

# Juvenile Delinquency and Illegitimate Child: A Criminological Analysis of *The Bathing Women*

**Hu Ming & Zhao Yilin**

**Abstract:** The drowning of Quan is the core of the story in *The Bathing Women*. The author uses a montage narrative to piece together the clues of the incident, exposing the fact that it is a crime intentionally committed by juvenile girls. From a criminological perspective, this paper begins with the dialogues of the unique inner monologues of characters and the complex growing environment, focusing on the significance and far-reaching influence of the nuclear family form on the development of underage individuals, examining Fei and Tiao's consideration of the right to life of illegitimate children when confronted with the natural conflict between the inherent ethical issues of illegitimacy and the social concept of monogamy, and analysing the reasons for the crimes committed by Fei and Tiao from depictions of their characters, plots and scenes. At a time when the legal and political order of the country as a whole has been hard hit, social mores, values, conflicts and problems become a source of normative acquisition for juvenile, and illegitimate child and the parent would not be understood by society. When Wu cheated on Yixun, Tiao was forced into a parentification dynamic, taking on an overly helpful role within the family, finding the legitimacy excuse in the death of her illegitimate sister, Quan, who fell into a sewage well and died. Growing up as an illegitimate child, Fei lacks the social support of her family, school, and society. She is lured by a married dancer into an unmarried pregnancy and then coerced into a clandestine abortion. Since her friendship with Tiao becomes a rare and supportive social interaction in her life, she designs Quan's death. The novel reflects social undercurrents and related ethical dilemmas from the comparative discussion of the fate of illegitimate children, probing the good and evil of human nature.

**Keywords:** *The Bathing Women*; criminology; juveniles; illegitimate child; right to life; social support

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**标题：**未成年人犯罪与非婚生子女：《大浴女》的犯罪学分析

**内容摘要：**尹小荃溺亡是《大浴女》的故事内核。作者运用蒙太奇叙述手段拼凑起事件的线索，揭露此意外事故实则为未成年少女故意为之的犯罪事实。本文以犯罪学视角，从小说独特人物内心独白的对话体与复杂的生长环境入手，关注核心家庭形态对未成年个体发展的重大意义与深远影响。本文检视了唐菲与尹小跳二人在面对非婚生子女内在伦理问题与“一夫一妻”制社会理念之间的天然冲突性时对非婚生子女生命权的价值考量，并从人物、情节和场景描写中分析唐菲与尹小跳犯罪的原因。在整个国家的法律与政治秩序受到重创时，社会的风貌、价值观、矛盾和问题成为未成年人规范习得的来源，非婚生子女与其父母均不被社会谅解。当章妩因婚外情与尹亦寻的婚姻出现问题时，尹小跳被迫在亲职化关系中成为过度帮助的家庭角色，为自己对私生女妹妹尹小荃落入污水井见死不救找到合法性解释。唐菲以非婚生子女的身份成长，缺乏家庭、学校与社会的支持，在已婚舞蹈演员的诱骗下未婚先孕，而后在胁迫中秘密堕胎。唐菲与尹小跳的友情成为其一生中难得的支持性社会交往，这也促使唐菲给尹小荃设计死亡意外。小说比非婚生子女的命运，从而反映社会暗流以及讨论相关伦理困境，叩问人性的善恶问题。

**关键词：**《大浴女》；犯罪学；未成年人；非婚生子女；生命权；社会支持

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“Guilt” bridges the evil and the good of human nature in *The Bathing Women*, where the guilt depiction of protagonist has followed a formulaic narrative of repentance, epiphany, and redemption. Chinese literary world, apart from investigating writing techniques and English translations of *The Bathing Women*, is keen to analyse its female characters, especially to explore the sin of innocence committed by female characters bathed in desire and the path to gain through repentance.<sup>1</sup> The road to redemption elucidates Tie Ning’s reconstruction of the structure of human nature.<sup>2</sup> Is the “sin” in *The Bathing Women* really a sin of

1 See Cai Xinqiang, “Sin and Salvation- Review on the Female Images in the Novel of The Bathing Woman by Tie Ning,” *Journal of Henan Open University* 2 (2015): 51-53.

2 See Wang Chunlin, “The Cleaning of the Complex and Deep Spirit- Comments of the Long Piece Novel *The Bathing Women*,” *Journal of Shanxi University (Philosophy and Social Science Edition)* 5 (2000): 33-37.

innocence that violates the moral sense and is not punishable by law? If we analyse from the perspective of criminology, we could taste from the novel that crime is not preconceived by the vicious, the scum of society, but more of some tiny, ordinary cohort who behave unethically because of own limitations. Nothing is either black or white, as there is much complexity hiding beside what black and white muddy with. *The Bathing Women*, to certain extent, depicts an even more specific cohort: delinquent juveniles. In the novel, those young people grow up in toxic environments and do things that are almost exclusively illegal.

The author artfully designs the death of Quan, an illegitimate daughter, who is thrown asides by her half-sisters Tiao and Fan, and eventually drowned in the sewer manhole on the road opened by her cousin Fei, another illegitimate daughter. From the field of criminal law, the general view is that formal crimes refer to behaviours that violate the criminal law and are criminally unlawful and should be punished by criminal penalties, while substantive crimes refer to behaviours with serious social harm.<sup>1</sup> Tiao has a specific duty to help with her mother's appointment of being babysitter. Tiao's dereliction of duty and Fei's opening of the sewage manhole cover leading to Quan to drowning have already constituted a crime in essence. The author arranges for the juvenile girls to face the natural conflict between the inherent ethical problems of having a child out of wedlock and the social concept of monogamy, and to choose between innocence and goodness, and the deep-seated filth, nastiness, and darkness of her heart, in the context of insufficient parental upbringing in the nuclear family hierarchy. This paper, in the context of "interdisciplinarity,"<sup>2</sup> interprets Quan's death being the result of a choice made by the perpetrator in an "ethical dilemma,"<sup>3</sup> that is, a choice between violating the right to life and recognizing a child born out of wedlock, and that Quan's death would be an inevitable result to a certain extent and in a certain sense.

### **I. Subject of the Crime: Juveniles in the Nuclear Family**

Based on the fact that Yixun and his wife were sent to Fuan city from Beijing in the late 1960s and that Dr. Tang jumped from height by suicide in 1976, it is assumed that Quan was born in the birth the early 1970s and drown as a toddler. At that time, China was embracing liberalized marital system where the "nuclear

1 See Chen Xingliang and Liu Shude, "Discriminating Formalization and Substantiation of the Concept of Crime," *Journal of the Northwest Institute of Politics and Law* 6 (1999): 92-101.

2 For a definition of "interdisciplinarity," see Jiang Chengyong, "Interdisciplinary Interaction and Innovation in the Methodology of Literary," *Foreign Literature Studies* 3 (2020): 61-72.

3 For a definition of "ethical dilemma," see Nie Zhenzhao, "Ethical Literary Criticism: Its Fundamentals and Terms," *Foreign Literature Studies* 1 (2010): 12-22.

family”<sup>1</sup> was becoming the dominant pattern of family structure in China by virtue of rapid changes. Such institutional change was marked by the Marriage Law of the People’s Republic of China (hereinafter referred to as the Marriage Law 1950), which was enacted after the Seventh Session of the Central People’s Government Committee in 1950. Published on the front page of the *Changjiang Daily*, this codified law established monogamy to liberate women from the oppression of the feudal marriage and family system into labour force of society. Moreover, a series of campaigns have been conducted to ensure a thorough promulgation of marriage law after its birth. In 1950, Ping Opera *Liu Qiao’er* was rolled out and swept the country for raising public awareness of the freedom of marriage. In 1953, the State Council released the Instruction on the Implementation of the Marriage Law to set up a marriage campaigns month. *The Bathing Women* discusses the moral standard change in its confirmation that the Marriage Law was already popularized in society at the time. For example, when Fei informs her lover, the dancer from the Fuan Song and Dance Troupe, of her unwanted pregnancy, “he then began to explain how law and marriage work” (Tie 206). Fei, “as a sixteen-year-old, pregnant with this man’s child, she had to listen to him babble about the law. According to him, they had violated some law, which scared her a little” (Tie 207). The direct outcome of these campaigns would be the paradigm shift of family structure. The basic family unit in the novel consists only of parents and unmarried children or adoptive parents and the infant, featuring a typical nuclear family, rather than three or four generations as traditional Chinese family favours. The nuclear family emotional process usually does not create problems early on the marriage relationship.<sup>2</sup> But as the lower the level of differentiation between spouses decreases, the greater the chances that trust, honesty, and mutual respect will be obliterated due to the overpowering of their needs and fears.<sup>3</sup> In the case of Tiao’s family, the father, Yixun, in order to maintain the apparent harmonised relationship, made huge adjustments to his own emotions and behaviours to tacitly agreed with the Quan’s existence. The mother, Wu, however, regarded her illegitimate daughter as the souvenir of her momentary love affair, which made her more sensitive to husband’s and lover’s attitudes.

The author, consequently, organized the writing characters with a clear generational division, those who were not yet adults in the late 1960s and early 1970s with their successive dating partners, as well as their parents’ generation. In

1 For a definition of “nuclear family,” see Alan Brown, *What is the Family of Law? The Influence of the Nuclear Family*, Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2019, 6.

2 See Murray Bowen, “Nuclear Family Emotional System and Family Projection Process,” *Family Systems: A Journal of Natural Systems Thinking in Psychiatry & the Sciences* 2 (2024): 99-120.

3 See Murray Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, Lanham: Jason Aronson, 1978, 185.

both groups, there are characters who break the boundaries of human decency and engage in unethical behaviour in terms of affection, love, or friendship, such as unmarried pregnancies of Tang Jingjing and Fei, cheating on spouse within marriage conducted by Wu, Fan's husband and Chen Zai, and maintaining inappropriate relationships with married people in Tiao, Fei and Dr. Tang's cases. The author uses the word "crime" to describe these behaviours, such as Dr. Tang's stolen pleasure of having affairs with a married female nurse. If the "crime" conducted by Wu and Dr. Tang out of improperly resolving physical desires, as well as "crimes" done by the educated youth who were sent to the Reed River Farm, manifested the psychological deformities and human distortions caused by the suppression of normal human desires during the Cultural Revolution, then Tiao's inaction leading to the drowning of Quan would be one of the "crimes" aligned with the modern standards of criminal law in the book. It forces the sheer impact of social conflict that breaks the natural ethics of human society. It features the perpetrator of the crime, namely, a group of juveniles, young Tiao and her peer group. Although law would be responsible for defining understanding of concepts whatever social circumstances change<sup>1</sup>, at the time Tiao lived in the early 1970s, there were no laws or policies directly defining the age of adulthood, which was gradually customized in China's juvenile criminal prosecution starting from the 1980s, and was not formally settled until in 1992 when the Law of the People's Republic of China on Protection of Minors came into effect that the term "minor" was explicitly mentioned to refer to citizens under the age of eighteen. Nevertheless, it is possible to extrapolate the social foundations of that time from the first criminal law adopted at the Second Session of the Fifth National People's Congress in 1979. Article 14 of this law makes a distinction between criminal responsibility for juvenile crimes. In terms of culpability, fourteen is the age of consent to people who shall be held criminally responsible for murder, serious injury, robbery, arson, habitual stealing, or any other crime that seriously disrupts the social order. And a person who has attained the age of sixteen is required to be held criminally responsible for the act. In terms of punishment, those aged fourteen to eighteen shall be subject to a lesser or mitigated punishment for the commission of a crime.

Scrolling through Tie Ning's detailed descriptions of the "bestieship" between Tiao, Fei, and Youyou, the audience would sketch a general impression of the age of these characters during this period. These girls should be a group of middle-school girls around fourteen or fifteen years old. The author explicitly leaves several

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1 See Anne Wagner et al., "Law as a Culturally Constituted Sign-System—A Space for Interpretation," *International Journal of Legal Discourse* 2 (2020): 239-267.

traits to inform the audience of the age of characters from a third-person point of view before and after Quan's drowning. However, she uses the first-person tone of the characters to create an age confusion that reinforces the characters' identities. When Wu returned home from the Reed River Farm, Tiao was the "eleven-year-old daughter" (Tie 101) who inquired her mother of the plates she preferred to taste, and Fan was "just seven years old" (Tie 369). At the end of the winter, Tiao was twelve years old when she stood in front of the mailbox to deliver the letter exposing Wu's infidelity, and Fei was fifteen years old when she met Tiao for the first time. Afterward, Tiao, Fei, and Youyou often got together for cuisine innovation based on recipes from the journal, *Soviet Women*. When Tiao recalled the sisterhood as an adult, she said, "I was thirteen and Fei was sixteen" (Tie 525). It was the year that the male dancer led to Fei's unmarried pregnancy and a clandestine abortion when he asserted that Fei was "probably not seventeen" (Tie 202). It was also the year that Fan's life was forever immortalized after the sewage manhole cover was opened. However, Fan's memory of the age when incident happened tended to be self-selected. The book makes it clear that Quan was born one year after Wu got back from the farm, that she turned one in late fall, and that her life ended abruptly at the age of two. Based on Tiao's and Fei's ages, the age of Quan's death is expressed as two years, and strangely, Fan's age is still expressed as seven years old after this time span, especially in the scene where the adult Fan argues with Tiao, "Seven years old, Fan began. One day when I was seven years old" (Tie 409). Tiao felt "Fan had come home especially to tell her this long-past incident, to denounce her, with a victim's deep compulsions" (Tie 414), as Fan accused her of "It was you who brought me all the unhappiness. You! When I was seven years old [...]" (Tie 413). It can be inferred from this that the author may have adopted tactic in expressing Fan's age mix of Gregorian and lunar ages. But there appeared an apparent tendency that in line with Fan's position of bringing herself into the victim of the person who instructed her. Fan absolved herself from the suspicion that she was an accomplice in the cause of Quan's death. The age-memory choices of Fan and Tiao also confirm the dilemma of children growing up in nuclear family where problematic marriage occurs, whereby the child either becomes a helpless child and maintains the role of a child throughout his or her life, or is highly reactive to parental problems and overly helpful to the family.<sup>1</sup> Tiao reveals age-inappropriate overburdening of parentified role since she was in elementary school, from controlling daily necessities and expenses to increasingly revealing to her father that she inferred her mother was cheating on him. She has crossed over the boundaries of parent and

1 See Murray Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, Lanham: Jason Aronson, 1978, 481.

child, and her desire to grow up has not been confined to guilt due to the crime, even if it resulted in the death of Quan. Fan, on the other hand, has always chosen to be a child, believing that she deserves to be protected and pampered, living in comparison with her sister and being powerless to deal with family matters, and choosing to study hard to go abroad to gain a sense of superiority. This contrast in technique distinguishes whether Fei, Tiao and Fan can clearly recognize the nature, significance, and consequences of their fault at the time of Quan's drowning.

## **II. Object of the Crime: The Right to Life of Illegitimate Children**

The novel features illegitimate children as disaffected characters, and regarded them as the core element to drive the plot with the unique tone of reflection on culpability. According to the ordinary meaning, illegitimate children are the relative concept of legitimate children, referring to children "born outside marriage" (Kamariah 71). This identity brands the fruit of sexual desire for a group of people, shaping the choices made by others faced with desire, as well as determining the fate of the object of the crime. Fei, Quan, and the baby Fei lost in pregnancy are all non-marital childbirth. Quan being the outcome of love affairs between Wu and Dr. Tang, and Fei being the unmarried child of Dr. Tang's sister, Tang Jingjing. The author assigns the fate of death to each of the three illegitimate children and their parent. Fei dies of liver cancer, Quan drowning in a sewage well whose cover was pried open by Fei, Fei's unborn child perishing because of the mother's desire to have an abortion and Dr. Tang's self-taught surgical procedures, Tang Jingjing committing suicide to protect Fei and her biological father's reputation, and Dr. Tang jumping from the steel mill tower after being caught in an adulterous relationship. The contrast between the two generations' inevitable deaths is that the deceased and the characters directly related to their deaths provide opportunity for the author to use the dialogue technique of internal monologue to creative sway of her characters, while other supporting roles in the novel mostly were demonstrated with third-person narratives in an omniscient perspective to present the complex social environment, or to act as a trigger or catalyst for the good and bad deeds of the monologue-qualified characters. In other words, the former reflects the characters' ethical thinking of guilt at the micro level, while the latter shapes the macro ethical concept of guilt in different stages of social change.

When Fei and Tiao were teenagers, the constitution and other written laws had not included the right to life, but there is no doubt that depriving people of their right to life is a crime in the simple conception of Chinese people and even the characters in the book. Lao-tzu, in the *Tao Te Ching*, pointed out, "he who



would administer the kingdom, honouring it as he honours his own person, may be employed to govern it, and he who would administer it with the love which he bears to his own person may be entrusted with it" (Lao-tzu 11). It indicates that life is the prerequisite for human beings to realize the meaning of their values. Only by valuing one's body and one's life can one become entrusted with the rule of the world. In Mencius's work, "heaven gives birth to all men. There is an appointment for everything. A man should receive submissively what may be correctly ascribed thereto" (Legge 449). It could be seen that both Taoism and Confucianism, as representative schools of Chinese culture, emphasize the value of life. And this kind of thinking has gradually influenced the later rulers to think about settling ideological disputes and stopping cultural disputes. In the broad sense, traditional Chinese law consists of two systems: punishment and rites. The former starts from the military, while the latter is from the rituals. *The Book of Han* records in The Treatise on Punishment and Law, "when Qin Shi Huang [...] destroyed the law of the former kings, extinguishing the rites and customs of the officials, specializing in punishment, there appointed an officer personally handling cases and rationing his own in deciding on the case and political affairs" (Ban 1096). After the Qin Dynasty settled down the penalty system of acting according to the law, the Han Dynasty, took up the mantle, and refined the official system of law with Qin's idea. Ban also noted that "At the beginning of Han Dynasty, Emperor Gaozu first entered central plain and released the law stated murderer shall be sentenced to death while injury and theft shall be punished accordingly" (1097). It shows that the simple concept of the right to life at that time was embodied in the penalty against the desecration of life. In modern China, as the population was regarded the basis and mainstay of all social production of a country, Chairman Mao stated "of all things in the world, people are the most precious" (Mao 454). Thus, in *The Bathing Women*, when Fei listens to her lover, the male dancer of the troupe, talking about the marriage law, "she had no concept of law; no one had ever spoken to her about law in such a serious way. She only knew if she killed someone she had to pay with her life, and if she owed someone money, she had to pay it back would understand" (Tie 205). As the concept of paying with one's life deeply rooted in the minds of Fei and Tiao, two teenagers who are still uninitiated in the world, and this is also the source of Tiao's sense of guilt.

In fact, the Marriage Law 1950 already implicitly recognizes the right to life as the fundamental and bedrock of all other human rights. Article 13 of Chapter 4, which explicitly prohibits infanticide by drowning or other similar crimes, affirms the value of the life of children born out of wedlock, and considers their civil



rights enumerated elsewhere in the Marriage Law 1950 to be the manifestation and materialization of the value of their right to life. Even though Fei was well versed in the natural justice of “a life for a life,” and aware of the existence of the Marriage Law 1950, she had already sentenced Quan to death due to the status of being the daughter of an unmarried father and a wed mother, and managed to deprive Quan of life after covertly aborting her unmarried foetus. The reason for this is that, in practice, the right to life of a child born out of wedlock conflicts with many factors and cannot be guaranteed, nor can it be guaranteed by the guilt of the person who terminates the life of the unwanted child. During the period when Fei and Wu were pregnant, although China had already proposed one child policy, the general population policy was embracing the policy of stimulating population growth after the failure of the Great Leap Forward and the policy of intermittent population replenishment under a planned economy. In the socialist country, regulations are intended to guide citizens to have children in a planned manner. The national population policy, moreover, does not give anyone the right to arbitrarily force abortion. Therefore, the reproductive rights of Wu and Tang did not conflict with the State’s population policy, and the factors affecting their reproductive rights were their own considerations.

There would be basically three main plights that hinder an illegitimate child from having a secured upbringing. First comes with the conflict between the right to life of the illegitimate child as a foetus and the sense of procreation. The fact that Wu was too lazy to undergo an abortion and that the male dancer persuaded Fei to have an abortion reflects that the foetus is regarded as part of the mother’s body. Whether or not the offspring outside of marriage could be given birth to depends on the way the mother disposes of it, thus weakening the value of the independent protection of the right to life of illegitimate child. Secondly, there is the conflict between the right to life and other rights and interests of illegitimate children. Wu unreservedly giving birth to Quan and keeping her was based on the fact that her marriage to Yixun was still valid and subsisting. After the loss of Quan, the author draws on Wu’s late-night remorse and guilt to compare the birth of her daughter with Fei’s secret abortion of illegitimate child—“How legitimate and righteous marriage was! How secretive and filthy marriage was!” (Tie 236) In this case, even though both Wu and Fei used the term “life” to refer to the child in her womb, treating it as a potential human being. But when conflict arises, the first thing to be relinquished is the right to life of the illegitimate child. Finally, the right to life of children born out of wedlock has its intricate conflict. That is, the right to life of children born out of wedlock is against the dilemmas they would face after birth, and the moral

standards by which they are measured also present real dilemmas. For example, as the cultural discipline of Confucianism as well as in the institutional humiliation and degradation of women has nurtured the social expectation of women in marriage and reproductive<sup>1</sup>, Fei's foetus, the product of sexual exploitation by a male dancer, essentially the result of a typical sex offending against minors in China,<sup>2</sup> would have caused negative consequences for herself, her family, and society if Fei had given birth to it. In the case of Quan, her external features have already doomed her destiny. Wu has already commented that her daughter is "How little Quan looked like her surprised even Wu. The child's appearance didn't leave any room for doubt in the adults, the families, and the society in which she would have to live [...] Even though they all knew that the good times wouldn't last" (Tie 239). Quan's biological father, Dr. Tang, "didn't consider his pessimism about the lives in the Tang family as cruel. In fact, he had predicted long ago that they would live to suffer, just as with his sister Jingjing's miserable death, or his niece Fei's plight, or the awkward life he was living himself" (Tie 241).

### III. Root of Crime: Lack of Social Support

Criminology suggests that human nature is generally resistant to social norms and discipline, and depending on the situation, it will go to any lengths to achieve its goals. Thus, social control theory suggests that socialization mechanisms to control an individual's basic human nature need to be perfected in order to curb the emergence of crime.<sup>3</sup> In the case of juvenile delinquency, this natural human evil manifests itself as a lack of self-control and self-restraint that does not stabilize with age.<sup>4</sup> The causes are complex, dynamic, and varied, but whichever way these factors interrelate and merge to form a particular structure of criminal causes. They cannot be separated from the social support that predisposes the criminal subject to negative or positive emotions. Social support is commonly understood to include both the objective and subjective support that a person receives from the social network in which they are embedded, as well as the extent to which they make use

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1 See Fang Fan et al., "Public Order, Human Dignity, and the Child's Best Interests: The Legal Dilemma of Surrogacy in Mo Yan's *Frog*," *Law & Literature* 3 (2024): 501-521.

2 See Liang Bin and Ming Hu, "A Typology of Sex Offending Against Minors: An Empirical Study of Rape and Molestation Cases in China," *Sex Abuse* 8 (2018): 951-974.

3 See Curt R. Bartol and Anne M. Bartol, *Criminal Behavior: A Psychological Approach*, 11<sup>th</sup> edition, Harlow: Pearson Education, 2017, 27.

4 See Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, "Emerging adulthood: A Theory of Development from the Late Teens Through the Twenties," *American Psychologist* 5 (2000): 469-480.

of that support.<sup>1</sup> Social support stems from the interactive forces generated by the interconnection of people, and the providers of such social relationships, including key family members, friends, colleagues, relatives, and neighbours.<sup>2</sup> *The Bathing Women* takes Tiao's point of view as the main line, and narrates in the third person all the incidents in which Tiao and her childhood friends grow up. By arranging different characters to intervene in the development of these teenagers in the main line, the social relations between Tiao and her friends are already outlined, and the readers are informed of the main sources of social support for Tiao and Fei, which is the most important factor for exploring the social relations between Tiao and Fei. This provides new perspectives and evidence for exploring the emergence of Tiao and Fei's criminal behaviour.

Social interactions are either coercive or supportive<sup>3</sup>, and coercive social interactions become a source of norm acquisition in Tiao and Fei's growth. In the macro setting of *The Bathing Women*, which spans the 1960s to the new century, Tiao and Fei grow up during the Cultural Revolution in 1960s. However, the novel does not give a straightforward portrayal of the social context of the time, but rather reveals the oppressive social psychology of the post-polarization period in a few strokes. For example, there are three major crime scenes in the book in which sentences are explicitly stated. First, two bored young people were sentenced for stuffing lit firecrackers into a mailbox, which resulted in burning all the letters in the mailbox. Second, a female lecturer at the revolutionary cemetery was sentenced for committing an anti-revolutionary crime for laughing in front of the tomb of the revolutionary heroes during the Cultural Revolution. Third, Fei's mother, Tang Jingjing, was sentenced to imprisonment at a criticism meeting for being labelled as a capitalist and female hooligan. In the book, the acts in the book that qualify as modern criminal law offenses, but are not punished by authorities represented by the defense team, are the following. Fei's boyfriend Captain Sneakers at her age of fifteen, committed bullying in school, and leading his team members to gang-rape by mistake the old head nurse of internal medicine who was labelled as an old female spy. The author arranges these two groups of "crimes" with contrasting results, revealing that the construction of the rule of law in new China was stagnant

1 See Gao Yue, "Criminological Analysis and Implications of Social Support Theory," *Contemporary Law Review* 4 (2014): 50-58.

2 See Peggy A Thoits, "Stress, Coping, and Social Support Processes: Where Are We? What Next?" *Journal of Health Social Behaviour* Extra Issue (1995): 53-79.

3 See Mark Colvin et al., "Coercion, Social Support, and Crime: An Emerging Theoretical Consensus," *Criminology* 1 (2002): 19-42.

due to leftist mistakes during the nascent period<sup>1</sup>, and China's traditional patriarchal culture has historically catered to the sexual needs of male criminals.<sup>2</sup> Teenagers Tiao and Fei, in the process of growing up and standardizing their studies, could only rely on their family environment, such as schools and other life environments, to form their judgments of what is right and what is wrong. Tiao begins to invoke the "crime" of Tang Jingjing, who had been witnessed for her being criticized as female hooliganism, to compare with her mother Wu's "crime". "If an unmarried woman who gave birth to a child was a female hooligan, then a married woman with children who had a man besides her children's father must be a whore. Whore or female hooligan, which was worse [...]" (Tie 155). Tiao's father, Yixun, in order to save face, does not punish the "whore" in his family, but this constitutes inconsistent social support in Tiao's mind. Moreover, Wu's and Yixun's approval of Quan's birth exacerbates Tiao's sense of anger and behavioural self-control. As a result, at home, Tiao and her sister Fan oppress Quan at every turn. Tiao gave Fan all the orange juice and meat loaf that Wu bought for Quan. Fan took a moment to pinch Tiao's chubby arms, legs, and shoulders with her fingernails. Tiao and Fan enjoy their pillow time in the sofa, ignoring Quan as the latter rolled on the floor begging to be played with. Tiao's subconscious mind is so repressed by society's rules and concepts that she acquiesces to the two-year-old Quan's wandering away from her sight, and after Quan falls into the manhole, her subconscious mind decides to pull Fan's hand without helping Quan or asking for other adults' help.

The author's arrangement for Fei is in similar way. During Fei's early childhood, the social rights of children born out of wedlock had already entered into the realm of legislation, as stipulated in Article 15, Chapter 4, of the Marriage Law 1950, which provides that out of wedlock births are empowered with the same rights as those born in wedlock, and no one shall jeopardize or discriminate against them. However, according to the traditions of countries around the world, births outside of marriage are born with an inherent sense of unworthiness that is frowned upon. In Europe, for example, the rule of *filius nullius* of common law from the Middle Ages to modern times made it clear that an illegitimate child could not be claimed as the heir of his or her father. In Chinese, the legal term *illegitimate child* is seldom used in folklore. Instead, the term is replaced by slang with contemptuous connotations like bastard. The reason for this is that bastard sequels are believed

1 See Zhang Xiaodan, "Rule of Law Within the Chinese Party-State and Its Recent Tendencies," *Hague Journal of Rule of Law* 9 (2017): 373-400.

2 See Hu Ming et al., "Sex Offenses Against Minors in China: An Empirical Comparison," *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology* 10 (2015): 1099-1124.

as the product of a breakthrough in human relationships, which represent an illicit relationship between a man and a woman or a violation by one party of the other. And children are always relegated to the sidelines when the family setting become fragile.<sup>1</sup> As a result, Fei's upbringing was bumpier and more filled with inconsistent coercion. As the illegitimate daughter of the Tang family, Fei has been isolated at school and criticized in society, but eventually gained the affection and possession of the school bully Captain Sneakers and became his girlfriend so as to gain a social status for which others dare not bully her. After Captain Sneakers was sent to the countryside, Fei encountered pregnancy and abandonment by the male dancer. This kind of coercive behaviour, which is full of contradictions between true love and self-interest, aroused Fei's complex and chaotic psychological state, triggering her to think about power, sex, and social identity. At the same time, it also awakened her strong anger towards Dr. Tang and Quan, with low self-control, and weakened social ties. Fei's emotions towards Quan ranged from hatred, which stemmed from the fact that Quan's mother has hooked up with her uncle, to compassion, which was characterized by a deep understanding of the narrowness of tolerance of the family's compositional background in this society, and even by resentment. Quan's happy upbringing was very different from the fate of the child she begged her uncle to abort, and even hers. If Fei's desire to abort a child born out of wedlock was prompted by the difficulties of implementing civil inheritance rights and other after-the-fact remedies for children born out of wedlock, the denial of the legitimacy of a child born out of wedlock's right to life was the catalyst that prompted Fei to kill Quan.

For Tiao and Fei, the friendship between them is the sole source of supportive social interaction experienced by each during their teenage years. The two met because of Dr. Tang's illicit relationship with Wu. The author adopts a slow-progressing narrative technique in revealing Quan's identity as the illegitimate daughter, showing the gradual deepening of the friendship between the two teenage girls, Tiao and Fei, as a result of their antipathy and resentment towards Tang and Wu's love affairs. It was only after Quan's untimely death that the author identified Quan as an illegitimate child.

In the quiet depths of the night, Wu often wept in the wide, empty bed [...] She would think that perhaps she shouldn't have given birth to Quan [...] Had she

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1 See Fang Fan et al., "Violence, responsibility and best interests: children rights in Elizabeth Harrower's *A Few Days in the Country* and Other Stories," *International Journal of Legal Discourse* 2 (2023): 257-272.

done it as a sort of memento of her relationship with Dr. Tang? Before Quan was born, Dr. Tang didn't even know the child was his. Wu didn't tell him, but she was sure the baby was his and she was willing to keep such a child in her life. (Tie 235)

Before that, the author spent huge number of words and sentences to write about Fei's detection of Quan's being illegitimate daughter. In the compound, Fei twice concludes, "She reminds me very much of my uncle. Hmm, she might be my cousin [...]. She reminds me very much of my uncle" (Tie 96) and Fei's conclusion further makes Tiao "finally was clear about the question she hadn't dared to ask, and now she had the answer" (Tie 96), which intensified her neglecting in taking care of Quan. With her best friend Tiao's ignorance, Fei's complicated emotions are destined to turn into a knife to sever the threads of Quan's fate.

### Conclusion

Good and evil are inevitable issues in the course of personal development, particularly when one is faced with ethical conundrums. The complexity of human nature will always torment desire and compel individuals to make decisions. Taking the symbolic meaning of the word *bathing*, *The Bathing Women* portrays how the characters as individuals, despite having both the material and spiritual possession, lose and remove their own goals as a result of society's influence. Tie Ning's sense of guilt implicates human shortcomings and inspires the audience to think about whether human nature is good, whether people can "do evil for evil's sake," and whether "making up for evil with goodness" could be converted to the true, good, and beautiful human nature and other ethical issues of guilt. The novel skilfully and dramatically designs the closed loop of Quan's death. When Chen confesses to the middle-aged Tiao her "crime"—as a teenager, he witnessed Fei opening the sewer manhole cover and not closing it the night before Quan fell into the manhole—the audience will sigh in dismay at the climax. They are left to marvel at the fact that one illegitimate daughter has subtly designed the "murder" of another illegitimate daughter, her cousin. The author does not write about Fei's guilt for causing Quan's drowning, and writes Fei's death in a frank and natural way, as Fei keeps quiet about her best friend Tiao before dying. After Quan's death, Tiao tries to assuage her guilt for her "crime" by accusing her of being the daughter of an illegitimate child- "she 'killed' to eradicate the dishonour of her family. The adults in her family created the dishonour and it should have been those adults who eradicated it, but she took on the responsibility" (Tie 142). In the end, after learning that it was Fei who opened

the sewage manhole and left it uncovered, Tiao entered the “garden in the depths of the heart” (Tie 257). But in essence, it is a kind of self-exculpatory success, Tiao has not been redeemed. In a sense, the adult Tiao and Fei have not gotten rid of the human weaknesses that were imprinted on them during their teenage years. *The Bathing Women* illustrates sins carry from birth— their own, those of the last generation, and those of society—as well as the reasons behind the criminal behaviour and poor psychology of the younger demographic. Tie Ning wrote in the book “Kindness and forgiveness without a reason don’t exist; that’s for fairy tales. Only a heart hoping for redemption can produce great tolerance of humankind and of the self” (Tie 142). This has already triggered the audience to think about how to face the conflict between physiological needs and social value needs, how to face the difficult problem of social identity of those so-called wrongful births or wrongful life and the secondary human conflict, and how to improve personality and rebuild morality in the questioning of human nature.

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