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Ding Ling

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Ding Ling

Ding Ling (1904 - 1986), a.k.a. Bing Zhi and Cong Xuan, was one of the best-known contemporary writers and activists of China. She was born in Linli, Hunan Province as Jiang Wei. She lost her father at three, and her mother Jiang Shengmei, a school administrator, brought her up. The mother taught Ding Ling Chinese classics like the *Analects of Confucius* and kindled her interest in reading when she was very young, thereby laying the foundation for her literary future. An activist herself, the mother supported Ding Ling whenever she acted rebelliously in the eyes of the elders of the old school. This nurturing set the tone for Ding Ling's future life.

In 1918, Ding Ling went from elementary to middle school. After a few transfers, she came to the Shanghai Pingmin School for Women in 1922. That year, she rejected an arranged marriage by her uncle and left the school without getting her diploma. She went to study Chinese at Shanghai University. In 1924, a brief trip to Beijing (Beijing) led to her marriage with her first husband Hu Yepin. Three years later, she published her maiden work *Shafei hushi de riji* (*Miss Sophie's Diary*), which instantly became a hit for its unconventional theme of a woman's love affair and sexual innuendos. A year after Hu's execution in 1931 for his communist activism, Ding Ling joined the CPC. In 1933, she was put under house arrest in Nanjing with her third husband Feng Da. In 1936, she managed to come to Yan'an, the CPC's headquarter. There she became successively the Chair of the Chinese Literary Association in the Soviet Territories, Associate Director of the Political Department of the Guards Regiment of the Central Committee of CPC, Commander of the Service Regiment in the Northwestern Battleground, Chief Editor of the "Literary Supplement" to the *Liberation Daily*, and Associate Director of the Literary Association of the Shanxi Gansu-Ningxia Border Region. In 1948, Ding Ling published her renowned *Taiyang zhao zai Sangganhe shang* (*The Sun Shines over the Sanggan River*), which won her the Stalin Literary Scholarship in 1951. Soon after 1949, she was appointed to several import posts in the government and its publishing facilities, including the Director of the Office of Literary Affairs of the Publicity Department of CPC, Dean of the Institute of Literature of the Central Committee of CPC, and Chief Editor of *Literature Press* and *The People's Literature*, to name a few.

Her fate soon changed for the worse. In 1957, Mao Zedong instigated the notorious Anti-Rightist Movement as a response to criticism of the CPC, and by the year-end, 300,000 people—including Ding Ling and Zhu Rongji who later became Premier of China from 1998 to 2003—had been given the name "rightists" and sent to labor camps. Labeled as a key member of two "anti-CPC cliques" in 1955 and 1957 successively, Ding Ling was condemned to hard labor, and her works were banned. During the Great Cultural Revolution (1966-76), she was imprisoned for five years, and not until 1978 was her case "redressed." In her solitary confinement, Ding Ling finished over 300 pieces of literary works, which she included in a compilation of her fifty-year's writings under the title of *Wo de shengping yu chuangzuo* (*I Myself Am A Woman: Selected Writings Of Ding Ling*).