

# *Okay, Whatever: Intellectuals, Sex, and Time in Wang Xiaobo's The Golden Years*

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## *Abstract*

Wang Xiaobo's fiction has amazed and impressed critics, who find in it a powerful if sometimes bizarre model of the intellectual under state power. This kind of intellectual is high-lighted in Wang's award-winning novel *The Golden Years*, where the ubiquitous Wang Er is living as an educated youth who like many others has been sent down to the countryside. Central to his character is an unemotional emphasis on sexual pleasure that through sensitive appreciation, slight melancholy, and a sense of fatefulness differentiates itself from the more cynical and alienated hedonism common in fiction that overtly criticizes capitalist consumerism. Also part of this stance is a rejection of ordinary ways of understanding history, and a focus on time as experienced subjectively and through reflective memory. Wang Er emerges neither as an example of collective socialist identity, nor as a contemporary capitalist subject formed through a psychologized, angst-laden personality. Overall, Wang Xiaobo's writing avoids revolutionary passion while disregarding market enthusiasm, in the process gently mocking revolutionary strategies of self-identity such as confession and personal accounting and putting in their place a covertly philosophical and aesthetic approach to life.

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