cultural elites' entering the film industry with their individualized humanistic/artistic visions.

### Conclusion

This paper has scrutinized how the comic elements in *Long Live the Mistress*, a “comedy of manners” film, are drawn from Zhang Ailing's purposeful application of conflicts, coincidences, suspense, contrasts, contradictions, and plot twists as well as in Sang Hu's cinematic rendering. From Zhang's essays, we can recognize her references to audience and emphasis on story quality. It contends Zhang's intentional “craftsmanship” (such as characterization, familiar topics and plot twists) is strategic to enhance the Chinese constituents, analyzing how those modifications in return contributed to the popularity of this film at that time. Furthermore, it testifies that its comic vision is a stylistically fused exercise with sources drawn from both the Hollywood films and the Chinese context. It asserts it is particularly imperative to be humorous, as laughing serves as a stress-reducing remedy in a period marred by political chaos and historical ambiguity.

Although Zhang as a scriptwriter appears brighter than as a novelist, several characteristics of Zhang's fictional writing are observable in her script writing. The most important similarity lies in her unique vision of China in which human (particularly Shanghai inhabitants) behaviors and experience remain the focal point of her narrative. In both her novels and script writing, Zhang deliberately omitted the “big” social-historical problems such as war and revolution. History for her signified “popular memory,” and “only in China, history continues to be actively performed in daily life” (Zhang, *Liuyan* 109). Through her characters' petty worries over money, relationships, and family conflicts, a stable, amiable version of (middle-class-centered) history is represented. When depicting her char-

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<sup>19</sup> The Motion Picture Association of America's enforced the Production Code in 1934 which proscribed those “morally unacceptable” scenes.

acters, Zhang rejected to idealize, romanticize, or offer a solution, or even to take them seriously.

The comic vision in *Long Live the Mistress* is tinged with Zhang's sense of desolation toward life. She had no intention to praise or criticize her characters, but simply invited her audience to share together the "vast life's load" (*youyou de sheng zhi fuhe*). Consequently, her works were often considered lacking of an ostensible social/instructive function or even a moral. Unsurprisingly, critics disapproved of her "failing" to make Sizhen either a Chinese Nora or one of those virtuous women.<sup>20</sup> However, it is exactly because of her sense of desolation and middlebrow emphasis that Zhang was able to laugh and forget about the "sadness of floating life" exemplified by Sizhen.<sup>21</sup> Comedy in this regard provides a theater of individual sorrows in which both personal virtue (such as honesty) and social ethics (such as family order) are contested, renegotiated, or subverted. It is within Zhang's desolate aesthetics and urban middle-class viewpoint that the comic vision of *Long Live the Mistress* should be understood.

With the Communist Party's triumph in 1949, Zhang left Shanghai for Hong Kong and then for the U.S. In 1957, Zhang reengaged with her talent in comedy scriptwriting by producing *The Battle of Love* (*Qingchang ru zhanchang*) for MP & GI (Motion Picture and General Investments Limited). This initial cooperation with MP & GI led to more urban romances and battles between the sexes,<sup>22</sup> or the comic films known as "North-South series," that tackle the cultural conflicts between the Northerners and Southerners.<sup>23</sup> Several of those films were warmly received in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Southeast Asia. Zhang's imagining in effect already appeared in *Long Live the Mistress* with Sizhen's brother's residing in Taiwan and her husband Zhiyuan's trip to Hong Kong. Both small facts are entwined into the comic vision of *Long Live the Mistress*. Shopping for the indigenous Taiwanese fruit (pineapple) for instance turns into a prelude of a romance,

<sup>20</sup> In "Weirao Zhang Ailing *Taitai wansui de yichang lunzheng*" (Debates surrounding Zhang Ailing's *Long Live the Mistress*) of the book *Shuobujin de Zhang Ailing* (Endless talks on Zhang Ailing), Chen Zishan outlined the debates triggered by Zhang Ailing's "Preface of *Long Live the Mistress*." Chen argued that the debates primarily surround whether the film contains (if so, what kind of) educational function and social effect. Several pieces (mainly criticisms) published in December 1947 were compiled in this book, which offers a handy reference to critics' opinions about the script/film.

<sup>21</sup> Zhang praised the film *Cloud over the Moon's* insightful depiction of the lives of the middle class, indicating that Chinese films focus too much on exceptional people.

<sup>22</sup> Examples include *A Tale of Two Wives* (*Rencai liangde*, 1958), *The Wayward Husband* (*Taohua yuan*, 1959), and *June Bride* (*Liuyue xinniang*, 1960).

<sup>23</sup> Around the same time, Zhang also wrote *Father Takes a Bride* (*Xiao ernü*, 1963) and *Please Remember Me* (*Yiqu nanwang*, 1964). Her stylistic hybridity can also be seen in her renderings of western texts into Chinese scripts. *The Battle of Life* was adapted from Max Shulman's *The Tender Trap* and *The Greatest Love Affair on Earth* from the English play "Charley's Aunt."

while Zhiyuan's journey to Hong Kong not only creates the misunderstanding about Zhiyuan's means of transportation but also a cause leading to his moral corruption afterward.

As far as *Long Live the Mistress* is concerned, Zhang's market awareness was not exclusively limited to China's audience but included those from different Chinese communities outside China. Beyond the textual level, the circulation and positive reception of her works among her aficionados likewise corresponded to this subtle transnational dimension of Zhang's sense of audience. *Long Live the Mistress* contains both instructive and social functions. It is instructive as it evokes and reminds people of the essence of life—laughing—even if it may be slightly contrite to do so. Its social implication lies in its offering an apolitical and purportedly middlebrow alternative history. Its “transnational” cultural imagining of Shanghai, Taiwan and Hong Kong further attests that it's a Chinese delight.

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## 《太太萬歲》的喜劇性及 中國式風俗喜劇之製作

### 摘要

本文以風俗喜劇的角度分析文華公司1947年出品，由桑狐執導，張愛玲任編劇的電影《太太萬歲》，尤其是張愛玲如何將此源自西方的影劇形式稍作更動，以使其能更符合中國觀影者的品味。文章分三部份，首先討論桑狐以及張愛玲兩人對喜劇的重視，細論桑狐的特寫鏡頭、場景調度、畫外音之使用，以及張愛玲在情節衝突、巧合、懸疑、對比、矛盾、轉折的技巧運用，如何成就了此片的喜劇性。第二部份檢視張愛玲的數篇散文，說明她認為可信的角色形塑和對中國脈絡的關注為成功的中國電影的要件，並闡述張愛玲在《太太萬歲》中的角色塑造如何戲謔了五四的激進主義和傳統的「才子佳人」羅曼史。第三部份比較《太太萬歲》中的喜劇性和好萊塢神經喜劇的異同，分析《太太萬歲》何以可被視作中國式的風俗喜劇的諸多特點。結論指出《太太萬歲》中的角色塑造呼應了張愛玲小說中對社會歷史議題的省略和個人經驗的強調。也論證喜劇提供張愛玲一個可有效地表現個人悲哀的形式。《太太萬歲》的喜劇性應從張愛玲的蒼涼美學和都會中產的視角來理解，而此理解則修正了將女主角陳思珍視為女性權力的成功彰顯的前人研究。

關鍵詞：喜劇性、《太太萬歲》、風俗喜劇、張愛玲、好萊塢神經喜劇

