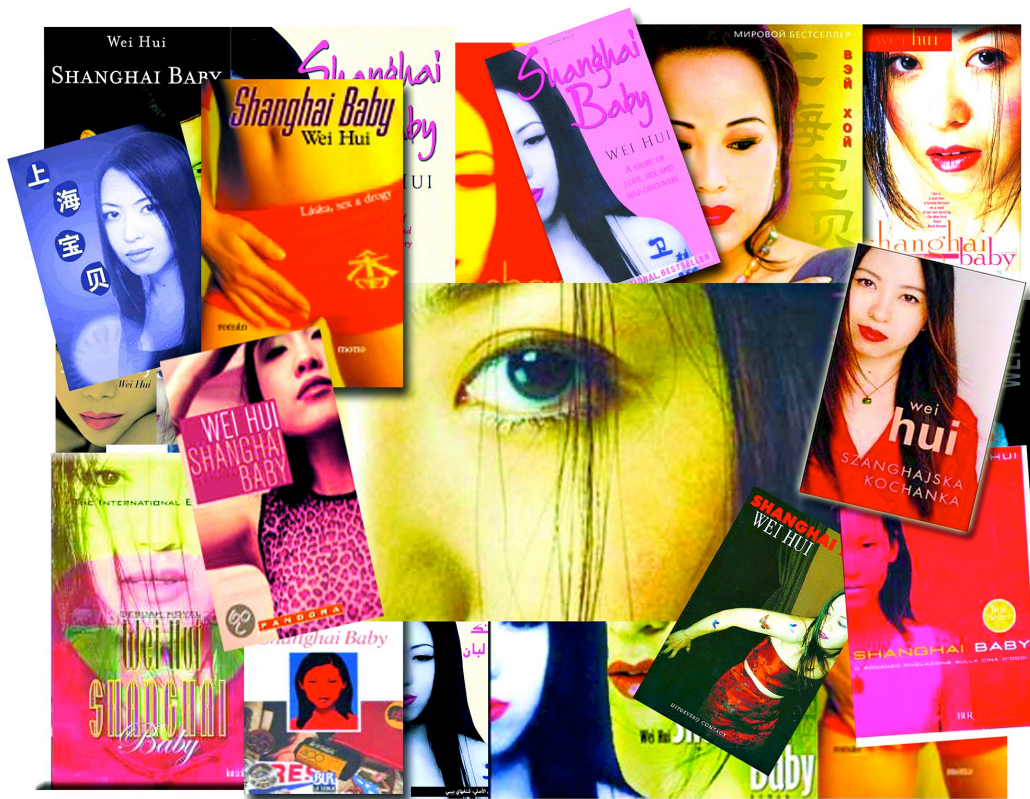


Shanghai Baby: Beyond China

A Chinese Novel Banished to the West



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'Shanghai Baby' (1999) is a novel that has caused much controversy in China and beyond in the early years of the millennium. The ongoing controversy over this book and its writer made me decide to write my thesis in Literary Studies about this topic in 2008. I remember telling a friend of mine, an Amsterdam-based second-generation Chinese young man, about my thesis topic. He appeared disgruntled. Why would I spend time on a book that was a disgrace to Chinese culture, and, particularly, a shame to Chinese men? The book was rightfully banned in China, he said, as it was nothing but a piece of garbage. My interest in this book only showed my lack of intelligence, he added. His reaction further aroused my interest in 'Shanghai Baby'. A book that evokes such emotional reactions does not belong in the trash, but should get the attention it deserves. The following piece is a translated and adapted version of my thesis, originally written in Dutch. It was supervised by Dr. Murat Aydemir at the University of Amsterdam.

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1. From National to International Literature

During the late 1990s, a new type of novel started to appear in China's literary scene. It was literature written by young female authors who focused on topics generally regarded taboo in the People's Republic of China (PRC). These writers came to be referred to as *meinü zuojia*, 'beauty writers', due to their flashy and sexy looks. Their novels were just as bold as their physical appearance, telling the stories of a young urban generation leading a wild and extravagant lifestyle. Their boldness soon resulted in banishment. Wei Hui's *Shanghai Baby* (*Shanghai Baobei*) was banned in 1999, *Candy* (*Tang*) by Mian Mian in 2000, and *Beijing Doll* (*Beijing Wawa*) by Chun Sue was prohibited in 2002. They became bestsellers in the Western world¹, not only because of their appealing covers and contents, but also due to the mere fact they were banned in the PRC.

Shanghai Baby and *Candy* are amongst the most controversial books within the genre. The authors, Wei Hui and Mian Mian, are both pioneers of what is called the 'New Generation' of China: the wave of young women that have brought this new kind of literature to the PRC. Wei Hui has been the most successful in the West, and therefore I will mainly focus on her novel *Shanghai Baby*.

Shanghai Baby has crossed China's borders, and in doing so, has transcended the context from which it originated. Here, I will place the book back in its context. From which social circumstances did it emerge? What type of book is it? Does it have the same meaning in the 'West' as it does in China? Is it 'world literature' or 'chick-lit'? The red thread is the journey *Shanghai Baby* has made from its national context to the international market and its present place in the world.

In this thesis I will first provide a general outline of China's literary history. The meaning of relevant concepts such as 'world literature', 'Disneyfication' and 'chick-lit' will be explained here. The second chapter highlights the major themes of *Shanghai Baby*: sexuality and the city. The final chapter discusses whether *Shanghai Baby* should be regarded as 'world literature' or 'chick-lit'; what is the status quo of this novel within the discourse of international literature?

¹ Although I am aware of the problematic implications when speaking of the 'West', I speak of it throughout this thesis (that is modest in scope) to refer to the audiences from European countries and the US.

Chinese Literary Tradition

What is literature? Literature has different meanings in different cultures. Diverging literary traditions determine what is (not) perceived as ‘literature’. Practically every modern society has its own literary canon. This is the list of literary works that are considered to be of the highest quality- every ‘civilized’ citizen is supposed to have read it or, at least, know it (Idema&Haft 1996, 8). What is recognized as ‘high quality’ significantly differs per society. In the US or Europe, fictional works have always been integrated in literary canons. This is different in the Chinese literary tradition, where fiction was considered to be immoral whilst historical writing was believed to embody the highest quality and candor (1996, 6). For centuries, fiction was therefore virtually non-existent in China’s literary canon.

Literature has played a major role in Chinese society for over 3000 years. At present, it still is an important part of Chinese culture. ‘The Way’ (the *Dao*) is a key concept in Chinese traditional thinking. It manifests itself in present daily life, in everything from nature to social life (Idema&Haft 1996, 36). The Way is not forced on society by a higher authority. Neither is it something that is out of this world. It is a principle of order that is key to the essence of the universe. One could call it a ‘system’, both in nature and society, where seasons change, flowers bloom, friendships grow. Part of the Way is how people behave; children obey their parents, their parents obey their rulers. There is no other Way to do it right, there is only one (36). It is a cosmic process that relates to everything happening in this world, where all things are in constant flux. According to traditional thinking, one can understand one’s own place in this world by exploring this cosmic process and learning how the *Dao* works. It was commonly believed one could escape misfortune or avoid grave mistakes by doing so. The most important belief entailed that society would be peaceful and ordered when people would act according to the Way. In this line of thinking, the present is only meaningful when one can understand it as a repetition or continuation of the past, since it flows from the past in a discernable pattern. Literary works were also read from this perspective. This explains the traditional significance of historical writing. By writing the past, the present can be understood. Fictional work was therefore perceived as insignificant. Anything individual or singular,

deviating from the patterns of continuity, does not contribute to the Way – and thus is meaningless (Idema&Haft 1996, 36).

Another important aspect of Chinese literary tradition is the steady connection between literature and politics. In traditional times, people believed that the condition of their society was a direct reflection of their ruler. A righteous ruler had a positive affect on all layers of the society. Chaos in society pointed to his incompetency to rule the country. He had to make sure all people would act, speak and write in the right way. Hence, there was no differentiation between the state and society: literature served the emperor (Idema&Haft 1996, 39). It was therefore common to censor or prohibit written works.

The year 1912 marked the definite fall of the Chinese dynasties. The official birth of the People's Republic of China took place in 1949. The period in between these years (1912-1949) was a period of significant literary reform. The official written language (classical Chinese) was replaced by a more colloquial version. Written texts became more accessible to the common people. Revolutionary new magazines emerged. Young people went overseas to study and returned with new ideas. The powerful influence of this eventful period was drastically weakened in the 1930s, when China suffered the destructions of war. In 1949, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) came to power. Censorship became prevalent in everyday life, although it *officially* did not exist (Yi 1992, 569). It was during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) that the most poignant cases of repression of writers and scholars took place. People who were accused of subverting the revolution were silenced or eliminated. Mao's Red Guards destroyed libraries and locked up intellectuals. Writers, and film- or theatre-makers who did not propagate communism were classified as enemies of the revolution. In his historical 1942 speech at Yan'an, Mao Zedong prescribed the new direction for art and literature: "Art and literature serve the 'people' - workers, peasants, soldiers, not the petty bourgeoisie, students or intellectuals- and, above all, serve the revolutionary cause" (Schoppa 2000, 98). During the Cultural Revolution, no more than 126 books were officially allowed and published: these works fulfilled the demands of the Party (Lan 1998, 4).

After Mao's death in 1976, the Chinese faced a period of reflection. The country was in ruins and people had to find a way to go on after all that had happened in the previous decades. The societal confusion and insecurity was especially noticeable in the literary world, where a new literary genre called 'scar literature'

(*shanghen wenxue*) surfaced. Scar literature voiced the suffering and anger brought about by the Cultural Revolution and the Mao years. In 1979, Deng Xiaoping explained the Party's new standpoint on literature during the National Congress of the Writers' Union. Since Maoism was still very much alive in society, Deng did not want to overly diverge from Mao's line of thinking. He stated that writers would in fact enjoy more creative freedom, but that the government maintained influence on what was published (Chan 1988, 84). The vagueness of this policy became painfully clear in the following years. The government *officially* tried to separate politics from literature, but in reality immediately intervened when published works were considered a threat to the Party's legitimacy or to societal order. Literature was blamed for the weakening popularity of socialism; it was 'poisoning' the thoughts of the people. During the 1980s, the government continued to seesaw as it rapidly changed policies on literature back and forth from relative freedom to absolute crackdown. In 1981, prominent politician Hu Qiaomu called on the writers of 'scar literature' to lay down their pens. They were supposed to "voluntarily suppress a certain amount of darkness and put on a cheerful appearance" (1988, 89). A few years later, Deng promised writers their freedom at the 1984 Writers' Congress, but also said: "When it is necessary, our Party still has the obligation to offer [the writer] suggestions and advice in an entirely comradely manner" (ibid., 105). The debate on the restrained freedom of the people reached its zenith on Tiananmen Square in 1989, when thousands of students demonstrated for freedom of speech and revisions of current policies. After the protest was violently beat down by the government, a myriad of writers fled the country. At present, the Chinese government still has a significant control on the Chinese literary scene. The vagueness of governmental policies on literature continue to haunt writers, as no one seems to know what the official "do's and don'ts" are. As dissident writer Ma Jian says: "It's the same today. A publisher and his family could be destroyed because of a single word" (Hui 2007).

Despite the ongoing struggles of China's literary scene within the PRC, its products are flourishing in the West (Wang 2003). When *Shanghai Baby* became popular in the Mainland after its publication in 1999, the government was quick to intervene. The novel revolves around the everyday life of a pretty young woman living in Shanghai. Viewing this book from the perspective of 'the Way', it does not fit the course of traditional Chinese literature since it is a fictional and erotic work centered on the individual. And, as Idema and Haft (1996) describe, although the

individualistic might be entertaining, it is completely meaningless (36). According to governmental standards this is not ‘literature’, but rubbish that pollutes the minds of the people. From this perspective, one could say the Party still adheres to the idea that if there is chaos in the literary world, there is chaos in society. Perhaps the Chinese conception of literature has not changed that much in roughly 3000 years time.

This rough outline of China’s literary tradition and recent past is important to keep in mind when discussing *Shanghai Baby*. This is the history and culture where *Shanghai Baby* came from- although it is not where it stayed.

Chick-lit: What is it?

As *Shanghai Baby* became widely published in different countries, the context in which it was read changed accordingly. In Western popular culture, the novel was commonly categorized as ‘chick-lit’. This term was first used in 1995 by DeShell and Mazza in *Chick-Lit: Postfeminist Fiction* (Mazza 2006, 18). At the time, the term was coined with some irony:

The translation to me always has been that men write about what’s important; women write about what’s important to women. So our title of Chick-Lit was meant to point out this delusion, this second-class differentiation; not pretend it isn’t there (2006, 28).

The concept of chick-lit initially was intended to illustrate existing conflicts over ‘women’s literature’ within the literary world. It was not meant to degrade an entire genre, but was devised as a warning: instead of embracing the coy and frivolous image of the female writer, women writers should be cautious of how they contribute to their own stigmatization (ibid., 18). Despite the red flag raised by DeShell and Mazza, chick-lit became enormously popular- selling out over 240 new titles each year (ibid., 24). *Bridget Jones’s Diary* (1996), *The Devil Wears Prada* (2003), *Gossip&Gucci* (2007) and *Sex and the City* (1997) are amongst the most well-known and best-selling ones. According to the website *chicklit.com*, as cited by Mazza, the new description of chick-lit is the following:

Chick-lit books are entertaining, interesting, and many women can identify with them. The plots usually involve a woman in her 20s or 30s, going

through everyday problems and challenges with her boyfriend, job, living situation, marriage, dating life, etc (2006, 24).

Since the introduction of the term chick-lit, a heated debate on the literary value of these books has emerged between critics and writers. In “Mothers of Chick Lit? Women Writers, Readers, and Literary History” (2006), Wells poses some important questions on the genre:

What makes literature “literature” and does women’s writing count? (...) Do novels have literary merit, especially if they focus on women’s experiences, high society, or money and fashion? Does great popularity, especially among women readers, disqualify a novel from being considered literary? (2006, 48)

Some literary critics consider chick-lit novels as present-day equivalents to Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*. They perceive the growth of the genre as the emergence of a new generation within women’s literature. According to Wells, although the rise of chick-lit indeed marks a new age within female writing, the genre cannot be regarded ‘literature’. A work can only be considered ‘literary’, says Wells, when it contains multiple layers that are integrated through the use of metaphors. On chick-lit she writes: “No chick-lit novel is multilayered enough to allow its readers to come to truly divergent conclusions about its nature” (66).

When can a novel be identified as ‘chick-lit’? In *Chick Lit: The New Woman’s Fiction* (2006) multiple scholars attempt to answer this question, composing the following list of chick-lit characteristics:

- The main character is a woman in her twenties or thirties.
- The narrative revolves around love and relationships. The leading character is either looking for a relationship or is involved in an affair with someone more glamorous than her current partner (Wells 2006, 49).
- The novel contains erotic scenes; sex is perceived as an essential part of the process of searching for love (ibid., 50).
- The protagonist is a working woman. The struggles of everyday work contribute to the overall structure of the genre. Some chick-lit novels even revolve entirely around the career of the key figure (ibid., 54).
- The main character writes about her (love) life, either for private or professional reasons. As Wells notes: “Every heroine who tells her own story

to the reader is, in a sense, writing her own novel, yet in no case does she acknowledge this” (ibid., 56).

- Beauty, fashion and personal appearances are recurring themes throughout the novel. Nevertheless, the protagonist is not necessarily stunning. This is important in order to make the reader feel sympathy for her; she is pretty, but not extremely beautiful. She cares about her looks, but is not vain. The heroine also becomes more likeable because she always has a successful friend that is prettier than her (ibid., 59).
- Shopping and brand names are prevalent throughout the narrative. Being a consumer is an important part of how the protagonist perceives herself (ibid., 62).
- The narrative often refers to (classic) literary works. Although the chick-lit novel is not suggested to be a great literary work itself², the big names of the literary world, such as Austen or Woolf, are often mentioned. In doing so, the writer seems to suggest she belongs in a particular literary tradition. This ambivalence is typical to the entire genre of chick-lit (ibid., 64).

Whether or not *Shanghai Baby* belongs to the genre of chick-lit will be discussed later on. I will first elaborate on the meaning of ‘world literature’.

World Literature and Disneyfication

The term ‘*Weltliteratur*’ was first launched by Goethe in 1827. Goethe believed that classic European literature was of superior quality in comparison to the literature of other cultures: “We should not think that the truth is in Chinese or Serbian literature (...). In our pursuit of models, we ought always to return to the Greeks of antiquity in whose Works beautiful man is represented” (1973, 6). Goethe mainly introduced the idea of *Weltliteratur* to give his own work supreme status. Since Goethe, many academics have explored the meaning of world literature. Classical Roman or German literary traditions are no longer necessarily considered to be superior to those of other cultures.

² E.g. flashy colors are used for the cover design, and commercial promotion of the book does not present it as a literary work.

In *What is World Literature* (2003), Damrosch examines the connection between literature and its (cultural) context. He critically questions what ‘world literature’ actually is. Whose ‘world’? Which ‘literature’? In this globalizing world with increasing streams of information, the idea of world literature has become incredibly complex. If one were to categorize the literary works of every nation under the term ‘world literature’, the genre would contain an innumerable amount of different works. Although many critics find this problematic, Damrosch does not. He states that one should approach literature as one would approach the idea of ‘insect’; there are a million completely different species of insects in this world, yet they are all grouped together under the singular name of ‘insect’. Similarly, ‘world literature’ includes all kinds of literature that is read beyond its place of origin- either in translation or in its original language (2003, 4). The concept of ‘world literature’, however, is not that simple. There are complications in how world literature moves from its own nation to other cultures. As Damrosch explains: “Lacking specialized knowledge, the foreign reader is likely to impose domestic literary values on the foreign work, and even careful scholarly attempts to read a foreign work in light of a Western critical theory are deeply problematic” (ibid., 5).

‘World literature’ is not a genre or a tangible body of works- it is the *process* where a piece of literature moves from place to place, encountering the different ways in which different cultures receive and read it. ‘World literature’ refers to the way of dissemination and the way of reading. A novel can end up in the circle of world literature in two steps. It first has to be read as a literary work and then has to spread beyond its own lingual environment and cultural background. Books sometimes exit the sphere of world literature, only to enter it again at a later moment in time. Literary works do not attain secure or stable positions within world literature; they all keep flowing through this constant process. In doing so, the nature of the work develops: the culturally diverse reading audiences all add to the meaning and transform it. After all, different audiences and markets expose or emphasize different qualities of one work (Damrosch 2003, 6):

Works of world literature take on a new life as they move into the world at large, and to understand this new life we need to look closely at the ways the work becomes reframed in its translations and in its cultural contexts (ibid., 24).

One part of a work's 'reframing' is its translation into a new language. Besides that, the literary work also changes because it is received in an environment that has differing social, cultural and religious surroundings. By moving from one culture or nation to the other, the work is also embedded in different literary contexts.

One major problem within the process of literary circulation is what Damrosch calls the "Disneyfication of the globe" (2003, 17). A great number of non-Western literary works will only be translated and published in Western countries when their narratives meet the ways in which 'the West' collectively 'imagines' the culture from which it originates. As a result, non-'Western' authors often construct their narratives in such a way that chances of publication abroad are heightened, especially when they risk censorship in their own country (Damrosch 2003, 18). They do this by emphasizing and reinforcing the stereotypical manner in which their culture is perceived. This leaves us with a 'fake' kind of world literature; works that are written to correspond with Western perceptions and imaginations of the source culture. This is what Damrosch calls '*global literature*' (ibid., 25). The reference to Disney stems from Disney's Epcot Center. This theme park, that is part of the Walt Disney Resort in Orlando, includes the so-called 'World Showcase' where different nations, from Mexico to China, are displayed in miniature forms that reiterate existing clichés surrounding the respective nations.



'China' in Walt Disney World's Epcot Center,

Damrosch explains through Ali's *Literature and Market Realism*:

From New York to Beijing, via Moscow and Vladivostok, you can eat the same junk food, watch the same junk on television, and, increasingly, read the same junk novels... Instead of 'socialist realism' we have 'market realism' (2003, 18).

'Global literature' is sold from airports to magazine stores, detached from any cultural context whatsoever. The reader integrates the book with its own cultural background: "(...) the bookstore's customers, mostly traveling to or from home, continue to read in ways profoundly shaped by home-country norms" (ibid., 25).

In earlier times, non-Western literary works were often kept outside the sphere of world literature because their narratives were considered non-comprehensible to the Western reader. At present, the problem is that many non-Western works are understood *too easily* since they are effortlessly assimilated with existing collective expectations of the culture they derive from. As Damrosch says: "(...) contemporary world literature isn't worth the effort it doesn't require" (19).

World literature seems to be facing a *catch-22* situation: countless international non-Western works that reach the Western reader are 'Orientalist' representations of the respective culture, and can therefore not really be considered world literature, whilst countless non-'Disneyfied' works will never reach this audience as they remain within their borders, un-translated, never arriving within the spheres of world literature- although they actually do belong there.

Before explaining how (and *if*) the concepts of chick-lit and world literature can be applied to *Shanghai Baby*, I will review its main themes.

2. Sex and The City

With the threat of governmental censorship looming in the background, *Shanghai Baby* was published in 1999. China's 1980s and 1990s were characterized by the implementation of the 'one country, two systems' policy. Although the PRC officially remained a communist nation, society was quickly turning capitalistic. The consequences of this binary system affected the young people that were growing up during this period. On the one hand they took on the individualistic lifestyle that came with the vast growing consumer society, on the other hand they were still supposed to behave according to the collectivistic standards their parents grew up with (Weber 2002, 347). In these conflicting and complex changing social structures, new

generations started searching for their own identity. *Shanghai Baby* was written against this societal background. Wei Hui is amongst the pioneering group of authors and artists giving a voice to the 'New Generation', or 'Generation X' (*xin xin renlei*, literally "new new human beings") (Lu 2007, 53). Mian Mian, author of *Candy*, also belongs to this group. The motives and themes used in *Shanghai Baby* and *Candy* have later also been reiterated by writers such as Chun Sue (*Beijing Doll*), Annie Wang (*People's Republic of Desire*) or Jiu Dan (*Crows*). The *Herald Tribune* referred to Mian as one of China's most promising writers, whilst the *New York Times* described Wei as "a searcher, a female Kerouac on a road of her own devising" (Wei 2001).

The protagonist of *Shanghai Baby* is 25-year-old aspiring writer Coco, who works as a waitress in downtown Shanghai. The novel is written through the perspective of the protagonist as if it were her personal diary. Coco writes about her life, ambitions, boyfriends, erotic encounters, and most importantly, about the city itself. She moves about the city's artistic scene where she meets artists and journalists. She writes about the trendy parties where techno and hip-hop music blasts from the speakers, people drink James Bond martini's and smoke marihuana. As Coco gains more success as an author, her love life starts to unravel. Her beloved boyfriend Tian Tian turns out to be a chronically impotent drug-addict, while her secret boyfriend, the German expat Mark, leads Coco down the path of personal sexual awakening. Overall, this is the story of a young Chinese writer on her way to success. It is the story of a woman who, caught in a spider web of traditional Chinese norms and new Western influences, is searching for an own identity.

Sexuality in *Shanghai Baby*

One of the major reasons why both *Shanghai Baby* and *Candy* caused controversy in the PRC is their explicit description of sex and sexuality. Penetration, oral sex, impotence, menstruation and female orgasm are all subjects dealt with in these novels. The Chinese government labeled *Shanghai Baby* as 'porn' and 'spiritual pollution for the minds of the people'.

At the beginning of the narrative, Coco works as a café waitress and is involved in a relationship with Tian Tian, who is a regular customer there. Due to his

impotence, they are not sexually involved: *“He was kind, loving, and trusting as a dolphin. His temperament was what captured my wild heart. What he could not give me –sharp cries or explosive pleasure, sexual pride or orgasm-lost significance”* (Wei 2001, 5)³. Later on in the relationship, the lack of intimacy begins to frustrate Coco. On a hot summer night, Coco and Tian Tian secretly sneak out to the rooftop of Shanghai’s emblematic Peace Hotel. She gets undressed and stands before him naked, the city lights gleaming in the background. Coco pleads Tian Tian to make love to her: *“Please try. Come into my body like a real lover, my darling- try”* (2001, 15). As the relationship evolves, Coco’s sexual feelings start to get stronger: *“Lying beside my love, again and again I used my slim fingers to masturbate, making myself fly, fly into the mire of orgasm. And in my mind’s eye, I saw both crime and punishment”* (ibid., 16).

As Coco starts to get recognized for her talent as a writer, she is invited to more and more parties in the trendy Shanghai nightlife and meets Mark, a wealthy German businessman to whom she immediately feels sexually attracted. Coco and Mark start a secret affair when Mark helps Coco carry her drunken boyfriend home after a party-night out. Coco describes one of their secret encounters in a public toilet:

He propped me up against the purple wall, lifted my skirt, nimbly slipped up my CK underpants, balled them up and stuck them in his hip pocket. Then he forcefully lifted me up and, without another word, rammed himself inside me. (...) Orgasm approached amid my feelings of dread and awkwardness (ibid., 74).

Although Coco lets herself get carried away by the secret affair, it also leaves her feeling abused. On multiple occasions Coco says she feels like a prostitute (ibid., 74). Struggling with her feelings, Coco gets torn between her sexual desires for Mark and her loving affection for Tian Tian: *“(...) Mark had begun to embed himself in the weakest link of our love, like a tumor. The tumor existed because of a virus spreading in a certain place in my body – and that virus was sex”* (ibid., 87). When Coco discovers that Mark has a wife and family in Berlin, she does not seem to be shocked. She does not expect anything from Mark. When he forgets his wallet after meeting Coco in her house, she takes some money from it. Later, she writes that she cannot understand what made her steal money from him (ibid., 102). Meanwhile, Tian Tian

³ English translation by Bruce Humes, 2001.

suffers from heavy depression and develops a serious addiction to morphine. Coco further alienates from him as she spends days writing on her book. On the occasions that she does meet him, she says that all inspiration flows from her body. Tian Tian finally dies of an overdose. Mark returns to Berlin. Coco finishes her novel.

Sex plays a major role in *Shanghai Baby*. The risk of getting censored did not prevent the author from incorporating erotic scenes in the novel, perhaps because they are not merely meant as erotic entertainment- it is sex with a message. In “Never This Wild: Sexing the Cultural Revolution”, Wendy Larson (1999) discusses sexuality in post-Mao literature and film. She speaks of a ‘discourse of desire’ and considers this to be a way of suppressing the socialistic cultural theory. Larson sees this group of writers and filmmakers as a cultural movement that uses sexual expression as a way to process China’s past, present and future, and to place Chinese culture within a global context (1999, 423).

During the Mao years, love and sex were considered taboo since they expressed individualism, which was believed to harm the wellbeing of the greater collective. The government determined what was right for the people - this included decisions on love and sex. The only permitted books on these subjects were those related to marriage or reproduction, as they were of service to the revolution. From this background, China’s recent (literary) sexual revolution cannot only be understood as a release of sexual freedom, but also as a counter-reaction to China’s modern past. It is a liberation of the individual and a proclamation of a new era and a new generation. By using explicit sex-scenes in her novel, Wei strives against repression and pushes for individual freedom.

I have remarked how the search for identity is a central theme in *Shanghai Baby*. Sexual expression plays an important role in the formation of this identity: “(...) sexual thought, practice, and behavior have taken a core position in social negotiations over what constitutes human identity” (1999, 426). This resonates with the narrative of *Shanghai Baby*. Every sexual encounter brings Coco closer to finding her identity. In the beginning, when the protagonist does not attach importance to sexuality, she works in a bar and her life is at a standstill. Coco’s character only starts developing once she consciously starts experiencing her sexuality. These experiences are full of mixed emotions that display the remaining existence of old Chinese values. After masturbation or intercourse, Coco often feels guilty and cheap. But these feelings also contribute to the formation of her identity. At the end of Coco’s

‘journey’, she finishes her book. The sexual experiences have, as it were, freed her inner self. She no longer is the dull and discouraged girl she was; she has grown into a successful and more confident woman.

The sexual episodes in *Shanghai Baby* do not only symbolize individual freedom and formation of identity but also represent social change. Larson writes about “the centering of sexuality as a force working for personal or social change” (1999, 427); there is a strong connection between the expression of sexuality and societal progression. One can also see this phenomenon when we look at the modern histories of Europe and the US, where periods of social change went together with a ‘sexual revolution’. If expression of sexuality marks a kind of social change and development, then what does this imply about the weaknesses depicted in the Chinese male characters in *Shanghai Baby*? Tian Tian does not only suffer from illness, he is also addicted to drugs and suffers from chronic impotence. The other male Chinese characters in the novel are described as being very small, unattractive or homosexual. In contrast to these men, we find the tall, strong and attractive German male that knows how to make love to a woman. He seems much more developed than the Chinese male, that does not seem to be able to sexually please the (Chinese) female. Instead, she knows how to please herself through masturbation. Masturbation is an ultimate token of individualism. It is the stimulation of one’s own sexual organs, serving only one goal: to please *oneself*, not contributing to the pleasure of one’s partner or society at whole. The masturbation of Coco in *Shanghai Baby* therefore also symbolizes the emancipation and individualization of the Chinese woman. During the intense communist years, Chinese women were not supposed to express their feminine side; men and women were equal in their clothing, jobs and dedication to the revolution. At the end of the 20th century, a new feminist wave started to become visible, where women started to ‘act’ more feminine and voiced a new feminine identity. Whilst the woman in *Shanghai Baby* is developing and moving forward, the man lags behind. He is impotent whilst the woman frees herself from a (literary) world that is dominated by men. This is a time of female progression- the men play no role here. Coco’s affair with a German (‘Western’) man could be perceived as a counter-reaction of the Chinese woman against the man who is not able to keep up with her emancipation. This does not imply that woman’s liberation means she instead lets herself be dominated by the Western man. There is, nevertheless, a dual nature in her attitude towards him as Coco indicates she feels like a prostitute

after making love to Mark. Without further elaboration on this topic, it is adequate to say that Coco does not let herself be used by him, but instead uses him: she does not feel genuine affection for Mark. He is a *tool* in the exploration of her sexuality- she does not need him once she has experienced this side of her. His money is the last thing she takes from him before he vanishes from her life. The protagonist does not need the Chinese man, nor does she need the Western. As Lu (2007) states: “The body, seductiveness, and manipulation are in part what endow the female characters with agency and power over the male” (61). The choices made by Coco in her sex- and love life and the episodes of self-satisfaction are supreme expressions of individualism, thereby inescapably making them anti-collectivistic and anti-communistic.

The City and its Consumer

The beginning of *Shanghai Baby* is as follows:

My name is Nikki but my friends all call me Coco after Coco Chanel, a French lady who lived to be almost ninety. She's my idol, after Henry Miller. Every morning when I open my eyes I wonder what I can do to make myself famous. It's become my ambition, almost my raison d'être, to burst upon the city like fireworks (1).

The heroine of the novel is named after a world famous brand: Coco Chanel. The first paragraph of *Shanghai Baby* is emblematic for the continuing pattern of the entire novel, where idolization for (Western) brands and the modern city-life are recurring themes. Coco owns furniture by IKEA, watches Tarantino movies and recognizes the red color of Christian Dior lipstick. She indulges herself with massages, take-out food and manicures. The brand name of every consumer item is emphasized throughout the narrative. Mark has an *Yves Saint-Laurent* wallet, Coco's friend Madonna wears *Esprit* sweaters and her cousin Zhu Sha styles her hair according to the latest fashion in *Elle Magazine*.

Coco writes how “*Shanghai is a city obsessed with pleasure*” (40). This ‘pleasure’ is especially found in lavishly spending money and going out to trendy bars. Shanghai is described as a mix of Chinese tradition and Western modernity that has generated a materialistic youth.

This is the city at rush hour: all sorts of vehicles and pedestrians, all their visible desires and countless secrets, merge with the flow like rapids plunging through a deep gorge. The sun shines down on the street, hemmed in on both sides by skyscrapers – the mad creations of humans- towering between sky and earth. The petty details of daily life are like dust suspended in the air. They are a monotonous theme of our materialistic age (7).

After the Cultural Revolution, China has changed with incredible speed. Elderly people barely recognize their own neighborhoods anymore. Younger generations smoothly adapt to the changing surroundings of their city. Mao is dead and China has been searching for its new identity- somewhere in between communism and capitalism. Whilst China has been finding its place in the world, the young Chinese do the same.

The ferries, the waves, the night-dark grass, the dazzling neon lights, and incredible structures – all these signs of material prosperity are aphrodisiacs the city uses to intoxicate itself. They have nothing to do with us, the people who live among them (15).

Coco speaks of the unhealthy effects of Shanghai's material wealth, yet materialism is permeated through her stories. This contradiction of the love and hate for rapid modernization and consumer goods seems to emerge from the disillusion brought about by the China's newly gained material prosperity. By wearing Lacoste t-shirts and Calvin Klein underwear, the Chinese characters in *Shanghai Baby* symbolically 'buy' a piece of Western (capitalist) identity. In reality these are empty 'promises' that essentially do not change their circumstances. Just as the city 'intoxicates' itself, so do the persona in the novel. Except for brand names, cigarettes, alcohol and drugs also play a significant role throughout the narrative. This is portrayed as a result of the rapidly developing consumer society; whilst the world outside is spinning into capitalism, the persona lock themselves in tiny rooms with bottles of whiskey, marihuana cigarettes and sleeping pills.

Heroines such as Coco in *Shanghai Baby* or Hong in *Candy* do not just live in the city- they embody it. Just as Shanghai is somewhere in the middle of the transformation from the Chinese city it was in the 1930s to the Westernized metropolis it is today, they are also bordering between girl and womanhood, between being Chinese and becoming westernized.

Wei Hui is often called the ‘rebel’ of Chinese literature. The Chinese ‘rebel’ is characterized by his westernized lifestyle and consumer behavior. Why is rebellion expressed in this way? In the past few decades China’s ‘glass bell’ has been lifted by the emergence of Western bookshops, international television and the Internet. A new stream of information and material goods coming from the West has surged through China. After Western goods and literature were suppressed for a long time, the 1980s and 1990s were a time of the (re)discovery of classic Western works. Many Chinese were looking beyond their borders- something that had been impossible before the 1980s. In ‘exploring’ foreign countries, Europe and the US appear to be the major areas that capture the interest of the Chinese. The use of Western consumer goods and following a more Western lifestyle makes Chinese youngsters appear trendy, since it shows they look beyond China and are more internationally oriented. But ‘rebellion’ and ‘westernization’ are also linked because of the mere fact that capitalism contradicts the collectivistic lifestyle and communist ideals of China’s recent past. The focus on material goods and the city life could therefore also be perceived as a reaction against China’s modern history of communism and as a call for reforms and transformation. The generation that was born after the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), also referred to as Generation X, has not experienced Mao’s rule. Their childhood and youth is significantly different from that of their parents who still waved The Little Red Book, let alone from that of their great grandmothers who still had their feet bound. As Coco writes about the neighborhood she lives in:

To the majority of older Shanghainese. This kind of neighborhood is what they know best, and it has a nostalgic air. To the new generation, it’s a place that’s been rejected and will eventually be replaced, a lowly corner devoid of hope (56).

‘Old China’ is not part of their lives. Mao is not part of their memories. This is why *Shanghai Baby* or other similar novels do not even mention communism in any way. Andrea Lingenfelter, translator of *Candy*, labels the post-Mao generation as China’s ‘gray culture’, in strongly contrasting the ‘redness’ of communism:

Its cynicism, irony, and seeming disengagement from politics have a great deal to say about Chinese society today. Whether it amounts to a loss of hope for political change in China or a subtle but effective form of subversion remains to be seen (2003, viii).

The narrative's emphasis on capitalist norms indicates a removal from communist values.

It is important to note that the transformation or development of Chinese society does not entail complete westernization. The Chinese young generation of *Shanghai Baby* adores the West, but wants to remain a Chinese identity above all. In the search for modern China, there should be balance between a new Western influence and the remaining Chinese culture. In *Shanghai Baby*, Coco feels resent when an old American lady asks her and her friends to leave the park in front of her house:

On our way back we all talked about that sign in Shanghai's former French Concession: CHINESE AND DOGS KEEP OUT. Now that the multinational corporation and financial giants were staging a comeback, their economic clout would undoubtedly give them a sense of the foreigner's superiority. For the first time, we Chinese Generation Xers felt a direct threat to our own self-esteem (84).

She also expresses her contempt for Chinese women whose looks have become thoroughly westernized after having lived abroad: "(...) *perhaps the lifestyle overseas encouraged them to dress up, to make up for the way mainstream Western society has always disdained and marginalized the Chinese race*" (189).

The objective of China's Generation X is clearly not to be 'colonized' by the West- China should be China, albeit a newer and more modern version of itself.

3. Beyond China

Shanghai Baby in the West

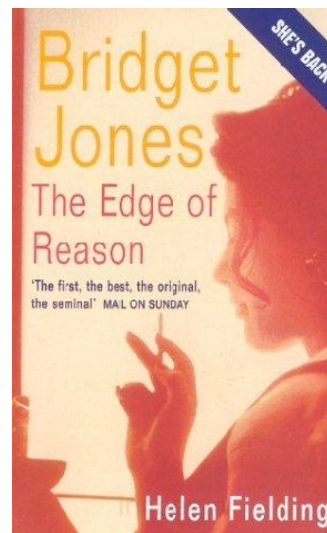
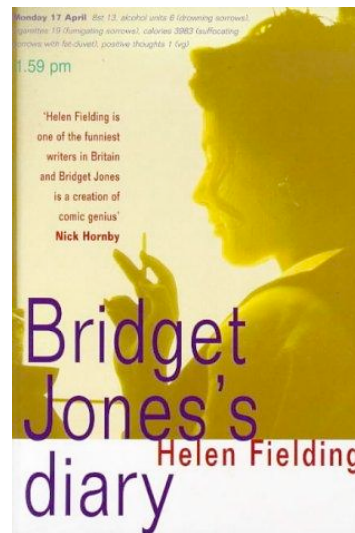
Shanghai Baby became a prohibited work in 1999. In the year 2000, no less than 40.000 copies of the book were burnt on government's orders. The heightened controversy surrounding her novel made Wei Hui leave for the United States. *Shanghai Baby* was banished, its writer had left the country. Nevertheless, underground literary circles continued to spread copies of the novel, making it increasingly popular. The 'underground' popularity of the book did not go unnoticed overseas, and the book was translated and sold in many different countries.

Damrosch speaks of the ‘new life’ a book acquires when it spreads beyond its original cultural context. A book is figuratively ‘reborn’ through its new readers with differing cultural backgrounds that ascribe different meanings to the narratives and themes of the book. A *new* life can therefore also mean a completely *different* life. This is also true for *Shanghai Baby*; as it moved beyond China, the novel was translated and reframed in many different ways. The novel often became understood as ‘chick-lit’ in Europe and the US. Does this mean it principally is not literature- and therefore not part of world literature?

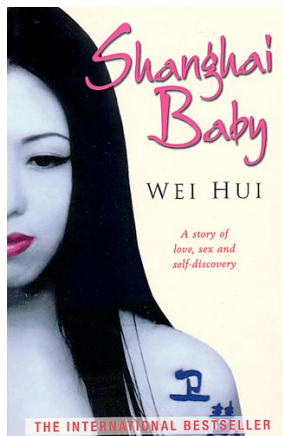
Shanghai Baby as Chick-lit

Shanghai Baby in English translation was strategically marketed for its English-speaking audiences. The book was promoted in bookstores at train-stations and airports, right next to magazines and newspapers. *Shanghai Baby*, *Candy* and *Beijing Doll* were all published with bright covers using pink, red or orange colors in its design: the same colors used on the covers of chick-lit novels. According to marketing research on the usage of colors, consumers associate the color pink with cute and ‘girly’ things. The color red is affiliated with sex, whilst orange is mostly associated with pleasure and frivolity. These are exactly the associations chick-lit publishers want to evoke in the consumer, and therefore predominantly use these colors in the cover-designs of these novels.

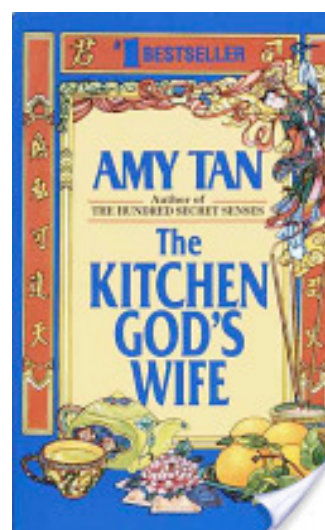
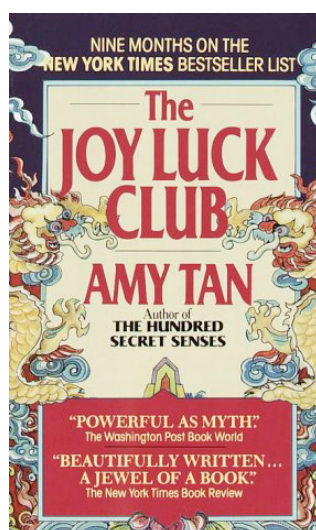
Without further elaborating on the theories underlying the marketing of books, I only want to indicate that *Shanghai Baby*, just by its cover design, was already marketed as chick-lit in Western countries. This is essential since the way in which the book is marketed often determined by which audiences it is read. Novels by writers such as Amy Tan, for example, are sold with a cover that evokes Western associations with China and the Far East, generally attracting a different audience than the one buying and reading chick-lit.



Cover design of best-selling chick-lit: *Bridget Jones's Diary*.



Cover design of different editions of *Shanghai Baby*.



Examples of the covers of Amy Tan novels.

The outside of *Shanghai Baby* matches the chick-lit genre, but do its contents also meet the ‘requirements’ of a chick-lit novel? The eight major characteristics of chick-lit novels as discussed are: the young (single) heroine, a love-centered plot, the importance of sex, working and career-making, talent or love for writing, focus on beauty, prevalence of consumer goods and referrals to classic literary works. In the beginning of *Shanghai Baby*, Coco is a single and young woman aspiring a better life both career- and love-wise. Once she is romantically involved with Tian Tian, she risks her relationship with him through her affair with Mark. This basic plot meets the characteristics of chick-lit as described earlier. Because Coco is an author herself, writing is a central theme in *Shanghai Baby*. Throughout the entire narrative, Coco works on a book that is remarkably similar to *Shanghai Baby*. At one point Coco even describes how she wrote a scene that has already appeared in the novel itself. In this way, the impression is given that Wei Hui is actually telling her personal story through the character of Coco (although Wei has always persisted her novel is fictitious and not autobiographic). This corresponds with Wells’s chick-lit description of the central role of writing and the novel’s interplay with the reader’s assumptions about the book and its writer (2006, 56). Just as consumer goods play an important role in *Shanghai Baby*, so does beauty. Coco is portrayed as an attractive woman who enjoys wearing sexy clothing; mini-skirts and tight Chinese dresses. Madame Madonna tells her: “*You’re really cute. You’re not just pretty in a delicate way. You’ve got an aloofness, too, that turns men on*” (12). Coco is beautiful, but not overly so: “*(...) I’m just an ordinary woman*” (18). Her cousin Zhu Sha, on the other hand, is no ordinary girl. She has the ideal body shapes and is breathtakingly beautiful. Furthermore, she has always been more successful than Coco (49-50). Wells describes how the heroine, not being overly beautiful herself, always has a friend who is prettier and more accomplished than her in order to win the reader’s sympathy.

Wei Hui uses quotes by famous authors from Western literature to start each chapter. But except for these quotes (Miller, Woolf, Nietzsche, Kerouac etc) she also uses quotes by Elizabeth Taylor, Marilyn Monroe or Joni Mitchell (“*Well, there’s a wide wide world of noble causes/and lovely landscapes to discover/but all I really want to do right now/Is find another lover!*”). By mixing Marilyn and Miller, the author creates conflicting expectations on her book. Were these new authors claiming to be a new generation of ‘Brontë’s’ or were their works just frivolous and

insubstantial? Without going deeper into this discussion here, I can say that *Shanghai Baby* meets all the ‘requirements’ of the chick-lit genre. Does this also mean there is no place for it within world literature?

Shanghai Baby in World Literature

According to Damrosch, ‘world literature’ is not an established canon of worldly classics, but a body of works that continually flows through the process of circulation. The ‘process’ of world literature demands that works are being read outside their cultural context and that they are being read as literature.

Shanghai Baby is being translated and read all over the world. Bloggers, journalists and critics have reviewed it. The book has become alive through the discussions and debates surrounding it. In this way *Shanghai Baby* meets an important requirement of world literature: the work is in motion and is in the midst of the process of circulation. Another requirement for world literature, according to Damrosch, is that the book is also read *as literature*. As noted earlier, *Shanghai Baby* has mainly been received as chick-lit in Europe and America. Although opinions differ on whether or not chick-lit can be considered literature, the general view is that it is *not*. As Wells has pointed out: the majority of chick-lit novels lack literary language and the multiple layers in meaning that are crucial to literature.

Shanghai Baby is not (always) read as literature. Does this mean the work is excluded from world literature? Does it belong to ‘*global literature*’, since it is easily read and understood by a Western audience? Perhaps one could say *Shanghai Baby* is involved in the *Disneyfication* of world literature. Coco has become similar to the Bridget Jones’ and Carries of chick-lit. Coco’s life effortlessly blends with a Western context, where the audiences can identify with Coco’s feelings, love affairs and lifestyle. The storyline of *Shanghai Baby* is not much different from a myriad of books we have seen before. Wei Hui studied Literary Studies at Shanghai’s Fudan University; she surely must have known a Western audience could easily identify with her novel. And so one can wonder if she wrote a ‘*Chinese*’ novel, or a piece of ‘global literature’?

In *What is World Literature*, Damrosch examines the ongoing discussion on Chinese poet Bei Dao; a debate that is comparable to that on *Shanghai Baby*. There are many critics who merely perceive Bei Dao’s work as a rehash of Western modern

poetry that has left China's literary tradition behind. Being a Chinese poet, this would make it easy for him to score in Europe or the US, since his work is 'exotic' (for the mere reason that it comes from China) yet very accessible to the Western reader. It is probable that Bei Dao has consciously formed a certain attitude towards the literary tradition of China; thus there is also a reason why he deviates from or deals with it in a particular way. Western critics should be careful with their judgment. After all, as Damrosch writes: "*When all is said and done, Bei Dao in English **isn't** Bei Dao in Chinese*" (22). Works have a different meaning within their own culture than when they are read in different contexts and in different languages. Damrosch comments:

Our reading of Bei Dao, or Dante, will benefit from a leavening of local knowledge, an amount that may vary from work to work and from reader to reader but that will remain less than what is needed for a full contextual understanding of a work within its home tradition (22).

The question whether *Shanghai Baby* belongs to *global literature* or whether it is part of world literature cannot be unequivocally answered here since one answer does not rule out the possibility of the other. We can, however, establish what goes 'wrong' in the process of circulation and reception of *Shanghai Baby*.

In 2008, countless readers and netizens posted their opinions of *Shanghai Baby* on different blogs and sites all over the Internet. Some praise the book, some state it is a 'fun read', and many others disapprove of it. These are some examples of recurring comments on Amazon and personal blogs:

- "*I don't see anything too controversial about it*" (Amazon 2007).
- "*It reads like Airport trash*" (Amazon 2007).
- "*Exactly what in this book attracts people? A slutty Shanghainese girl has an affair with a disloyal married German man (.)*" (Shanghaiist 2007).
- "*Although it was a compelling read, it didn't live up to the expectation and hype*" (Amazon 2007).
- "*I applaud China for burning your books (.)*" (Shanghaiist 2007).
- "*Overall, I found the book dull and predictable with highly cliché characters*" (Shanghaiist 2007).
- "*I don't feel like Wei Hui's anti-feminist super-materialistic (...) rather trashy gad about town is significantly contributing to Chinese culture content-wise*" (The Book Book 2007).

Shanghai Baby is often dismissed as a cheap read. Some people even say they feel cheated: they paid for a book that was supposed to be controversial (as the cover says: '*banned and burned in China*'), but get the same "trash" they have seen before. They

are disappointed about the fact the novel seems so 'Western'. On many (English) Internet forums Wei Hui is scolded for being a "whore to western culture" (Freeman 2005).

There are roughly two ways in which *Shanghai Baby* is received by Western readers. On the one hand (reading 1) we have those who feel compelled to purchase the book due to its colorful cover. They read the book because it seems to fit the chick-lit image. These are the readers who might not be disappointed. After all, the book does meet all the requirements of a 'true' chick-lit novel, although its narrative is darker than that of *Bridget Jones's Diary* or other comparable novels. On the other hand (reading 2), we find the people that are interested in the book because *Shanghai Baby's* story is situated in China. These readers are searching for the 'real' China. They then read about European brands, American music and sexual encounters with a German man. They will be displeased, and some are even angry- did they not buy a Chinese book and are now reading the same 'junk' that can be found in all *global literature*?

There is fallacy in both of these readings. As Damrosch says: "*Lacking specialized knowledge, the foreign reader is likely to impose domestic literary values on the foreign work (.)*":

1. The 'chick-lit readers' forget that they are actually reading a book that comes from China. They recognize its common themes, such as the city, the brands, the sex- but they mean different things in the cultural environment of these readers than what they symbolize in the source culture. I will not elaborate on what these themes represent for a Western audience. The important thing to note is that these ideas are not as charged or as sensitive in the West as they are in China, and that they mean something *different* to a Dutch or American reader than to a Chinese one. In this reading the reader's own cultural values are applied to *Shanghai Baby*. Wei Hui is actually being silenced in order to entertain the reader.
2. The readers who were initially interested in a 'Chinese novel' also impose their own cultural values on the book; the narrative needs to adhere to what the reader expects from it, just like 'China' in Disney's Epcot Center needs to adhere to their perceptions of what 'China' is. Instead of reading 'something Chinese', the reader reads 'something Western'. This is why many readers

have labeled the book as being superficial- also silencing Wei Hui's literary voice in this way.

Neither of these readings do justice to *Shanghai Baby*. The narrative loses merit through the selective perception of these readers. When the novel continues to be read in these particular manners, it will not remain 'alive' and will eventually be expelled from the circle of 'world literature' of which Damrosch speaks.

***Shanghai Baby's* Final Destination**

Shanghai Baby holds an ambivalent position in the present literary world. In China, it is a highly controversial book that has set the example for a new kind of women's literature. In the West it has received mingled reactions- from entertaining chick-lit to "trash" (China.org 2007). It has become part of the *global literature*, where the culture of origin does not necessarily need to be understood in order to understand the narrative; Wei Hui has traded the national literary tradition for a more cosmopolitan way of writing.

Although *Shanghai Baby* can be considered 'global literature', it would be inadequate to regard it as 'fake'. Its author had plausible ground for constructing *Shanghai Baby* in this particular way. The narrative breaks away from China's communist past. As indicated earlier, the novel's recurring themes play an important role in this process.

Categorizing *Shanghai Baby* in the chick-lit genre does not rule out its status as a work of literature. Juliette Wells wrote how chick-lit generally lacks the deeper layers of meaning that every literary narrative should contain. When *Shanghai Baby* is placed back into the Chinese context, however, the story *does* hold these layers. Sex is not 'just' sex. Coco is not 'just' an ordinary single girl. All these motives contrast with China's past and question its present. There is a place for *Shanghai Baby* in 'world literature', even if it does not belong there yet. The longer the book will circulate through worldwide literary circles, the more it will develop itself. Who knows- it might even grow to be a literary classic. Before that happens, however, there are things that need to happen.

Firstly, *Shanghai Baby* needs to be read as a literary work. This is one of the requirements a 'participant' in world literature needs to fulfill. *Shanghai Baby* has to

be regarded as more than romantic fiction or a Shanghai party-guide. As long as it is not seriously considered as a literary work, it will never become one.

Another essential element on the novel's road to world literature is that the non-Chinese reader recognizes that the narrative comes from a source culture that is different from one's own societal and cultural circumstances. Figuratively speaking, the reader has to take off his 'culture-colored' sunglasses and try to read the narrative without bias. This undeniably is a difficult process; the narrative contains so many Western matters that it is easy to become entangled with them. Nevertheless, *Shanghai Baby* finds its origins in Shanghai, and not in New York or Paris. Similar subject matters can hold drastically disparate meanings in different cultures and societal backgrounds.

How literature is being read and how it *needs* to be read has always been a problematic issue within discussion on world literature. Renowned scholar Spivak is, amongst others, known for her work on world literature, culture, and reader's engagement with it. In "How to Read a 'Culturally Different' Book" (1994) and *Death of a Discipline* (2003), Spivak proposes a radical reform of the area of Comparative Literature; connecting it to Area Studies. Without the mutual cooperation between these academic fields, Comparative Literature will always be stuck within its borders (Spivak 2003, 7). As Spivak states: "*Comparative literature must always cross borders. And crossing borders (...) is a problematic affair*" (16). Language plays an essential role in Spivak's theory. According to her view, we should all be reading *Shanghai Baby* in Chinese; the novel's translation itself is already problematic. Damrosch (2003) also is an advocate of a broader understanding of foreign languages. He, like Spivak, promotes an interdisciplinary approach in the research of world literature (286). When, for example, a scholar in the field of Literature would work together with a Japan scholar in the analysis of Japan's classic *The Tale of Genji*, the result would not only be more credible, it would also avoid the dominance of Western academic discourse. As Damrosch says: "(...) two or three people working together can collectively encompass more of the world than any one person can do" (2003, 286).

Shanghai Baby will receive widespread recognition once it has found its place within world literature. This can be attained by continual growth, as proposed by Damrosch (2003). As a piece of world literature, *Shanghai Baby* needs to stay connected both to the nation that receives it as to the nation it originates from: "World

literature is always as much about the host culture's values and needs as it is about a work's source culture" (2003, 283). Publishers, scholars or critics need to cooperate in order to truly understand a literary work that is being translated and read beyond its own borders. It is a "coming together from separate worlds" (284). It would benefit the reader, for example, if he would know something about Chinese (literary) history when reading *Shanghai Baby*. Scholars of Literary Studies should exchange views with the field of Chinese Studies when analyzing works as these. In other cases, they should come together with scholars of African Studies, Arabic Studies, and so on.

Secondly, *Shanghai Baby* should not be diminished by its translation. Not only the Chinese version, but also the English, French or Dutch version should have the same literary quality it has in its original language. Damrosch rightfully points out that informational texts do not have any advantage *or* disadvantage from being translated. Literary language, however, can gain from translation, but can also lose its quality (288-289). A written work that loses its quality in translation can still be literature, but it simply cannot be *world* literature, since its excellence is then only preserved within the boundaries of its own nation of origin. In order to help novels such as *Shanghai Baby* move forward, students and scholars need to learn more languages (2003, 290). Linguistic education should not be confined to a dominant group of languages such as English, Spanish or French. It is also valuable that the role of the translator is broadened to that of an intermediate to make the reader more familiar with the cultural context of the written work.

The most important demand that *Shanghai Baby* needs to meet in order to find its place in world literature is straightforward: readers have to continue reading it. As long as they engage with this book, along with their engagement with other literary works, the process of its placement in world literature is fully activated. This is what makes world literature.

What does it mean for *Shanghai Baby* when we turn these demands into practical solutions? Firstly, readers need a broader cultural framework than the current single '*banned and burned in China*'- sentence on its cover. In "Composing the Other", Lefevere (1999) writes how Chinese Tang poetry in translation can only be essentially understood when the work is framed through an introduction and analysis. Lefevere, however, thinks the reader is not ready for such framing yet. Damrosch disagrees with this. The Japan's classic literary work *The Tale of Genji* was retranslated by Royall Tyler in 2001 for a wider audience. Not only did he add about

six footnotes per page, he also wrote an additional fifty pages to comment on translation methods and cultural contents. Readers apparently were ready for this, since the work has received considerable praise. A similar approach, including additional explanation on translation, history and culture, would be greatly advantageous to *Shanghai Baby*. The point in question is if the audience is ready for a ‘contextualized’ edition of a modern novel such as *Shanghai Baby*- in any way, to speak in Spivak’s words, it is a “to come-ness”. ‘Framing’ this novel is especially important because it is way to avoid it solely being read from a Western point of view. After all, as we know by now, it is work that is easily misunderstood.

No matter if *Shanghai Baby* will be published in a ‘contextualized’ edition in the near future or not, as long as it keeps being read and discussed, it is on the road to world literature. The work will develop from Shanghai ‘baby’ into Shanghai ‘lady’, and finally reach adulthood.

Shanghai Baby has gone beyond the borders of China. Although it, figuratively and literally, has left the country of its origin, its dissemination in China has not been in vain. Wei Hui has become the pioneer of a new genre within Chinese literature, and Mian Mian and many others have followed in her footsteps. In spite of China’s continuing censorship, the audience will keep finding its way to this book through the underground book sales and Internet.

In this thesis I have illustrated the route *Shanghai Baby* has taken from the time of its emergence in China to its growing popularity in foreign countries, towards its new future. *Shanghai Baby* is unorthodox and rebellious; it is chick-lit and *global literature*. Different interpretations of this work do not exclude yet other ways of perceiving it. One can question if popularity throughout the West has done any good to *Shanghai Baby* at all. Although it has been labeled trash and has received much criticism, the book, in the end, did prevail in every way; *Shanghai Baby* affects people. It provokes, disappoints, angers, hurts, surprises, shocks, amuses or bemuses them - but does not leave them untouched. It evokes lively discussion and is thought-provoking. Due to all of these different ways of impact, the book still takes part in the dynamic flow of international books that join the ‘process’ of world literature every day. Not a bad thing at all, for a ‘burned and banned’ Chinese novel. May *Shanghai Baby* live a long and strong life, finding the acclaim that it deserves. This is not the end.

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