ABSTRACT

Chen Rong ( 谈容 ) is a well-known modern Chinese author in mainland China. However, her name may not be familiar to many readers in non-communist Asian countries, mainly due to the lack of patronage of her novels and to the lack of interest in the study of her literary works.

The main purpose of this academic exercise is to revive interest in her most representative novel *At Middle Age* (《人到中年》) as the starting point for examining her literary writings. It is hoped that with this study Chen Rong will gain her rightful status as a fine modern novelist not only in China's literary world but also in non-communist Asian countries.

*At Middle Age* was written by Chen Rong in 1979; this novel was awarded the best novelette prize for the years 1977-1980 in China. Through the main character Lu Wenting (陆文婷) an ophthalmologist, the author raised the sensitive question of the problems middle-aged intellectuals faced during the late seventies.
During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), intellectuals were given the worst punishment, but immediately after the revolution these same intellectuals became the most important people in China's modernization plan. However, they are not well taken care of: their living, welfare and status were ignored by the government. Hence, some middle-aged intellectuals decided to emigrate to other countries.

One of the themes of *At Middle Age* is to criticize the wives of some leading cadres, who disseminate communist ideas to the people under a cloak of insincerity. Another significant theme is to praise the virtues of people like Lu Wenting. They work to the best of their ability without expecting any reward. In depicting characters such as Lu Wenting and their struggles, the author implies that China will have a bright future after the revolution.

As for her writing skill, she does not adhere to the chronological principle of organisation. Instead, she uses the **montage** style of writing to present her work. The portrayal of the main characters is so lively that it creates a lasting impression on the readers.
From an in-depth study of this novel, we can claim that Chen Rong is a realistic writer; she has no hesitation in criticizing the government and in raising social issues with the readers. The themes and her original writing style, which explore the psychological depth of the characters, affirm her leading status in China's literary world of the post Cultural Revolution period. With Chen Rong's new found status, Chinese readers in Asian countries and other parts of the world will find in her works a source of literary inspiration.

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