

Wang anyi's "the destination" essay sample



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Wang Anyi's "The Destination" Essay Sample

This story focuses on the experience of a man, Chen Xin (pronounced "Chen Zin") who is returning to the city of Shanghai after an absence of ten years. He has spent that time in a rural area and has looked forward to being reunited with his family, which consists of his mother, his elder brother and the brother's wife and child, and his younger brother. The family lives together in cramped quarters and the introduction of the middle brother into this space creates something of a crisis.

The story shows the extreme regimentation of life in the crowded city and gives us insights into a carefully controlled culture where housing, education, moving people forcibly from rural to urban areas, the doling out of jobs, are all controlled by the central bureaucracy of the government. This is a rather generous portrait of Chinese Communism (also called "Maoism" in the past). Near the end of the story, Chen Xin stands looking at a fountain that he loved as a child. Once there was a statue of a mother and two children there. It no longer stands there, a subtle allusion to the fact that China has long pursued a policy of zero population growth. Families with more than one child are fined and public art that sends any other message is not allowed.

Wang Anyi, who lives and writes in China, does not pursue the politics of the situation. She just states them as givens and focuses instead on the family dynamics and the difficulties experienced by Chen Xin in "fitting in," both physically into a small space and mentally and emotionally as well. City life is very different from his life in the country and one of the themes of the story, a theme alluded to in the story's title, is that Chen Xin's longing to return to

the city has given him a goal (a "destination" in other words), but he is not satisfied when he reaches it. Something is still missing.

Chen Xin idolizes Shanghai, but he definitely looks at his return to Shanghai as at his final destination. After all this is the place where he spent his childhood. For better or worse, but his heart melts when he remembers his years spent in Shanghai as a child: "By sticking together, they had given one another warmth in hard times." (137) Longing for such warmth brought him back to the city, to "which he struggled to return" (138); his thoughts and dreams were going back to Shanghai all these ten years that were spent in the countryside. "He would make any sacrifice to return"(118).

It doesn't appear that Chen Xin was totally fooled by Shanghai's changing environment. During those long ten years, he did visit Shanghai occasionally and "with every visit he felt the distance between him and Shanghai grow. He had become a stranger, an outsider, whom the Shanghainese looked down upon."(118). Still Chen Xin wanted to return, he knew that certain obstacles would be in his way, but he willingly decided to face them.

The issue, however, was that Chen Xin wasn't ready enough. He wasn't ready to feel at loss, he wasn't ready to feel emptiness; he wasn't ready to miss the "new moon" eyes, and the life in the "countryside" that he couldn't wait to end. 'He had overlooked them all" (140) The feeling of disappointment that filled Chen Xin was too much for him to handle. When I was reading the few last pages describing Chen Xin's walk on the streets of Shanghai, and depression that came over him, I started fearing that this story might end with the accident. However, it didn't. It ends with the hope.

The hope that though Shanghai wasn't his true destination, not everything was lost yet. And " he believed that once he arrived at his true destination, he would have no doubts, troubles, or sense of rootlessness." (140)