



# Wang in Love and Bondage: Three Novellas by Wang Xiaobo

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*The first English translation of work by Wang Xiaobo, one of the most important writers of twentieth-century China.*

Acclaimed as one of the most important writers of twentieth-century China, the late Wang Xiaobo (1952–1997) is known for his frank, often antic treatment of sex and his gift for reveling in human absurdity and provoking laughter from horror. Comprised of three novellas, “The Golden Age,” “East Palace, West Palace,” and “2015,” this book is the first English translation of his work.

“East Palace, West Palace,” one of the first contemporary Chinese fictional works dealing with male homosexuality, is an S/M-oriented love story between a masochistic gay writer and a handsome policeman unaware of his sadistic tendencies. In “The Golden Age,” for which Wang Xiaobo is perhaps best known, the protagonist, Wang Er (literally, Wang number two) is a city student sent to the countryside for rustification during the Cultural Revolution. There he meets a lovely young doctor whom he encourages to live up to her undeserved reputation as “damaged goods.” In “2015,” another Wang Er, after being put into a labor camp for practicing painting without a license, becomes the love object of a sadistic policewoman.

Although the sexual and social roles of Wang Xiaobo’s characters intertwine, sexuality functions not as protest but as an absurd metaphor for state power and the voluntary, even enthusiastic, collaboration of those subject to it. Full of deadpan humor and oddball sex, Wang Xiaobo’s novellas allow us to see, through a subtly shifting kaleidoscope, scenes from the elaborate dance the individual must do with the state in twentieth-century China.

Wang Xiaobo was born in Beijing in 1952. At the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, he was sent to rural Yunnan for “rustification,” but later, in the 1970s, studied economics at Renmin University of China. He received a master’s degree from the University of Pittsburgh in 1988, and, after returning to China, taught at Beijing University and at Renmin. Wang’s published works include four fiction collections and two essay collections.

Hongling Zhang teaches fiction writing at Fontbonne University and has published short stories in both Chinese and English.

Jason Sommer is Professor of English and Poet-in-Residence at Fontbonne University. He has published three collections of poetry, including *The Man Who Sleeps in My Office*.

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