This Academic Exercise presents the early fictional works of Chiang Ping-Tsu (蔣冰之), known in her writings as Ding Ling (丁玲). It strives to bring out the major contributions made by this novelist to Chinese modern literature between the 1920s and early 1930s. (After the late 1930s, her literary works took on a communist propagandistic character and her themes began to shift from the social towards the political scene — which is not of interest to this Academic Exercise). What is intended here is to focus more closely upon her earlier works which has displayed her literary talents in poignantly setting out the social mood and thinking prevailing during her time.

For clarity and convenience, I have divided this Academic Exercise into six chapters.

Chapter One outlines the novelist's biography to serve as a background to her writings.

Chapter Two presents the broad social scene in China prevailing during her time, and how they have influenced her writings, in the sense of having itself found expression in her literary works.
Chapter Three deals with the first phase of her writings (1927-1930) that consisted of two main collections of short stories entitled 'In Darkness' (在黑暗中) and 'The Diary of A Suicide' (自殺日記). They have the main theme of expressing poignantly the empty lives of her heroines who have no purposeful aspirations in life apart from their light-hearted pleasure-seeking enjoyments.

Chapter Four deals with the second phase of her writings (1930-1932), consisting mainly of a collection of short stories entitled 'Shanghai In The Spring of 1930' (一九三零年春上海), and the novel entitled 'Wui Hu' (絮语). The theme now shifts from the somewhat isolated lives of her earlier heroines and takes on the broader aspect of their social roles, in a challenging capacity. They deal mainly with the conflict of interests between the heroes and heroines, as one is dedicated towards the revolutionary cause of improving the livelihood of the masses while the other is swayed towards their emotional love relationship. On a broader outlook, they deal with the conflict between serving the revolutionary cause and that of pursuing materialistic well-being and personal comfort for oneself.
Chapter Five covers the third phase of her writings (1932-1933), that deals with the lives of the masses in China, whose representative works include 'Deluge' (水) and 'Flight' (徙). The themes are now shifted completely out of the family context to that of the turbulent and swiftly-changing social scene in China. The focus now is on the mass peasantry and the large pool of city factory workers, dealing with their poverty and hardship, and upon the exploitation of these masses by the rich land-owning class.

Chapter Six attempts at a critical evaluation of the substantive fictional works of Ding Ling, and includes the concluding observations made by this Academic Exercise.