

medicine, a field of established patriotic worth, but her attraction came from a dream of becoming an independent career woman. When asked why she wanted to study medicine, she said nothing about saving the nation. Instead, she asked me, "Do you know how women used to give birth?" After a dramatic pause, she answered her own question. "They had two people to help them, one to hold this hand and one to hold the other. And then she would scream her head off, yelling 'I'm dying. This child is killing me.' I wanted to help women. I thought there had to be a better way." She planned to forgo marriage after completing her training in order to open a women's clinic.

Life at school allowed female students to consider alternatives outside the family. A new Chinese term, "singlehood," described women's desire to resist marriage and lead a single, professional life. This idea aroused strong social criticism. Articles denouncing singlehood claimed that it could lead to same-sex love or insanity, as well as potentially harm the nation's reproductive abilities.²⁴ Yet Amy persisted in her admiration of an exemplary woman named Dr. Ding who, like Kang Aide and Shi Meiyu, had attended the University of Michigan. Dr. Ding returned to China to open a private hospital. When Amy told Shuhua about her dream, Shuhua made fun of Dr. Ding, saying she was an ugly woman with a face covered in pockmarks. She said no one would ever marry her. Amy replied, "It doesn't matter to me. It doesn't matter to her patients."

The Ling family spent two summer vacations, in 1919 and 1920, at Beidaihe, a seaside town in Hebei province originally developed as a beach resort by British railroad engineers in the 1890s. At this cosmopolitan vacation destination, where both foreigners and Chinese gathered, Amy's plans to attend medical school took shape. The Lings stayed in a house owned by one of Ling Fupeng's friends from the Zhili political scene. The two sisters could run out the front door onto the beach, while the adults watched horse races at the neighboring track from a second-floor balcony. Amy recalled the parties her father hosted. He and his guests drank dark German beer from a wooden keg packed in a tub of melting ice on the balcony. The foreigners Amy met the first summer included a young Indian woman from a wealthy family who practiced speaking Chinese with her and an American woman who taught at Qilu Medical College on the campus of the Shandong Christian University in Jinan. Many foreign vacationers knew the American teacher because she ran a small drugstore for them in the summer at Beidaihe. Amy slipped into the store and pretended to look over the items for sale. She glanced nervously at the woman from behind shelves of aspirin, tooth powder, and sunglasses. She bought a bathing cap and ran back out to the beach. On the following day, she worked up the nerve to ask the woman if she indeed taught at Qilu as she had heard. She asked, "Do I have a chance to

enter that college?" The woman asked how much English she knew, explaining that half of the classes were taught in English. Amy shrugged her shoulders, and the woman told her, "Then you have to study English."

When the sisters' Feng cousins, nephews of First Mother, visited Tianjin the following winter, they broached the issue of how Shuhua and Amy would continue their studies in the coming years. A train passed by the house, and Ruolan complained about living so near the station. Feng Xianguang seized the opportunity to tell her that her youngest daughters should attend university in Beijing. He urged them to leave: "Tianjin is not the place for Uncle to live in. What nonsense to have to see those warlords every day. He cannot enjoy such a life. Now they are trying to draw him into their group; it simply does harm to him."²⁵ When Ling Fupeng decided to follow his nephew's advice, the two sisters were thrilled at the thought of returning to Beijing. In this hopeful moment, with which Ling Shuhua ends *Ancient Melodies*, the grit and oppressiveness of Tianjin in her memory finally lifts.

Both Mai [Amy] and I were excited when we heard Father's decision. I remember in the evening she and I went into the garden chasing the two large dogs up and down the artificial rocks for a long time. The garden was lighted by the electric lamps; the young trees, the rocks, the flowerbeds, the Western-fashioned steps and balconies were then covered with white snow; they looked extraordinarily fascinating, which I had never noticed before.²⁶