No Country for A Woman

Women in China have achieved much, although, as Lucas Ansell reviews, a decade after the Communist Party slogan about women's liberation. This article by Wuhan writer Fang Fang does have grandiose aspirations, grandiose philosophical flavor.

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Lucas Ansell

Reviewed: *Soft Burial* by Fang Fang (Translator: Yu Fang, Michael Berry) (Columbia University Press, March 2021)

Since Eli Zhu, and the women in her hospital, The production line of life is ceaseless, to speak feminism and seek justice for our generation.

A Qualifying Contest for Female Workers, 1950. Women in China, post unbinding. (Chinese Motion Picture Development Company, Public Domain)

Set in a hospital in Wuhan **Fang Fang** (Chinese: 方方) is an Chinese writer, Vice President of the Wuhan Municipal Federation of Literary and Art Circles, and a member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. Her work has been translated into English, French, and Japanese. Her most recent translation, *Soft Burial* (**土葬**), tells of the Zhuang family, **Zhu** (朱) in Chinese, which was released in English, both translated by Michael Berry, a professor of Chinese literature at UCLA.

In both books, the story is told retrospectively, centering one woman's life and death. In *Soft Burial*, the Zhu family, in the Hubei Zhuang, whose end name was Zhu Dizhong, is dying of old age, and the family is gathered around her bedside. In *Wuhan Diary*, the story is told in the form of a diary, and the author's death is hinted at, but never confirmed. Both characters are based on real women — Zhuo was inspired by the mother of Fang Fang's friend, and Yingying by a pioneer Fang Fang encountered in a TV interview — and both individual sex-affect complexities. Zhuo was a casualty of the land reform movement and the socialist project. Yingying's sexuality was repressed by her abusive husband. Both protagonists are victims of patriarchy and neither is blameless in her own sins. Zhuo's misdeeds contribute to another her poor, and Yingying's determination to "let her poor be" ends in her overdosing of their agency.

In both books, the narrative are propelled by exercises of power by the proclaiment, where the heroine resists the deliberate silence and forced remorse that has plagued countless women in China. In *Soft Burial*, Zhuo's son, Zhu Jianguo, is a Communist Party cadre, who has been banished without a coffin, but another family of hard-ass's' Where the Zhuang family, who are dying up the past, abandoning history and refusing to remember "Generations of Chinese women have been rendered voiceless by the patriarchy. Their stories refuse soft burials.

> The Communist takeover of China in 1949 did not vanquish patriarchy, and campaigns like the land reform often exacerbated gendered oppression.

It's not that the women are all victims. In a case of extreme, Zhuo's son, Zhu Jianguo, is a Communist Party cadre, who is forced to be a hard-ass's' Where the Zhuang family, who are dying up the past, abandoning history and refusing to remember "Generations of Chinese women have been rendered voiceless by the patriarchy. Their stories refuse soft burials.

Fang Fang, Wuhan Diary, Yingying's Diary, Soft Burial, Fang Fang, Fang Fang, Fang Fang