

Copyright

by

Xiaoping Wang

2010

**The Dissertation Committee for Xiaoping Wang Certifies that this is the
approved version of the following dissertation:**

**Contending for the Chinese Modern: The Writing of Fiction in the
Great Transformative Epoch of Modern China, 1937-1949**

Committee:

Sung-Sheng Yvonne Chang, Supervisor

Huaiyin Li

Lynn Wilkinson

Martha Selby

Xudong Zhang

**Contending for the Chinese Modern: The Writing of Fiction in the
Great Transformative Epoch of Modern China, 1937-1949**

by

Xiaoping Wang, B.A.; M.Phil.

Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
The University of Texas at Austin
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Texas at Austin

May, 2010

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents in China.

Contending for the Chinese Modern: The Writing of Fiction in the Great Transformative Epoch of Modern China, 1937-1949

Publication No. _____

Xiaoping Wang, Ph.D

The University of Texas at Austin, 2010

Supervisor: Sung-sheng Yvonne Chang

This dissertation studies the writing of fiction in modern China from 1937 to 1949 in the three politically-divided areas: the Nationalist-controlled area, the Communist-dominated region, and the Japanese-occupied districts (before 1945), under the framework of “contested modernities” (the capitalist, the colonialist, and the socialist). Works of fiction here are explored as fundamentally cultural responses to the social, political, and historical experience. Therefore, it appreciates the dialectics of the content-form of these works as expressions, manifestations, and articulations of the contending modernities that competed against each other during that era. Methodologically, this project combines the application of the theory of “field of cultural production” promoted by Pierre Bourdieu, with the approach of historical/political hermeneutics as advocated by Fredric Jameson.

The three areas set the stage for cultural productions of differing ideological tendencies. In this context, fiction is a testing ground for various versions and visions of “new cultures” of Chinese modernities. Here, we treat “1940s China” as a social-cultural space and “fiction” as a literary and intellectual institution in which various visions of “new cultures” expressed themselves. “Style” or “form” then becomes a socially symbolic, political action in which writers’ search for social and symbolic certainty was incarnated.

Part I, “Negotiating with the Nightmarish Modern,” explores writers from the Japanese-occupied areas. The first chapter studies the relationship between the experience of exile and Xiao Hong’s war-time diasporic literature. The second chapter explores the middle-brow boudoir literature from Shanghai. In particular, it studies the works by Zhang Ailing.

Part II, “Rethinking the Disjointed Modern,” investigates the Nationalist-controlled regions. The so-called “neo-romanticist” writers Wumingshi and Xu Xu, as well as the famed writer of the “July School” Lu Ling, are its objects of study.

The third part, “Contending for a New Modern,” takes as its object of research writings from the Communist-controlled area. It looks into the “peasant writer” Zhao Shuli’s stories and the works by the May-Fourth-writer-turned-Communist-intellectual, Ding Ling.

The study not only substantiates the argument that in modern China, the search for a new subjectivity was undertaken through conquering the identity crisis of the “new man” and “new woman,” but also testifies to the fact that this “control of the form” was simultaneously a symbolic action that articulated the anxiety of the intellectuals about becoming a new, modern Chinese. Put in other way, this search for a new identity is premised upon the establishment of a new subjectivity, which was an integral part of the project of building various “new cultures.” Through a practice of political hermeneutics of fictional texts and social-historical subtexts, this dissertation shows that social modernity and literary modernity intertwined and interacted with each other in the development of modern Chinese literature.

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|-----|
| Introduction..... | 1 |
| Part One Negotiating with the Nightmarish Modern..... | 27 |
| Chapter One A Homeless Soul and a Dispossessed Nostalgia Exiled Experience and Xiao Hong's War-time Diasporic Literature..... | 43 |
| Chapter Two Matrimonial Anxiety in a Besieged City: Identity Complex in Zhang Ailing's "Boudoir" Stories..... | 95 |
| Part Two Rethinking the Disjointed Modern..... | 143 |
| Chapter Three Alienated Minds Dreaming for Integration Constrained Cosmopolitanism in Wumingshi and Xu Xu's "Modern Literati Novel"..... | 158 |
| Chapter Four "Subjectivity" and Class Consciousness Intellectual's Predicament and Lu Ling's Neo-Leftist Stories..... | 214 |
| Part Three Contending for a New Modern..... | 260 |
| Chapter Five "National Form" and "Problem Stories" Rural Society in Transition and Zhao Shuli's "Peasant Stories"..... | 275 |
| Chapter Six Feminine Woman, Social Critic, and Cultural Worker Identity (Trans-) Formation and Ding Ling's "Stories of New Woman"..... | 326 |
| Conclusion..... | 384 |
| References..... | 396 |
| Vita..... | 403 |

Introduction

In China's modern era, especially in the 1940s, various political and cultural forces vied with and competed against each other for hegemony. In particular, we witness that various political forces advocated their versions of "new cultures" for the Chinese people: The Nationalist Party (KMT) held neo-traditionalist ethics, promoted "nationalist literature" (*Guofang wenxue*) and a "New Life movement,"¹ the Japanese occupants propagated a "new," "sanitized," "healthy" culture that was allegedly immune of decadent Western Euro-American cultural influence; the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) also advanced a "new democratic culture." Most of modern Chinese intellectuals joined into these ideologically-diversified ranks to pursue their ideals and dreams. Indeed, ever since the late Qing, and especially after the May Fourth era, modern Chinese intellectuals were consistently fighting for a new society that would be more democratized in terms of political arrangements, more equal in regard to class hierarchy, a society that would enjoy more freedom in the sense of owning national independence and more social and individual liberty. This competition for the "Chinese modern" in the cultural realm was simultaneously a process of contending for differing roads into the modernity, or "modernities;" to vie with one another for the hegemony and the right of claiming for the nation's future.

Under these circumstances, this era witnessed diversified writings of fiction, which were the records of the dynamic historical experience, and the crystallizations, articulations,

¹ The goal of the movement allegedly is to militarize the life of the people of the entire nation. The "new life style" placed emphasis on hygienic practices, promptness, truthfulness, and courtesy. It promoted four traditional values: politeness, righteousness, integrity, and self-respect. The movement was suddenly introduced but quickly ended.

projections, and promotions of the writers' visions of different "new cultures" for China as a new, modern nation. This dissertation studies the writing of fiction in the three politically-divided areas (which also happened to become three distinguished fields of cultural production) during this period: the Nationalist-controlled area, the Communist-dominated region, and the Japanese-occupied districts (before 1945).

This introduction includes four sections. In the very beginning, I explain why I choose Chinese fiction in the 1940s as the project of my dissertation; secondly, I will introduce the methodology that I adopt for my study; then, I will make a brief survey of the existing scholarship and lay out my own vision of the literature of this period, and briefly introduce the content of each chapter; this is to be followed with a section discussing a thematic concern that ties in these chapters and the three parts together: the problematic of the "woman problem," as shown in the characters of the stories and the writers themselves. The various ways to negotiate the "woman problem" is symptomatic of the differing ways to approach the "Chinese modern" and to solve the historical dilemma (in terms of social contradictions and international conflicts) of modern China.

Fiction Writing in the Great Transformative Epoch of 1940s China

The 1940s (1937-1949) entered as the third decade of the construction and development of Chinese "new culture" since the May Fourth movement.² It was a culturally

² The May Fourth Movement was an anti-imperialist, cultural, and political movement. It grew out of the student demonstrations that took place in Beijing on May 4, 1919, which protested the Chinese government's attitude towards the Treaty of Versailles, especially the items regarding the Shandong Problem. The demonstrations marked the upsurge of modern China's anti-imperialistic, patriotic nationalism. The term "May Fourth Movement," however, often refers to a broader period around 1915-1921, which is also called "New Culture Movement." For reference, see Chow Tse-Tsung, *The May*

significant, transformative epoch. If we say the first decade (1919-1927) was featured by a radical, iconoclastic anti-traditionalism and a volcanic burst of individual energy, the second decade (1927-1937) was characterized with a fast-paced development of modern modes of social organization, or the “rationalization” process in the Weberian sense, and a robust conservatism in cultural and ideological realms (with its fierce fights with the antagonistic, radical leftist thoughts), alongside the looming threat of Japanese full-scale invasion; then in this decade, all these historical experiences finally found channels to work their ways out to realize their potential tendencies, and all the possibilities and limits of modern Chinese culture and society converged to form fields of ideology and discourse which were relentlessly polarized. Insofar as the May Fourth movement is generally regarded as a new starting point after the Opium War (1839-1842) for the modern Chinese to study the West and reform society in order to rejuvenate the nation, the following 1930s an important era of developing social rationality for the “nation-state building,” then this period can be seen as a culminating stage of modern China’s one-hundred-year “pursuit of modernity.”

My designation of this period as a “great transformative period” is meant to avoid any teleological lineality implied in the appellation of “transitional period,” which is commonly used to describe the era. The outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War ended the Nationalist government’s state-building agenda, and exacerbated the domestic economic situation. Yet also because of the War, antagonistic political forces united together to resist the invaders.

Fourth Movement: Intellectual Revolution in Modern China (Cambridge/Mass.: Harvard University, 1960); Vera Schwartz, *The Chinese Enlightenment: Intellectuals and the Legacy of the May Fourth Movement of 1919* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

The long enfeebled “national morale” had been strengthened once again, and various calls for “Chinese modernity” or “resurgence of Chinese essence” had also emerged. The era was “transformative” is also shown in the fact that all the three areas that I am studying exhibited distinct cultural landscapes and politics.

The significance of this period can be briefly explained by the tension between the agenda of the “New Culture movement” with its intrinsic paradox and the intensified social-political conflicts of this particular historical conjuncture. As said, Chinese intellectuals had long been engaged with various projects to rejuvenate the Chinese nation and its culture. From around 1915 to the 1920s, they launched a New Culture Movement. Iconoclasm and radical anti-traditionalism that vehemently attacked neo-Confucian values, superstitions, and classical Chinese language featured its dynamic momentum.

But the objective of the New Culture is not merely deconstructive; rather, in its deconstructive impulse and passion it aimed for a constructive project, in its negative critique it harbored a positive agenda. Or, as Xudong Zhang aptly points out, the goal of the Chinese “New Culture” is two-fold: “it is an intellectual effort at disengaging the pre-existing structure or system of meaning,” but it is also “a holistic reorientation aimed at embracing a new reality outside the tradition that is perceived to be physically as well as morally corrupted;” in other words, this effort is simultaneously “a systematic and persistent effort to search for a new structure of meaning, a new order in the social, moral, and symbolic spheres

that protects a newly founded socially-based individuality.”³ For this objective, many intellectuals promoted wholesale westernization: to invite “Mr. Democracy” and “Mr. Science” to China to eliminate the backwardness of the Chinese nation; and to attack the traditional family system so as to promote gender equality and freedom in marriage and propel individual emancipation. Put in other way, they realized that modernization not only requires importation of techniques, but also entails changes in the way people think.

The 1930s saw a massive and systematic effort to ground modern institutions in the Chinese society. New Culture intellectuals strived to build a new symbolic order in an environment that saw a dearth of Chinese modernity. “National construction” provided the objective condition for a limited rationalization within the cultural sphere and among the intellectuals themselves. But not only was this process of social and cultural rationalization impeded by intense domestic class conflicts and residual – yet strong – traditional forces and customs, as scholars have observed, the imminent Japanese invasion also apparently displaced the priority of the New Culture Enlightenment project. In this sense, the Sino-Japanese War became a crucial moment or “the breaking point where the crisis of the New Culture and the crisis of the 1930s converged.”⁴ It marked a new turning point – the beginning of the crucial 1940s – in the history of modern China.

In the mean time, we also note that after 10 years of “state-building,” Chinese modernity entered a new stage in the 1940s, which partially fulfilled the conditions demanded

³ Zhang Xudong, “The Politics of Aestheticization: Zhuo Zuoren and the Crisis of Chinese New Culture (1927-1937),” Ph.D. dissertation, Duke Univ. 1995, 17-18.

⁴ Ibid, 216.

to substantiate, if not to complete, the ideal of the New Culture, such as the social experience of industrialization, a more or less developed middle class and a glamorous commercial culture, and a developing, if not matured, political-legal system. Not only this, the decade also saw ways to put to test the viability of the multiple forms of institutions that contained those alternative, radical cultural visions promoted by the intellectuals since the May Fourth period. To be sure, the Japanese imperialists in the occupied area also promoted their “new culture” and undertook “cultural constructions,” such as instilling knowledge of imperial Japan (including the incorporation of Japanese language education into the school curriculum of the colonial areas), implementing the colonial cultural agenda of idealization of “good wives, wise mothers” (*xianqi liangmu*), and cultivating loyalty to Japan. In this way, they advertized their idea of “overcoming modernity” which allegedly was to overcome the Euro-American imperialist road to modernity. This is generally regarded as a form of “colonial modernity.” But what I mean by the “radical cultural visions promoted by the intellectuals” is referring to a mighty momentum of a more radical Enlightenment and an (alternative) modernity which professed itself as a “new democratic culture,” or a “national, scientific, and mass culture,”⁵ that allegedly not only inherits but also transcends (therefore, “sublates”) the bourgeois New Culture.

In short, if we say that in modern China, many modes of modernities had vied for supremacy to claim their legitimacy for the nation’s future, they were vividly displayed in the

⁵ See Mao Zedong, “Xinminzhu zhuyi de zhengzhi yu xinminzhu zhuyi de wenhua” (New Democratic Politics and New Democratic Culture), later known on “Xinminzhu zhuyi lun” (On New Democracy), *Zhongguo wenhua*, 1:1, 1940.

cultural politics of the 1940s, as this was a time of culminated social crisis and political polarization. It is in terms of these diversified cultures that the fictional works of the era, which crystallized profound historical experiences, are worthy of deeper exploration.

Methodology: Field of Cultural Production and Political Hermeneutics

The three politically-divided areas set the stage for the cultural institutions of differing social and ideological tendencies, which constituted diversified fields of cultural production. They all had their own internal mechanisms and laws of operation. In this tumultuous epoch, many writers' works provided a relieving analgesic to mediate the reality as well as to negotiate with, rethink, or try to solve the modern dilemma. Because their production was intimately associated with and conditioned by their positions in the ideological space of the era, the existing social contradictions and cultural politics provide a frame of reference in which their appropriation and development of cultural and symbolic capital can be examined both formally and critically. In particular, fiction in this context is a testing ground for various versions and visions of "new cultures" of Chinese modernities. It is the symbolic construction of the historical experience of modern Chinese intellectuals. Their works were thus a unique crystallization of the complex social and cultural relations through which the ideas of various "new cultures" imagined, differentiated, and transformed themselves. As their writings were intertwined with social dynamism and cultural politics, here we treat "1940s China" as a social-cultural space, and "fiction" as a literary and intellectual institution in which various visions of "new cultures" expressed themselves. "Style," or "form," then

becomes a socially symbolic, political action in which writers' search for social and symbolic certainty was incarnated and sedimented.

The existence of the three tremendously different cultural fields testifies to the immensely rich and complicated nature of Chinese modern era. It is with respect to the contradictory conditions and contending voices in the tortuous process of the legitimation of the "Chinese modern" – including the formation of new modes of cultural production and institutional restructurations – that Pierre Bourdieu's theory of field of cultural production provides us with a very useful model to study literature in this period. Because Bourdieu's approach focuses on the contextual elements that contribute to the configuration of the literary field and the formation of writer's habitus, it also helps to explain some aesthetic features of literary works.

Yet, as basically a sociological model, Bourdieu's theory is strong in describing a roughly constant, fixed structure (a structure at least not experiencing radical changes for a period of time), yet it falls short of accounting for a society that goes through a meandering, fast-paced, and fundamental re-structuration process like the case of modern China. Besides this (and also partially due to this), it cannot fully explicate and explain the aesthetic characteristics of literary texts. Therefore, this sociological method should be combined with other perspectives to be a more useful model in studying modern Chinese literature.⁶ In my view, political hermeneutics offers such a much needed tool.

⁶ In the very beginning, I wanted to take the works of Wumingshi and Xu Xu as the subject of my dissertation, but my supervisor suggested that the two writers are merely "middle brow" writers and encouraged me to apply Bourdieu's theory of field of cultural production to study the literary phenomena

Political hermeneutics is a way of historicizing historical experiences and phenomena. The latter, as raw materials, shaped and restructured the formal codes of presentation. In this way, the real, or History, becomes the “subtext,” as each text is a rewriting or restructuration of pre-existing historical material. When the real is drawn into its own formal structures, the texts, accordingly, “carry the real within themselves as their own intrinsic subtexts” to become a symbolic action that incorporates the “world” within it as the content.⁷ In particular, the presence of history in a particular text shows itself as a particular form of contradiction. Or, social contradictions express themselves in the texts as irruptions and disruptions. Because formal architectonics is now seen as a result of the sedimentation of social and historical experiences, the form then becomes the content.

Consequently, the most promising prospectus this understanding brings into literary studies is displayed at the textual level: by inexorably historicizing, a practice of political hermeneutics can explain the most idiosyncratic aesthetic details of a text. To historicize is also not to sacrifice of exploring aesthetic qualities of texts, but we need to note that only by thoroughly historicizing can we thoroughly understand aesthetic properties of artistic works. Through a hermeneutical drill, the social-political, the historical, and the aesthetically textual can finally illuminate each other. Furthermore, with this method “the empirical exploration of

at the time. In particular, she pointed out that the three politically-divided areas became three distinct “cultural fields.” When I look into the cultural production in the three fields, I find that they essentially illustrated three modes of modernity. To explain the literary texts in the three fields as incarnation or expression of these “modernities,” then, the approach of political hermeneutics, which can be read as a method of explication and interpretation of historical experience, is apparently more useful than Bourdieu’s theory of cultural field, the latter of which is sociological in nature.

⁷ Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form* (Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1974), 335.

the representation of history” would be creatively replaced by “a critical probing of the historicity of the relationship between history and representation.”⁸

Because in this perspective form is “content working itself out in the realm of the superstructure,” and the evolution of forms crystallizes “the emergence of new types of content as they force their way to the surface,” there is now a dialectical logic or standard to evaluate the artistic plenitude of an artistic work, which is best conveyed by Jameson in his apt argument,

The adequation of content to form there realized, or not realized, or realized according to determinate proportions, is in the long run one of the most precious indices to its realization in the historical moment itself, and indeed form is itself but the working out of content in the realm of the superstructure...The insufficiency of a work of art is not at all to be seen as the result of individual clumsiness, Hegel tells us in the Aesthetics, “rather, the insufficiency of the form derives from the insufficiency of the content.”⁹

The “content” that is mentioned here is historical in nature, which, in the case of modern China, can be roughly identified as the historical experience in the pursuit for modernity.

The most important procedure in this practice of political hermeneutics is to explore those ideological reifications as well as utopian yearnings contained in the semantic textures of texts, because the function and imprints of history are concealed in or refracted as literary imaginations. In short, the key in undertaking this dialectic of form and content is to undertake an ideological analysis. In particular, in studying modern China, where heterogeneous elements ferociously competed against each other, we need to inquire why and how different class consciousness (which was refracted as the habitus and in the writing

⁸ Ibid., 448.

⁹ Ibid., 329.

practices of various writers) conditioned and over-determined the capability of writers to recognize the social-political situation/contradiction, leaving gaps and fissures in their works, which, consequently, failed to become aesthetically coherent, thematically consistent, and structurally integrated. This is the concrete method that I take in my research throughout this dissertation.

Outline of the Dissertation and a Discussion of the Existent Scholarship

My dissertation is divided into three parts, which roughly correspond to the three areas of cultural production. Part I, “Negotiating with the Nightmarish Modern,” explores writers from the Japanese-occupied areas. The first chapter studies the Manchurian female writer Xiao Hong’s war-time diasporic literature in the context of her exiled experience. From the writer’s own short, tragic life, we witness a homeless soul and a dispossessed nostalgia, which is symbolic of the general condition of the Chinese (liberal) intellectuals trapped in a semi-colonial, semi-traditional situation. Yet, unlike her and other women writers from Manchuria who endorsed the gender ideal of the New Culture movement and opposed the Japanese colonizers’ attack of the idea of “New Women”, in the Japanese-occupied Shanghai, this critique, curiously, found sympathetic echoes by women writers there. The second chapter then studies the middle-brow “boudoir literature” from the metropolitan city, using Zhang Ailing as a case study, because the writer herself holds cynical skepticism of the “new woman” ideal. In analyzing the paramount thematic concerns of her stories, which shows a predominant matrimonial anxiety in a besieged city, I delve into the identity complex in her ostensible apolitical stories. In general, these two women writers, Xiao Hong and Zhang

Ailing, negotiated with the nightmarish (semi-colonial, semi-traditional) modern to struggle for a humble life of dubious personal happiness amid war-time turmoil, yet both failed to various degrees.

In Part II “Rethinking the Disjointed Modern,” I will investigate the Nationalist-controlled areas. The third chapter works on Wumingshi and Xu Xu’s “modern literati novels,” which are often read by critics against the framework of “romanticism” or “modernism.” I suggest that fundamentally, they display the alienated minds of some intellectuals desperate with China’s social-political situation. Their idealistic cosmopolitanism was greatly constrained by the social-historical circumstance, and so appears as merely fantastic reveries. If these two writers converted from being leftists to liberalists, then Lu Ling, a young writer from the July school led by Hu Feng, apparently kept his leftist passion unabated. The fourth chapter then studies Lu Ling’s “neo-leftist stories” by reading them against the intellectual’s spiritual predicament, and through an exploration of the relationship between “subjectivity” and class consciousness. In general, Wumingshi, Xu Xu, and Lu Ling all engage in a painful rethinking of the disjointed modern in the Nationalist-controlled areas to figure out a way out of the historical predicament and social contradiction of a semi-colonial, semi-traditional society, yet the literary characters and the writers themselves all failed to attain a new reason through a genuine intellectual growth. Thus while Wumingshi in his *Book without a Name* seemingly presents a “Bildungsroman” of a leftist-turned-liberalist youth, the novel is revealed to be a pseudo- or reverse-Bildungsroman; and while Lu Ling in his *Children of the Rich* also offers another simulacrum

of Bildungsroman of a leftist intellectual, the novel turns out to be merely an anti-Bildungsroman, or an aborted one.

The psychological conflicts of modern Chinese intellectuals were apparently solved by writers from the CCP-controlled areas. In close scrutiny, however, we find that there are still tensions there waiting to be straightened out. The third part, “Contending for a New Modern,” then takes as its object of study writings from the Communist-controlled area. Chapter 5 looks into Zhao Shuli’s “peasant stories” and a different version of “new culture” that he had envisioned. If Zhao aimed to repudiate the May Fourth New Culture tradition, how did the veteran writers evolving from the camp of that tradition behave in this historically new area? The sixth chapter explores this issue. I argue that these veteran writers’ arduous intellectual transformation and reform was a result of both political pressures (and their ensuing self-mortification and censorship) and the reshuffled cultural field with a new structure and paradigm. Here I use the famed writer Ding Ling as a case study. While her identity (trans-) formation – shown in the change of the subject and style of her fictional writings (mostly on “new woman”) – seemingly solved the predicament of modern Chinese intellectuals’ political anxiety and existential agony, it still left many fissures and gaps there to be emended, which can be regarded as simultaneously the dilemma of the “new democratic culture”¹⁰ that the writer endorsed and promoted.

¹⁰ The CCP, under the leadership of Mao, developed the Marxist-Leninist thesis of proletariat revolution, and established the theory of new-democratic revolution – a democratic revolution against imperialism, feudalism and bureaucrat-capitalism waged by the masses of the people, on the basis of the worker-peasant alliance, and under the leadership of the proletariat with the party as the vanguard. For this purpose, the party proclaimed to create a “new democratic culture,” which is “a national, scientific, and mass culture.” For more details, see the introduction of the part three of this dissertation.

The choice of the writers and the arrangement of the framework are based on the following considerations. Scholars studying modern Chinese literature so far have mainly focused on the period from the May Fourth movement in the 1910s and early 1920s to the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese war in 1937. There is no systematic study on the transformation of Chinese literature during the most turbulent years of the 1940s, although there are several individual projects working on either individual writers or specific regions. As for individual writers, there are some book-length studies:

Howard Goldblatt's 1976 biographical study of Xiao Hong integrates the writer's life experience with her literary creation, although this was done in a less integrated way.¹¹ The book is divided into seven chapters. The first six chapters follows her trajectories of exile, and the title of each chapter is mostly geographical name; only the final chapter is clearly devoted to "Xiao Hong and Her Craft." This biographical framework, as well as its analytical tool which is mainly the approach of new criticism, prevents the book from analyzing fruitfully the writer's literary achievement.

For Eileen Chang, there are many individual papers and several master-degree theses and doctoral dissertations in the English world.¹² As a fast-developing industry, studies on

¹¹ Howard Goldblatt, *Hsiao Hong* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1976).

¹² For instance, "Transgressing boundaries: Hybridity in Zhang Ailing's writing and its multidimensional interpretations in contemporary China," by Wang Yuan, M.A., McGill University (Canada), 2007; "The gendering of eroticism: Modern subject and narrative of Yu Dafu and Zhang Ailing," by Jaeyeon Ahn, Ph.D., Yonsei University (Republic of Korea), 2006; "Re-imagining the site of the feminine: A rediscovery of Zhang Ailing's fictional works," by George A. Da Roza, Ph.D., University of Southern California, 2003; "Love demythologized: The significance and impact of Zhang Ailing's (1921-1995) works," by Chen Ya-shu, Ph.D., The University of Wisconsin - Madison, 1998; "The life and works of Zhang Ailing: A critical study," by Carole Hang Fung Hoyan, Ph.D., The University of British Columbia (Canada), 1997; "Reading Eileen Chang's early fiction: Art and a female sense of self," by Karen Sawyer Kingsbury, Ph.D., Columbia University, 1995.

this writer show a gigantic momentum. But most of the research more or less fall short of explicating the cultural-political import of her stories – the matrimonial anxiety as a symptom of an identity complex – thus the aesthetic features of her aesthetics of “triviality.”

Studies on the works by Wumingshi and Xu Xu are not so developed, and I find a recent (completed in 2009) dissertation by a Yale graduate Fredric Hermann Green, which is entitled “A Chinese Romantic’s Journey through Time and Space: Cosmopolitanism, Nationalism and Nostalgia in the Work of Xu Xu (1908-1980).” The author subscribes to the view of the critics from mainland China which sees the two writers as neo-romantic writers. In contrast to this framework, I will suggest that the two writers’ works are a form of “modern literati novel,” or a genre of “fiction of conception.”

For Lu Ling, there is a book-length study, *The Problematic of Self in Modern Chinese Literature: Hu Feng and Lu Ling*, by Kirk Denton.¹³ I will conduct a dialogue with him in my dissertation and suggest that Lu Ling’s *Children of the Rich* is not a Bildungsroman as he contends, but an anti-Bildungsroman.

As for Zhao Shuli, there are two dissertations in recent years that study him.¹⁴ I benefit from their study, yet I will focus on my own interpretation of the writer’s thematic focus of a rural society in transition, and the relationship between his consciousness of writing “problem

¹³ Kirk Denton, *The Problematic of Self in Modern Chinese Literature* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998).

¹⁴ “Artistry and authenticity: Zhao Shuli and his fictional world,” by Josephine Alzbeta Matthews, Ph.D., The Ohio State University, 1991; “From Lu Xun to Zhao Shuli: The politics of recognition in Chinese literary modernity: A genealogy of storytelling,” by Jiang Hui, Ph.D., New York University, 2007.

stories” which catered to the tastes of the peasants but also aimed for a positive education, and the “national form” that Mao envisioned and advocated.

Works studying Ding Ling are also numerous, here I will engage in a dialogue with two representative works: Yi-tsi Mei Feuerwerker’s study of the relation between ideology and narrative in Ding Ling’s works, and Tani Barlow’s analysis of the tension between the writer’s presentation of historical experience and her political commitment.¹⁵ The major difference between the two scholars and me lies in the theoretical perspective: Departing from the postcolonial discourses that they subscribe to, which I think yield to both insights and blind spots in understanding modern Chinese history, by a historical/political hermeneutics I try to find the continuity as well as the ruptures in the writer’s identity transformation, as well as its relationship with the shifting institutions of literature.

As for regional studies, there are these contributions: Edward Gunn’s *Unwelcome Muse: Chinese Literature in Shanghai and Peking, 1937-1945* (Gunn, 1980), Norman Smith’s *Resisting Manchukuo: Chinese Women Writers and the Japanese Occupation* (Smith, 2007), Nicole Huang’s *Women, War, Domesticity, Shanghai Literature and Popular Culture of the 1940s* (Huang, 2005), Poshek Fu’s *Passivity, Resistance, and Collaboration: Intellectual Choices in Occupied Shanghai, 1937-1945* (Fu, 1993). Curiously, all of them are studies on the literature/culture in the occupied areas. These studies offer me helpful information on the cultural-historical background of the areas.

¹⁵ Yi-tsi Mei Feuerwerker, *Ding Ling’s Fiction: Ideology and Narrative in Modern Chinese Literature* (Cambridge, Mass, and London: Harvard University Press, 1982); Tani Barlow, “Introduction,” in Tani E. Barlow., and Gary J. Bjorge. ed., *I Myself am a Woman: Selected Writings of Ding Ling* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989).

I choose these specific writers as the objects of my study not merely because they are all important and distinguished writers – certainly some other writers are also, but because in either negotiating the modern, rethinking the disjointed modern, or contending for a new modern, their works “typically” represent the historical experience of the areas that they came from and show differing political nature and cultural significance of the diversified societies, through which we can have a better understanding of the cultures that were promoted and/or dominant there. The following section is a brief introduction of one key aspect of this social-historical experience as a prelude or preparation for us to enter into the detailed discussions of the complex historicity.

What is the “Chinese Modern”: “New Youth” and “New Woman”

What is the “Chinese Modern”? How does one become a modern Chinese? A “new culture” is first and foremost shown in the appearance of a “new citizen” (*xinmin*) and “new people” (*xinren*), which in the May Fourth era was referred to mainly as the birth of a “new youth” (*xinqingnian*), whose mentality and behavioral mannerism was regarded as the essential incarnation of this new, modern culture. Interestingly, in modern Chinese literature we witness that woman is more often than not better than man in playing such a role of assuming the personae of the various, competing claims of “new cultures.” For instance, in the May Fourth era, Henrik Ibsen’s Nora became an incarnation of the “new youth,” as she symbolized individual emancipation. As Christina Gilmartin aptly points out, “May Fourth cultural revolutionaries...turned the *funv wenti* [woman question] into a cause célèbre” by

importing new concepts, mainly Western Enlightenment ideas, into the national horizon for the vision of a new nation and new people.¹⁶

In this way, the issue of the “new woman” was correlated closely with the project of Chinese modernity. This is because the liberation of Chinese women, who were seen as being subjected to thousands of years of traditional oppression, was regarded as directly related to the ideal of emancipation and equality for the oppressed Chinese people and the future of China as a new nation-state, as against the patriarchal society, the “feudal” regime, and the imperial forces. Indeed, it is widely noted that “the so-called ‘woman question’ has been a focal point in the construction of modernity and of the Chinese nation-state since the late nineteenth century;” and it was “indicative of the widespread, and often violent, social and political transformation that took place.”¹⁷

Accordingly, as the representation of the “women problem” was a medium through which literary modernity and social modernity intertwined and interacted with each other, it becomes the best medium to observe the various claims to “new cultures” under writers’ pens. In the following, I will take a brief review of the differing presentations, or better, the differing historical experiences as shown in the works of fiction in the three politically-divided areas.

Scholars studying the occupied areas have long noticed the phenomenon that “the officially sanctioned ideal of the self-sacrificing, obedient woman” was used by the

¹⁶ Christina Gilmartin, *Engendering the Chinese Revolution: Radical Women, Communist Politics and Mass Movements in the 1920s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 22.

¹⁷ Nicole Huang, *Women, War, Domesticity: Shanghai Literature and Popular Culture of the 1940s* (Leiden; Boston: Brill: Academic Pub, 2005), 41.

colonizers to direct “women’s energies towards...strengthening the economy, and contributing to the war effort.”¹⁸ Especially after the outbreak of the Pacific War, Prasenjit Duara notes that the “ideal was not to confine women to the home, but to contain and deploy them in the public in a way that would serve state and regime interests.”¹⁹ In short, “in society, she is productive, in the home, she is a smart housewife.” Yet this again was seen as typifying the best of “Asian tradition.”²⁰ Female writers in the occupied Manchuria resisted this Japan-centric, patriarchal propaganda by creating works that insist on the validity of the individualist New Woman ideal.²¹

What I study in this dissertation is Xiao Hong, the exiled female writer from Manchuria who publicly disclaimed the legitimacy of the puppet regime and lived in diaspora. The woman characters in her stories are mostly peasant woman, who appear ignorant and squalid; they are misfortunate and mistreated, yet simultaneously tenacious and well-meaning. Having been subjected to the abuse of their husbands as well as the exploitation of the class structure, they drag on a dark, miserable life, apparently falling short of the New Culture enlightenment. In addition, the writer’s own tragic experience, a result of the ruthless conditions of the society but also a side effect of her own numerous miscalculated choices,

¹⁸ Ibid., 31.

¹⁹ Prasenjit Duara, *Sovereignty and Authenticity: Manchukuo and the East Asian Modern* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003), 147.

²⁰ Shi Xiuwen, “Zhiyu funv yu jiating funv” (Professional Women and Household Women), *Daban Huawen meiri* (Chinese Osaka Daily) 9, no.7 (1942), 29.

²¹ See Norman Smith, *Resisting Manchukuo: Chinese Women Writers and the Japanese Occupation* (Toronto: UBC press, 2007).

was also symptomatic of the besieged “new women” in particular, and the dilemma of the New Culture agenda in general.

The idea and the image of the “new women” was criticized by the Japanese colonizers “for being lewd, selfish, and self-centered,” and “self-absorbed, profligate,” which incarnated a “drunken-life dream-death” (*zuisheng mengsi*) existence that is “greedy, Westernized, and immoral.” This critique was not endorsed by female writers in Manchuria.²² But in the occupied Shanghai, this critique found sympathetic echoes by women writers there. Zhang Ailing, in particular, holds cynical skepticism on the “new woman” ideal. I find in her apparent “boudoir” stories an identity complex apparently caused by a matrimonial anxiety held by the woman characters. The troubles caused by marriage and love for them show the predicament of these social institutions in a semi-colonial, semi-traditional society, which in general exemplifies that the May Fourth individualism was deeply trapped in a crisis, and implies the impossibility of the “New Woman” project in the circumstance. In general, the woman characters in these two writers’ stories negotiate with the nightmarish (semi-colonial, semi-traditional) modern to drag out an (ig)noble existence.

The KMT’s promotion of conservative neo-Confucian ideology, shown in the New Life Movement that was launched in 1934 and lasted for only a few months, had been paralleled with the propaganda of *Wangdao* in Manchukuo.²³ In terms of the conservative ideology that both regimes resorted to in order to undergird the legitimacy of their rule, some

²² Ibid., 33-34.

²³ Vera Schwartz, *The Chinese Enlightenment: Intellectuals and the Legacy of the May Fourth Movement of 1919* (Berkeley : University of California Press, 1986), 218.

family resemblances are indeed shared by them. Yet we need to take into consideration of their differing social contexts and over-determinations: to a certain extent, the KMT's project aimed to propagate the modern life style and facilitate social rationalization; its failure none other than showed the vulnerability, if not utter impossibility, of this attempt. Their insistence on filial piety, obedience to patriarchs, and stringent self-discipline also invited repulsion from liberal-minded intellectuals.

The two writers that I study in the Nationalist-controlled area did not specifically write about women, yet we still can see woman's experience in their stories. In Wumingshi's works, as a whole, no matter whether the women characters hold the ideal of "new woman" or not (Qu Ying in the writer's *Book without a Name* is a quintessential incarnation of the model of new woman), are a testing ground for male protagonists' "spiritual" adventure. These women's egocentric indulgence in love and fantasy about happy marriage (the dream is also pursued by the heroines in Zhang Ailing's stories, which now apparently comes true) and their disregarding of other social concerns forfeit their youth, happiness, and even life. Female characters in Xu Xu's stories seemingly show more spiritual transcendence, yet they are still largely the projection of the first-person male narrators' fantasy: either as a retired revolutionary, or as contemporary spies working for political mission, or a fairy in a surrealist tale, they are still vehicles for the male protagonist – who is often also simultaneously the narrator – to explore his own existentialist anxiety and agony. On the other hand, these female characters also show some mysterious enchantments that not only apparently bypass the narrator's intellectual understanding, but also transcend the ideal of the

“New Woman” itself. Love, marriage, and gender equality are not their only concern, but their social-political engagement and intellectual pursuit ostensibly surpass the male protagonists. Nevertheless, these elements do not receive further treatment, but are contained by the male-centric narrative.

As for the women in Lu Ling’s *Children of the Rich*, there is another story. Two cardinal female characters essentially compose a parallel, if not a contrast. One is Jin Suheng, a daughter-in-law of the patriarchal household. Reminiscent of many female characters in Zhang Ailing’s stories, she is born in a downfallen family, but she tries her best to fit in, to fight for a comfortable niche in the orderless world. Her sense of morality, or principle of living at the society, is to secure enough property and fortune at any price that the action may cost. Her turpitude, which now and then intermixed with moral conscience, could be understood as a self-legitimation of her struggle aimed at an internal and external self-transformation of a class identity propelled by the social-economic imperative. She succeeds in plundering, through legal procedures, the huge amount of inheritance at last, yet her seemingly fortunate life is destroyed by the Japanese invasion of Nanjing. In this way, her identity (trans-)formation is aborted, or not fully developed. Another “new woman” is Wang Guiying, a May-Fourth type of “new woman” who has romantic dreams of women’s liberation. Being pregnant and abandoned by one of the major male protagonists, she commits infanticide; after that she gradually becomes a movie star. Her passion of desire is typical of the reckless May Fourth individualism, yet is simultaneously irresponsible, amoral, and anarchical.

If “May Fourth renunciation of political autocracy, imperialism, and patriarchy predisposed the women to reject the conservative Confucian ideals of womanhood advocated” both by the Japanese and the Republican governments,²⁴ and if the idealistic “New Woman” image had been debunked to various degrees by the writers such as Wumingshi and Lu Ling, then what could modern women choose to behave? The fiction by Zhao Shuli and Ding Ling in the CCP-controlled area offered some alternatives. In particular, Tani Barlow notes that the “reconstruction of the New Democratic family” linked “the raised status of daughters, daughters-in-law, and wives to national salvation, prosperity, and social reconstruction.”²⁵ In this light, the writers in their works are contending for a new form of modern culture.

Zhao Shuli writes stories about the transition of rural society. Pandering to the tastes of the peasants, the woman subject is not his exclusive concern. Yet in his stories, peasant women do assume a slightly differing persona than Xiao Hong’s characterization. Apparently, they have “stood up” against patriarchal concepts and customs, the backward authority (“feudal” parents and corrupted regime, and sometimes their male-chauvinist husbands), and have engaged in progressive political activities, such as organizing study units to study culture, participating actively in political movement, etc. But there are still some shadows existed there; for instance, their maltreatment in the family by their husbands and

²⁴ Norman Smith, *Resisting Manchukuo*, 140.

²⁵ Tani Barlow, “Introduction,” *I Myself as a Woman*, 16.

mother-in-laws is not fully redressed; their political consciousness is still spontaneous and so they do not have much self-consciousness, or “subjectivity.”

According to Tani Barlow, “no other writer in this century has conveyed better” than Ding Ling “what it felt like to be a modern Chinese woman,” and “her unique significance as a twentieth-century Chinese cultural figure lies in this.”²⁶ She enthusiastically suggests that “Ding Ling’s characterizations (of women in her early stories)...resolve the old May Fourth question of what modern Chinese women would be in the absence of Confucianism.”²⁷ But did they really solve the question? As noted, though it is well acknowledged that in her stories “as a group, these [women] characters accept without question the cardinal tenets of May Fourth feminism, such as the priority of autonomy, alienation from family control, the importance of willed action, sexual experimentation, the centrality of love as an effect of freedom, and so on;” these women still “all share qualities represented as universal and innate, qualities bracketed in the text as the ‘feminine’: repressed eroticism, self-delusion, irrational and sudden mood changes, obstructed will, hyper-romanticism, childish impulsiveness, obscured vision. These traits that, while absolutely feminine, also ... chronically undermine self-respect and autonomy.”²⁸ If the latter description is true, then the writer’s stories about the first-generation Chinese “new woman” did not solve the dilemma in a satisfying way, which is fundamentally a socially-historically over-determined predicament. And I will suggest that from the writer’s later stories – when they are read against her intellectual

²⁶ Ibid., 1.

²⁷ Ibid. 26.

²⁸ Ibid.

trajectory as a feminine woman, social critic, cultural worker, and finally an ambivalent role of the people's critic/party's intellectual – we can get more helpful message about the development of the genealogy of modern Chinese “new woman” and the ultimate (problematic) settlement of the “woman problem.” In particular, as regards her characterizations of the “new, new woman” in the area, there are also two contrastive characters: the woman intellectual in “Zai yiyuan zhong” (In a Hospital), who sticks to the May Fourth individualistic tenets, and Zhenzhen in “Wo zai xiacun de shihou” (When I was in Xia Village), who, holding a strong “subjectivity” against the marriage arrangement by her parents and the pursuit of her erstwhile boyfriend, repudiates the charge of her “feudal-minded” villagers and disregards the mercy of the narrator, but only wants to go to study a new culture somewhere. In short, she is representing a new-styled “new woman;” yet her mentality and behavior defies the female intellectual narrator's understanding.

In the end of this introduction, I wish to explain a little bit about the concrete procedure that I take in conducting my study and writing the dissertation as well as its significance for the structuration of the whole dissertation. The structure of the individual chapter makes my work look like nothing but a traditional way of research: the biographical introduction of the writer is either put before discussion of their works, or is brought out vis-a-vis the latter. But my methodology is much less practicing a traditional biographical study than trying a new one: because the social-historical context (including the writer's own personal experience) in my approach is treated as the subtext (of the fictional texts), the brief discussion of the

trajectory of each writer is meant to bring out his/her class habitus, intellectual positions, and aesthetic tastes, which are refracted in his/her works (to find out how they are “refracted” is the job of the concrete analysis that I work out in the textual analysis with the help of political hermeneutics); moreover, more often than not these habitus, positions, and tastes led to the political and cultural choices, decisions, and the ultimate fortunes of the writers, while the latter have much symbolic significance. In this light, for instance, the individual trajectory of Xiao Hong (which was always an experience of exile in her “lost” homeland), the first writer that we discuss, with her homeless soul and disposed nostalgia, symbolically shows an identity in loss and the premature death of a “New Woman,” thus the difficulty, if not utter impossibility, of realizing the ideal of the “New Culture” agenda. And the various negotiations of the various writers (and the characters in their works) that we discuss in the following chapters, all but aimed to establish a firm individual (and sometimes collective) identity, though they might not be conscious of this effort by themselves. As for the last writer that I study in this dissertation, Ding Ling, her transformation to a certain extent might be seen as a metamorphosis from a “New Women” (Xin nvxing), the ideal of which was the essential of the project of the New Culture, to a “New People” (Xin ren) for the ideal of the New Enlightenment – though we will observe that until this period came to its end, her journey to this new identity had not yet been fully completed.

Part One
Negotiating with the Nightmarish Modern
Writing Fiction of the Japanese-Occupied Area

As it has been observed, “the Sino-Japanese War was an extension and intensification of decades of foreign domination and exploitation and the threat of more of the same.”²⁹ In other words, it only worsened the semi-colonial nature of modern China. While the full-scale Resistance War did not break out until 1937 in the wake of the Marco Polo Bridge Incident,³⁰ some territories of China had been colonized by the Japanese for a long time. Taiwan was separated from China in the year of 1895;³¹ and on September 18th 1931, the Japanese perpetrated the “Mukden Incident”³² and occupied Manchuria, which the Chinese normally refer to as the “Three North-Eastern Provinces.” Before the liberation of these areas, they had been in the hands of the Japanese for fifty years and fourteen years, respectively. But this dissertation will not include Taiwan into its parameter of study, because long-term separation

²⁹ Edward Gunn, *Unwelcome Muse: Chinese Literature in Shanghai and Peking 1937-1945* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 1-2.

³⁰ The incident took place on July 7th, when the Japanese army stationed in a suburb south of Beijing claimed that one of its soldiers went missing in the exercise; and a military confrontation ensued. Although they blamed the Chinese army to start the incident, it is a consensus now that they had manipulated the incident aimed to expand their control to southern China. The KMT, driven by a strong demand within China for a military showdown, declared war on Japan, which unraveled the curtain of the full-scale Sino-Japanese War that lasted until the end of WWII. The incident was the beginning of WWII in the Far East.

³¹ The War took place over Korea. There was a rebellion led by the Tonghaks. Qing court sent troops to help quell the rebellion. According to an earlier agreement with Japan, whenever the Qing government sent troops, so would Japan. The two armies clashed in Korea. The Japanese destroyed all the Qing’s ships. The Qing government was forced to sign the Treaty of Shimonoseki, in which Qing court ceded Taiwan and Liaodong peninsula (just west of Korea) to Japan (the peninsula was forced by France, Germany and Russia to return to China) shortly later. For references, see Marius B. Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002); S.C.M. Paine, *The Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895: Perception, Power, and Primacy* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

³² The Japanese exploded a portion of railroad near Fengtian (also known as Mukden, now named Shenyang), the regional center, and blamed the Chinese for doing so. They attacked the city, and in the next few weeks they occupied all of Manchuria. For reference, see Yoshihisa Tak Matsusaka, *The Making of Japanese Manchuria, 1904-1932* (Boston: Harvard University Asia Center, 2003).

imposed on it a different cultural-political dynamic, and during this period it had much less contact with the motherland than other occupied areas.

The cultural production in most of the occupied areas shared the same pattern of development: initially, the Japanese invasion and occupation brought to an abrupt stop or even a collapse of cultural production; but gradually the literary world revived, and around the late 1930s and early 1940s these areas witnessed a vibrant literary culture. However, after the inception of the Pacific War in 1941, with the intensifying censorship and oppression, such as crackdowns on publication, harassment, threats, and even imprisonment and execution of editors and writers, literary activities again went into a coma. The literary cultures in these occupied areas also had an analogous nature: as popular culture, they ostensibly broke down the boundaries between the high and the low, or the serious and the popular. Meanwhile, an important aspect of this popular, “middle-brow” culture is that it was gendered or feminine, with some distinguished woman writers residing at the center of the literary arena, who composed writings revolving around the topics of love, marriage, sexuality, childbirth, and housekeeping techniques. Family resemblance aside, these areas also had saliently differing, or even antagonistic features, which can only be understood through analysis of the diversified cultural-political strategies of the Japanese occupants and the diverse social-historical dynamics of the local societies. The last common trait is that the Japanese tried their best to reign in the predominant negativity that was expressed by the writings, yet to no avail.

Literature in Manchuria

Though the Japanese intended ultimately to annex the land, after considering international reactions, they established the puppet state of Manchukuo in 1932 (namely “country of the Manchus”),³³ and put the last Emperor of the Qing dynasty Henry Puyi (1908-67) on the throne in 1934. Fundamentally, it was a brutal military regime fully controlled by the Japanese as a frontier of its colonial enterprise.

Just four years after the occupation, a cohort of important writers fled the region and formed an “exiled faction” (*liuwan pai*), including Xiao Hong (1911-1942), who we will study in the first chapter, and her husband Xiao Jun (1907-1988). They disavowed the legitimacy of Manchukuo and wrote of the unremitting bleakness of the peoples living in the area and their unyielding resistance, which instantly attracted the attention of the nation enveloped in a high nationalistic sentiment. The patriotism endowed them with a national fame. They are regarded as the first generation of the area after the occupation. But a brief introduction of the activities of the second-generation writers in the remaining ten years of occupation is warranted.

Ever since the Japanese occupied the land, they adopted the same strategy that they imposed on Taiwan which emphasized the colony’s Japanese identity. As Norman Smith points out, “Japanese-owned media, the film and popular music industries, and official Manchukuo publications mythologized a paternal, inherently hierarchical relationship between Manchukuo and Japan; the emperor Puyi even submitted to an honorific position

³³ The founders of the Manchu Qing dynasty (1644-1912) came from this area. The Qing empire was toppled in the wake of the Revolution of 1911; subsequently the Republic of China was established.

within the Japanese imperial family.”³⁴ But this official policy, just like its cultural propaganda that we will soon discuss, was not heeded by the average Chinese. Instead, as the occupied region controlled by a “military fascist” regime was felt by the Chinese residents like “an Auschwitz state or a concentration-camp state,”³⁵ and “the regime’s racist policies” that “privileged high-ranking Japanese and subordinated all other ethnic groups...underlined Chinese national impotence and exacerbated contempt for Puyi’s fledgling regime.” Consequently, the Manchukuo identity – as the necessary step to divest the citizen’s consciousness of being a Chinese and make them turn towards the Japanese identity – which the colonizers enforced upon “was not embraced by the disaffected public.”³⁶

Across the society, the Japanese launched a propaganda campaign to convert the Chinese. They circulated the slogan “same culture and same race” (*tongwen tongzhong*), which appeared hypocritical considering their racist policy and brutal crimes. The most important political claim was *Wangdao* (the Kingly way), a Confucian concept that has its antagonistic counterpart of *Badao* (hegemonic, high-handed rule). Ironically, only its reverse concept appeared true to the colonized. Nevertheless, the Japanese promoted the “ideal” as an antidote to the “imported” nationalism and republicanism, as well as the KMT’s “Three People’s Principle” and the Communist ideology. For this purpose, the Confucian idea of “returning to tradition” was leveled as a means allegedly against the long-standing warlordism, to make a “golden mean between the fascism and bolshevism” that wrecked

³⁴ Norman Smith, *Resisting Manchukuo: Chinese Women Writers and the Japanese Occupation*, 3

³⁵ Yamamuro Shin’ichi, *Manchuria under Japanese Domination*, trans. Joshua A. Fogel (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 4.

³⁶ Norman Smith, *Resisting Manchukuo*, 4. For the depiction of its racist policy, also see 23.

Asia.³⁷ This political conservatism, which resorted to a traditional Chinese political ideal to bolster the legitimacy of colonization, necessarily extended into the realm of gender relations. Confucian maxims have dictated women's role in internal household matters. And the Japanese made use of the Confucian classic *Li Ji (The Book of Rites)* to support the patriarchal gender claim. The reformulated idea of a "New Woman" under the ideal of *Wangdao* tried to steer women's loyalty from the domestic sphere to the state, which was explained as essential to the construction of a "national spirit."³⁸ Because they claimed that the "scientific, conscientious, bold experiment" of Manchukuo could bring the restless warlords and communists in rein, leading to stability for the achievement of East Asian modernity and to build a "paradise land" (*letu*),³⁹ this ideal "good wife, wise mother" (*Xianqi liangmu*) was woven into their nation-state building strategies. But although they intended to use a sort of rhetoric of legitimacy founded on the Confucian order to attract social conservatives, they "failed to garner much support from a population that accorded women and men more egalitarian roles."⁴⁰ The colonizers were infuriated over their failed project of ideological interpellation and attributed it to Manchuria's harsh "geographical situation," which made its populace "little influenced by modern culture."⁴¹

³⁷ See Austin Fulton, *Through Earthquake, Wind, and Fire* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1967), 19.

³⁸ See Liu Jinghui, *Minzu, xingbie yu jieceng (Nation, Gender and Social Stratum)* (Beijing: Shehui kexue xenzian chubanshe, 2004), 6-7.

³⁹ Kishi Nobosuke, cited in Yamamuro Shin'ichi, *Manchuria under Japanese Dominion*, trans. Joshua A. Fogel (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 4.

⁴⁰ Norman Smith, *Resisting Manchukuo*, 27.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 27.

However, it is a differing vision of a modern culture that accounts for the failed reception of the “gospel” that was enforced upon the colonized. The Japanese and their Manchukuo cultural functionaries proclaimed to bring in a new citizenry through its mission of civilization. This “modern culture” was an involution, or what Prasenjit Duara calls a “tradition-within-modernity” model,⁴² to counteract the “pernicious, corrupted” Western individualism. Yet the indigenous population had long received the baptism of the New Culture Movement that was prevailing there between 1915 and 1920. The traditionally sanctified values, such as the Confucian ideal of “good wife, wise mother,” were condemned as “enchain[ing] women through the requirement of chastity.”⁴³ They were attacked by the enlightenment intellectuals as a “slave mentality” that was instrumental to perpetuate the political autocracy. The progressive intellectuals believed the establishment of democracy demanded gender equality, especially women’s freedom in love and marriage. The ideal of the “new woman” proclaimed women’s rights to control their bodies and manage social relations, including their career.

This ideal had swayed the minds of most of the educated classes, especially those of the young generation. If Xiao Hong was well recognized as “the first major woman writer to challenge the patriarchal ideals that she linked with Manchukuo,” then the second-generation writers inherited her “inspiring legacy.”⁴⁴ Therefore, although the Japanese promoted a mode

⁴² Prasenjit Duara, *Sovereignty and Authenticity: Manchukuo and the East Asian Modern* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003), 147.

⁴³ Vera Schwarz, *The Chinese Enlightenment*, 115.

⁴⁴ Norman Smith, *Resisting Manchukuo*, 17. This book is a systematic study of the career of the Chinese women writers in Manchuria.

of Asian Women who has “upright posture and a seemingly greater dignity,” against the “sexually unrestrained, individualistic Chinese new women,” whose “destructive character” was allegedly a result of the pernicious Western influence,⁴⁵ such arguments sounded hollow and hypocritical to them. Meanwhile, because the education of women in Manchuria followed the concept of good wives and wise mothers, the curricula for women were “increasingly concentrated on housekeeping and hygiene, the domestic science.”⁴⁶ This program became the target of women writers. After the launch of the “Sacred War” in 1941, the colonizer’s emphasis shifted, and now claimed that “women, just like men, had responsibilities for and vital contributions to make to the nation...as workers, subjects, and citizens.”⁴⁷ Nevertheless, again, the Japanese “lamented the reluctance of Manchukuo women to embrace the ‘beautiful customs’ that they associated with Japanese women.”⁴⁸

Overall, the socially engaged nature of, and the dark and pessimistic tone and content within, the writers’ works in Manchuria reflected their deep sense of alienation and oppression. As Norman Smith aptly points out,

In Manchukuo, social realism emerged as the most favored literary form, as it did in Japanese-occupied Taiwan. Social realism enabled writers to vent political frustration while exploring issues of personal identity. Exposing reality became a popular tool with which to entertain and influence readers, to question Japanese colonial authority, and to articulate individual ideals of modernity. Writers in Manchukuo and Taiwan...shared similar literary styles. In Taiwan, colonial literature embodied a renewed search for self-identity and a yearning for independence. In Manchukuo ... (the writers were) portraying contemporary society as unrelentingly oppressive...⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Ibid., 34-35.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 35.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 37.

⁴⁸ See Mochizuki Yuriko, “Zai Man-Ri xi nvxing tan” (Discussion of Feminism in Manchukuo and Japan), *Qingnian wenhua* 1, no.3 (1943): 35-36. Quoted from Ibid., 37.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 139.

Literature in Beijing and Shanghai

In the other parts of China that were lost to the enemy's hands after 1937, the Chinese citizens saw the Japanese occupation as a temporary phenomenon that mandated their temporary, practical strategy for survival.⁵⁰ Unlike in Manchuria, where the Japanese had some sort of long-term plan, in these newly-occupied areas they did not develop a detailed cultural agenda to foster a pro-Japanese literature. Consequently, "a kind of literary anarchy flourished: output was primarily of works that...ignored or reflected poorly on their rule, and of some that reached the point of satire and dissent."⁵¹

Some collaborationists did have tried to promote some "new literature." If the collaborators in Beijing had advocated establishing a "new people's literature" that would "reflect a new era of peace and strength for China,"⁵² then in Shanghai they contended for a "peace literature" that was allegedly "a portrayal of the needless sufferings of the people for the Nationalist and Communist resistance effort and was an expression of the people's hopes for peace."⁵³ Echoing the Japanese rhetoric, it called for opposing the contamination of decadent Western culture that allegedly had infected both of the two domestic antagonistic political forces and had ruined the Chinese language. In another piece published by *Zhongguo wenyi* (Chinese Arts and Letters) titled "Jianshe xin wenyi de gejie hunglun" (A General

⁵⁰ Timothy Brook, *Collaboration: Japanese Agents and Local Elites in Wartime China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2005), 12.

⁵¹ Edward Gunn, *Unwelcome Muse*, 9.

⁵² It was promoted in 1938 by one editor of Beijing's New People's Herald, Geng Xiaodi. In his vision the literature does not focus on class issues, but develops the genuine qualities of Chinese indigenous literature, its compressed style, and repudiates Western-styled syntax and diction. *Ibid.*, 15.

⁵³ Man Jun, "Heping wenxue," *Xin shen bao*, 28 December 1939, 4.

Discussion from All Quarters on the Founding of a New Literature), the pro-Japanese intellectuals again urged readers to abandon May Fourth literature, to adopt Confucian ethics, and lastly, to free the masses from their spiritual enslavement.⁵⁴ Ironically, when the masses were being tortured by the colonizers, such rhetoric was articulated by the collaborators. But these principles were not systematically imposed on the writers, and there were few repercussions across the society. Even though the Japanese accommodated the Three People's Principles to Wang Jingwei's puppet Nanjing regime for propagandistic consideration, the denunciation of feudalism, white imperialism and Communism and promotion of a "peace literature," a New East Asia, and the Three Principles by their Chinese Literary Association (*Zhongguo wenyi xiehui*), which was established in Nanjing in December 1939, fell on the deaf ears of most Chinese.

In these areas, Chinese writers again "for the most part responded to the proscriptions of censors rather than the prescriptions of propagandists."⁵⁵ After the exodus of many distinguished writers from Beijing, some important Manchurian writers left for it in 1942 to avoid the intensified persecution in Manchuria, because the Japanese rule in Beijing was relatively lax. They created a literature there with a distinct style different from that of the area that they came from. But they were still forced to join the North China-Manchukuo Writers Association (*Huabei Manzhou xiehui*), and some to participate the Greater East Asia

⁵⁴ "Jianse xin wenyi de gejie honglun," *Zhongguo wenyi* (January 1940), 1 (5): 10-15.

⁵⁵ Edward Gunn, *Unwelcome Muse*, 5.

Writers' Congress, which emphasized Japanese culture as the bedrock for the future of Asian culture and promoted a "New East Asia Literature Concept."

Only after two years, the literary activities in Beijing resumed their prosperity, which was a result "largely of an influx of young writers, students, and intellectuals from Japanese-held Manchuria and Taiwan, who joined with the remaining local students."⁵⁶ In addition to the writings by the emigrated Manchurian writers, popular fiction – such as martial arts stories and "Triangular Love Stories" – was also flourishing. Some writers also engaged in the writing of "native soil literature" (*Xiangtu wenxue*)⁵⁷ with critical social consciousness.

As for Shanghai, there was a different story. We have noted that the Manchurian female writers, through expressing their agonies, anxieties, and sense of failure or dilemma about their identities, reconstituted their ideal of womanhood with a "negative dialectics." But the writing style of the female writers from Shanghai is vastly divergent. In "Manchukuo," it has been observed that "few moral or financial incentives existed to entice writers to abandon the idealism that initially drove them to establish their careers."⁵⁸

However, in Shanghai, although most of the writer's responses could also be identified as

⁵⁶ Ibid., 3.

⁵⁷ The appearance of the so-called "native soil literature" can be traceable to Lu Xun's story "Hometown" (*Guxiang*) written in 1921. In the following decade, there were a number of young writers, who were mostly from the rural areas and now resided in metropolitan cities, writing stories about the rural life, in particular the suffering of the peasants. Their writings were more or less influenced by Lu Xun's works. Witnessing the difference between modern culture and the traditional rural society, these writers recalled the memory of their childhood and the native culture, oftentimes with nostalgic elements but also with a critical consciousness – the inspiration of the latter came from the ideas of "New Culture," in particular the idea of "transformation of national character" that was also harbored by early Lu Xun.

⁵⁸ Norman Smith, *Resisting Manchukuo*, 59.

“resistance, dissent, or disengagement,”⁵⁹ and few works have a sympathetic depiction of the Japanese or the puppet regime; still, the writings are “breaking away from the themes of individual self-assertion...are more concerned with individual failures caused by self-deception.”⁶⁰ To be sure, this was to certain extent shared by the literature in Manchuria, but the “mainstream” Shanghai literature had a particular nature. Before we delve into it, a short introduction of the history of its occupation is needed.

The outbreak of the Pacific War, which took place in December 1941, divided the eight years of Japanese occupation of Shanghai into two periods: the so-called “Solitary Island (*gu dao*) Era” between 1937 and 1941 and the “Occupation Era” after that. The former, as a topographical analogy, aptly conveys the geographical features and political characteristics of the city. In that era, there were two places that writers and intellectuals found their temporary haven: the International Settlement and the French Concession. The former was administered by the British before it finally fell to the Japanese’s hands following the Pacific War; while the latter was resigned to Vichy France in 1940, so it maintained some autonomy.

Shanghai’s literary scene in and before the period of “Solitary Island Era” was filled with militant nationalism. It was the main seedbed of China’s literary anti-war efforts in the early phase of the war. In December 1941, the Japanese army attacked and then seized the International Settlement, the Solitary Island Era finally came to an end, and the Japanese controlled all of Shanghai’s territory. The political and cultural climate of post-1941

⁵⁹ Edward Gunn, *Unwelcome Muse*, 50.

⁶⁰ Edward Gunn, 9. See Geng Xiaodi, “Qingnian zuojia xiehui” (Youth Writers Association), *Xin min bao* (Beijing), 5 March 1938, 8.

occupation era is generally referred as a suffocating prison cell. The Japanese closed down major publishing houses, foreign-published newspapers, and all the theaters. As a result, many writers went underground or flee to the hinterland.

Wang Jingwei's puppet regime never enjoyed popular support. As noted, "although he had a corps of writers at his disposal, they were employed not to politicize creative literature, but to write editorials, attend Sino-Japanese cultural functions, and provide occasional testimonials as the needs of a political facade and circumstance demanded."⁶¹ The Japanese manufactured cultural products to promote the so-called "Greater East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere," and eliminate Anglo-American elements that were influential in the popular media. Besides closing down many newspapers and journals, they turned others into their propaganda machine. Among these were the two key literary publications, the biweekly journal *Wenyou* (May 1943-July 1945), or Literary Companion, and the monthly *Wenxue* (Nov. 1943 - Sep. 1944), or Literary Association; the latter was edited by the Shanghai branch of the Sino-Japanese Cultural Association.

As stated earlier, throughout the period, only minor writers and hacks were willing to work for the Japanese, and most male writers who had partial cooperation in order to survive saw themselves as *yimin*, which in Chinese means survivors from the last dynasty who had not died for loyalty to the emperor. So their works either bear nuanced "allusions to the shame and anguish of compromise," or are filled with nostalgia for the past.⁶² As noted, "The

⁶¹ Edward Gunn, *Unwelcome Muse*, 4.

⁶² Poshek Fu, *Passivity, Resistance, and Collaboration*, 110-154.

only significant Chinese works of pro-Japanese propaganda were some films produced under direct Japanese supervision, and these were relatively few given the total number of films produced under its occupation.”⁶³

A typical periodical that published such works was *Gujin banyuekan* (Reminiscences Biweekly, literally mean Past and Present Biweekly), published between 1942 and 1944. It was “a vehicle of a self-pitying, self-justifying, and reclusive literature,”⁶⁴ blending “remembrance with penitence and history with remorse, as a personal testimony to human tragedy.” They did not brandish the patriotic rhetoric of preserving China’s survival and culture that those political collaborationists championed, but what was articulated was a low-key pretext, that “the banality of survival (of individuals)” was “inexorable law of human nature.”⁶⁵

The Gujin group’s political ambiguity and anachronistic attitude epitomized the ethos of occupied Shanghai. The escapist and individualistic tendency was the thrust of Occupation literature, which was shared by many women writers, the most distinguished one being Eileen Chang (Zhang Ailing), whom we will study in the second chapter. This is why Poshek Fu has argued that “a decadent generation of writers who had no set ideology, no concern for life, and no respect for collective goals, but wrote only for money and fame, had arisen.”⁶⁶

Fictional writers there were generally divided into two groups, those of the so-called popular literary writers associated with such magazines as *Xiaoshuo yuebao* (Fiction

⁶³ Edward Gunn, *Unwelcome Muse*, 5.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 111.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 149.

Monthly), *Da Zhong* (the Mass), and *Zi Luolan* (Purple Violet); those so-called “new literature writers group” revolved around Wan Xiang (Phenomena) after Ke Ling took charge of the editorship of the journal in 1943. In this period, as writers from other areas kept sending their works to be published here, Shanghai became the literary centre among the “Fallen Area” aside from the “North-East Three Provinces.”⁶⁷ Indeed, Shanghai’s popular culture still flourished, and with this a new generation of urban writers came into being. This was a burgeoning middlebrow culture, which sustained a cultural life in occupied Shanghai.

Emergent women writers were prominent and celebrated in the cultural scene, and there was a distinguished “feminine” feature in the popular culture. Their stories deal with the theme of urban alienation set in a suffocating environment. Whether their artistic world rises above or submerges under the bloody historical reality, transcends or submits to the boundaries of the nighttime darkness, circumvents or evades the immediate present – the differing evaluations depends on the different perspectives from which to appraise their efforts. However, it is the consensus that they refused the calling of their time and rejected to be moralized. Instead, they chose to engage contemporary popular culture and insisted on being at the center of a burgeoning middlebrow culture. What stood out in their opinions, however, are their views on the role of woman in society, which is vastly different from that of the female writers in Manchuria. Nicole Huang has studied a mainstream woman magazine *Women’s Voices* at the time. She notes that in that journal the concept of

⁶⁷ Chen Qingsheng, *Kangzhan shiqide Shanghai wenxue* (Shanghai Literature of the Sino-Japanese War)(Shanghai: Shanghai renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1995), 193.

“ ‘Motherhood’ ...was often singled out and reclaimed ...as a fundamental role for modern women. Instructions for becoming a good mother...became an important part of the corpus of ‘new knowledge.’ Many featured articles argued that motherhood was an important dimension of womanhood and should be regarded as essential to both female identity and social solidarity. While motherhood was frequently linked to nation building, the mode of the ‘virtuous wife and good mother’ was advocated to enhance social consolidation.”⁶⁸ Meanwhile, “the editorial staff openly declared their plans to reevaluate the May Fourth discourses on individuality, freedom of choice, and women’s liberation.”⁶⁹

This difference should be understood in the context of Shanghai’s particular geo-cultural locale. Before the War, unlike northeast China, as the country’s earliest treaty port Shanghai had developed to be China’s financial, commercial, and industrial center, and it had a large middle class community. The latter’s cultivated traditional gentry-class tastes were blended with the newly developed middle class cultural distinction, forming a culture that had a salient local flavor. In particular, it is noted that this new generation of urban writers, young women writers in particular (most of whom were just coming out of college, or even still in colleges and middle school), were promoted in the print media of a particular school that had persistently engaged in the cultivation of a middle-class readership. This school is the so-called “Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies School,” which played a leadership role in constructing a wartime culture.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Nicole Huang, *Woman, Domesticity, War*, 104-105.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 111.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 57.

The school had produced urban popular fiction since the early twentieth-century. Its narrative tradition is the sentimental romance between talents and beauties in turbulent times. The writers of this group were the first group of professional writers coming to the center stage of urban life, thanks to the long-term flourishing urban commerce taking shape ever since the late nineteenth century. The heyday of the school is in the 1910s and 1920s. They were depreciated as “old-styled literati” by those of a younger generation of Shanghai writers, who had more knowledge of Western literary trends, tastes, and techniques. But there was a historical opportunity for this school to revive – with some adaptations – in wartime Shanghai, thanks to the lessening of the critical censures and the general escapist atmosphere. Thus Shanghai’s Butterflies writers and the journals associated with them fostered a middlebrow culture, together with a new generation of writers who sustained and developed the latter.

Chapter One

A Homeless Soul and a Dispossessed Nostalgia Exiled Experience and Xiao Hong's War-time Diasporic Literature

While the consensus holds Xiao Hong as one of the most talented writers (or even the utmost one) of the “group of Northeast writers” (*Dongbei zuojiaqun*), the appraisal of her writing of fiction is not only always susceptible to the vicissitude of political situation and cultural atmosphere, but is also differing with different critical perspectives. This to some extent is attributable to the fact that she is a writer of multiple hues and talents: She had been the core member of the “Lu Xun faction” (and later the “Hu Feng group”)⁷¹ of leftist writers, and one of the originators of the “Resistance Literature,” and was also the pioneer of the “poeticized stories” (*shihua xiaoshuo*) popular in the latter half of the 1940s; she even tried the water of “satire literature,” a trend in her time. Indeed, although her literary career only lasted for seven to eight years before she died, as it spanned the two decades of the 1930s and the 1940s and so touched many key issues pertaining to the New Literature and the post-New Literature, namely the pro-leftist literature and the war-time literature, an exploration of her works becomes a perfect channel to enter the literature of this period. As the writer’s literary trajectory, including the frequent shifting of her intellectual-political positions between humanist and humanitarian concerns, is closely tied in with her personal experience – most of her stories can find their direct origins in, or inspirations from, her individual sufferings in

⁷¹ When Lu Xun was alive, many young literary talents visited him and got his advices. They are called “Lu Xun faction.” After Lu Xun died, Hu Feng assumed himself as the legitimate successor to Lu Xun’s spirit and cultural heritage and exponent of his creative method. He and the writers around him (especially those who published their writings in the journal *July* that Hu edited) were thus called “Hu Feng group.”

society – this chapter studies her works by placing them within the context of her life and the historical conjuncture. Only through this procedure, can we understand why she was often wavering between differing choices and oftentimes apparently made miscalculated decisions, which finally cost her life; and why this incompetence in recognizing social-political conflicts and contradictions sometimes left fissures in her works, which then became thematically incoherent. We will see that in Xiao Hong's early creative periods, she more or less subscribed to the problematic of class politics and devoted her energies to humanitarian critique of imperialism and class oppression; in her later age, she seemingly more and more changed to be a liberal individualist and became more humanistic in her nostalgic description of her homeland and her townsfolk. Based on this study, I suggest that not only is her tragic experience a microcosm of the besieged "new women" in particular, and the radical epochal change in general, but the dilemma of her always miscalculated choices and the predicament of her literary creation subtly show the divergence between the May Fourth-styled "New Literature" and the "post-New Literature," as well as the tension between the "New Culture Enlightenment" and the "New Enlightenment" (the latter of which called for a collective awakening of the rights of the subaltern and was rapidly emerging at the time), due to the still irresolvable social-historical contradiction.

The Beginning of an Oppressed "New Woman"

In 1911, the year when the last "feudalist" Qing dynasty was overthrown, Xiao Hong was born in a county of Heilongjiang province in Northeast China. The county was a typical

Chinese town of the time.⁷² The quintessential feature is its backwardness and the conservativeness of its residents due to the long-term isolation of this small town and the ingrained peasant mentality of the populace.

The then named Zhang Naiying was the first child of her well-to-do landlord-gentry family, but she did not enjoy the prestige this identity might confer upon her. Instead, in her memory, all family members – except her grandfathers – were not friendly to her. Her father appeared to her as one who “often gave up his humanity over his own covetousness” and was “characterized by his stinginess, aloofness, and even hard-heartedness.”⁷³ Her mother, according to her autobiographical stories, had “mean words and nasty looks” and often beat her. She died when Naiying was nine. The stepmother that Naiying’s father remarried reportedly also maltreated her.⁷⁴ In addition, the writer’s ailing grandmother also left her the impression of a domineering and merciless woman. No matter whether these are facts or simply a refraction of (and so a distortion by) an innocent child’s eyes, they indicate her alienated experience with the family members; she apparently felt her needs for love and warmth. Only the grandfather gave her tender love. It was he who introduced her to classical poetry, during which she showed a particular taste for nature poems. The family garden

⁷² It was “located in the heart of an agricultural district,” consisting “little more than marketplaces where the peasant sold their excess produce, some shops which catered to their nonagricultural needs, schools, and residential areas.” See Howard Goldblatt, “Preface,” *Hsiao Hung* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1976), 16. In her autobiographical “novel” *Tales of Hulan River*, it would be remembered as “a quiet and rather backward town peopled by conservative and superstitious peasants, craftsmen, shop owners, a few lettered individuals who served as teachers, and the ever-present gentry.” *Ibid.*, 16-17.

⁷³ Xiao Hong, “Yongjiu de chongjing he zhuiqiu” (Perpetual Longing and Pursuit), *Baogao* (Shanghai), inaugural issue (January 10, 1937), 73; trans. by Howard Goldblatt.

⁷⁴ See Howard Goldblatt, *Hsiao Hung*, 17-18.

where she often found fun during her carefree children days also cultivated her sensitivity to scenic natural beautifulness.

But her grandfather needed to spend a lot of time taking care of his sick wife, so Naiying often experienced loneliness. Nevertheless, when she grew up, she still claimed that “I learned from my grandfather that besides coldness and hatred, life also has warmth and love. And so, for me there is a perpetual longing and pursuit to find this warmth and love.”⁷⁵ In addition to her personal distress, this desire was also cultivated by her direct association with the suffering peasant folks around her. However, this longing and pursuit was often stymied and frustrated in the writer’s short life, as men’s maltreatments and betrayals more often than not went hand in hand with her. This unfortunate experience only strengthened her longing for individual security and personal happiness.

Like many writers of the time, she received the baptism of the momentous New Culture Movement in her young age. In 1925, the second year after she entered primary school, in the wake of the “May Thirtieth Incident,”⁷⁶ she joined the demonstration; she also joined a stage play by playing a girl fighting against arranged marriage. Two years later, she entered the First Municipal Girls’ Middle School of Harbin. In this metropolis, an important cultural and commercial center at the time, a new form of life, together with a brand new set

⁷⁵ Xiao Hong, “Perpetual Longing and Pursuit,” 74.

⁷⁶ The May Thirtieth Movement occurred on May 30, 1925, when the Chinese protest against the Japanese atrocity in Shanghai’s International Settlement were suppressed by Shanghai Municipal Police officers, which caused the death of four demonstrators at the scene and another five later out of injuries. The incident sparked international censure and nation-wide anti-foreign demonstrations. From then on, it was seen as a labor and anti-imperialist movement. For reference, see Ku Hung-Ting, “Urban Mass Movement: The May Thirtieth Movement in Shanghai,” *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol.13, No.2. pp.197-216.

of modern ideas, unfolded before her. Again she took part in demonstrations against the Japanese encroachments. This not necessarily showed that she had a strong political consciousness, but her patriotic awareness was largely propelled by the popular New Culture concepts at the time, including radical anti-traditionalism, anti-imperialism, and gender equality and freedom in marriage. She also cultivated a fondness for the “new literature,” especially those of romantic writings, by her reading of the literary supplement of a local new-styled newspaper *Guoji xiebao* (International gazette).

But when the idealistic, innocent girl implemented the ideas in reality, she met her first disaster in life. Just before she graduated from the school, to work against the arranged marriage by her parents to a warlord’s son, she left home and school with a young man. But when she went together with him to Beijing several months later, she found that he had wife and child. She was pregnant now and was abandoned. Economic predicament forced her to return to his home in January the next year. Seen as a shame of her family, she was imprisoned in her house for ten months. When she escaped from the family, her father declared publicly the severance of her family relations. The life after this was too harsh for a woman at the time: She found no help from relatives, friends, and schoolmates in Harbin. Feeling that there was a great distance between her and the outside world because of this betrayal by her father, lover, and friends, she felt alienated and disillusioned. After Nora left home, there was no much room to roam: Chinese society was not rationalized enough to offer enough social space for women to explore, as a result they had few choices. It was also

around this time that the Mukden Incident broke out (on September 18th, 1931), but her sense of personal agony probably prevailed over this national tragedy at the time.

Her life after this was miserable: finding a cheap hotel run by a White Russian, she was still unable to pay her rent. Worse, she was addicted to opium and probably occasionally sold her body for life necessities. Arguably this was one instance of the cases that would happen, and which did happen, after Nora left home. Fortunately, the bleak outlook was turned around by the editors of the newspaper that she was fond of in her student days, to which she had written for help. Finding a pregnant woman trapped in a dire existence, they managed to deliver her out of the hands of the ruthless hotel proprietor.

One of these two saviors is Xiao Jun, who would soon become her new lover. Three years elder than Xiao Hong, Xiao Jun was from a peasant family of a small county of Liaoning, one of the three Northeast provinces. After serving in military units for six years, in 1932 he became an editor of *International Gazette* and also engaged himself in writing. Shortly later, Xiao Hong gave birth to, but abandoned, her illegitimate child in a hospital. She and Xiao Jun lived together and she began her literary creation. One year later, they joined together to produce a collection of stories and essays, *Bashe* (Trudging).

Left-leaning Stories with Strong Humanist Concerns

These stories generally can be read as leftist stories popular at the time. They contain strong doses of class conflicts, but what also stands out is a humanist concern. This should be understood in conjunction with her life experience to this moment. Her father, who often appeared to her as avaricious, mean, and cruel, generated in her a bitter feeling of injustice.

And the kind-hearted folks who led a squalid and miserable life around her brought about her great sympathies. This spontaneous tender feeling for the social outcast, when combined with her own wretched experience thus far, undoubtedly contributed to her sense of merciless class division and oppression. This pre-theoretical recognizance did not necessarily lead to revolutionary thoughts, but her humanist feeling undoubtedly led to her pro-leftist inclinations and a strong humanitarian spirit, to be shown in these early stories.

In “The Death of Wang Asao” (Wang Asao de si), the titled peasant woman is found not in the field, but in her bed as she is seriously ill. She confesses to a sister Wang who comes to see her that she was kicked by Landlord Zhang the day before because her pregnant body forced her to take a rest in the field. “It’s a karmic entanglement – the baby’s daddy died at the hands of Landlord Zhang, and I just know that the same thing will happen to me. No one can escape the clutches of the landlord.”

Then we are informed how her husband died: he was murdered by the landlord who asked his lackey to set fire to his house when he was asleep at home, because his wild behaviors out of his indignation over the act of withholding his one-year wages by the landlord (in the excuse that his carelessness led the landlord’s horse accidentally lose its leg when it stumbled on a rock) horrifies the latter. The reaction of the landlord after this murder is vividly presented,

After a while, Landlord Zhang made an appearance: looking like a sinister hawk flapping its wings, he strode over from the front village, flyswatter in hand, eyes bulging, snorting through his nose, and oozing airs of superiority.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Xiao Hong, *Xiao Hong Juan*, ed. Fu Guangming (Xian: Taibai Wenyi, 1997), 18.

He asks her not to cry, and orders the burial of the bones of her husband. This is seen by the masses as a benevolent deed while his crime is unknown. He then “turned and strode back to the front village, waving his flyswatter like a wand that could drain the blood from the villager’s bodies.” The caricatured description is filled with sarcastic connotations.

The text is composed mostly of the scenes in which the reactions and discussions of the ignorant yet benevolent village folks are presented. We are thus informed that Wang Asao had three children, but they all died (the causes are not informed). The gruesome sight before she dies is reminiscent of many similar pictures of women’s bloody death during childbirth in the writer’s later stories: she “was lying on the *kang*, her final labored wails filling the small room. Her body was covered with her own blood, and there in the midst of all that blood a tiny, brand-new creature was fighting for its life.”⁷⁸ It shows the author’s particular concern over women’s suffering in procreation.

In addition to Wang Asao’s experience, there was another minor character, Xiao Huan, a seven-year girl. Her father died before she was born, and her mother was raped by the landlord Zhang’s son and died of humiliation when she was five. She became a wanderer and lived in various places, was maltreated by the landlord and bullied by his sons, and finally was adopted and raised by Wang Asao after the latter saw her pitiable existence.

In all, it is very clear that what the author shows in the story is “the issue of class (landlord/tenant, rich/poor),” which is “the fundamental cause of misery and death,” but not

⁷⁸ Ibid., 26.

merely the issue of “poverty,” as Goldblatt has argued.⁷⁹ A prototypical leftist story at the time, the story, with its graphic scenes and weighty tone, effectively transmits the author’s message of cruel class oppression.

While these writings about the miserable destiny of the subalterns are technically mature and thematically persuasive, when the writer shifts her attention to the awakening of the peasants and the fights of the revolutionary, the plots appear less plausible, due to her lack of real experience of the subjects. “Flying-Kite Observation” (Kan Fengzheng) is a typical case of this category. An old man’s daughter dies in an incident when she is working in her factory; the father seeks for compensation for several days, yet achieves nothing. Besides, his son has not returned home for three years since he was out. We are told that his son, busy in promoting revolutionary messages to the oppressed, neither knows the tragedy of his family members, nor does he care for it. This is because, the narrator informs us, “he has numerous fathers, he takes every sufferer’s father as his father; once he thinks of these fathers, there is only one road, one authentic road.” The revolutionary disregards his father, even when he accidentally chances upon the latter one day. When this insensible man preaches to the villagers, sometimes “his hands raise high and then put down, which probably means exploitation; sometimes he raises his hand gigantically to the high, which probably means (to them) not to be oppressed.” And the reaction of the countrywomen to be awakened by him is less credible, either, “I had been a cow and horse for a life. Haha! When the time comes I

⁷⁹ To him, the latter only “underlies to personal tragedies,” yet apparently the reverse order of this priority is the case. See Howard Goldblatt, “Introduction,” in *The Dyer’s Daughter: Selected Stories of Xiao Hong* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2005), xii.

would be a man! I've been enough to be a beast." The whole story reads like a parody of this category of work, written by a demagogue from the ideologically opposite rank.

Earlier, we have noted that the works that she read during her student days were mainly "romantic writings" that focused on the ills of society, some of which are translations of Western literature. While all these literary enrichments (together with her personal experiences) fostered in her a primordial political consciousness of class oppression and exploitation, her knowledge of the social injustice, like many leftist writers at the time, although touches on the class issue, was still coated with a spontaneous humanitarian feeling and even humanistic concern, rather than undergirded by a rigorous class analysis.

Field of Life and Death

The collection was soon banned by the Japanese occupants. When the political situation became too tough for them to live there, they left for Qingdao in May 1934. With the help of a friend, Xiao Jun edited the literary supplement of a local newspaper. Their lives improved to some extent, and Xiao Hong was able to devote most of her time to writing. It was around this time, when she was 23, that she completed the novel *Field of Life and Death* (Shengsi Chang), her first novel.

For left-wing scholars, the novel records vividly "the initial stages of awareness and resistance of the peasants."⁸⁰ But for other critics, because in it only "less than one-third of this short novel" that "concerns the Japanese at all," the target of this "story of struggle" lies

⁸⁰ Wang Yao, *Zhongguo xin wenxue shigao* (The History of Chinese New Literature) (Shanghai: Xinwenyi chubanshe, 1953), vol.1, 253.

elsewhere.⁸¹ Undoubtedly, the novel had helped to promote the patriotic anti-Japanese sentiment of the populace, which should be seen as what it (at least partially) aimed at. Yet, the debates regarding its overarching thematic concern fell into a pitfall, because there are multiple concerns in the novel, which are not coherently connected but are subtly in conflict with each other. I will suggest that this incoherency is due to the author's unclear differentiation of the priority, and her incapability to look into the innate correlativity, of the three major social contradictions of the time: patriarchal gender inequality, class conflicts, and national resistance.

The narrative structure of the novel is composed of two time periods. One takes place ten years before the Mukden Incident, another immediately after it. But the diegetic space is strictly confined in a village of the Northeastern area. The first ten sections lay out the contour of the major characters through exemplifying their behaviors and manners. Via the last, transitional section of the tenth, which narrates: "The hill in the village and the stream at the foot of the hill remained the same as ten years before ... In the village the cycle of life and death went on exactly as it had ten years before,"⁸² the remaining seven sections turn to the changed life of the peasants with the coming of the Japanese. A narrative without a closely-knitted central storyline, in most times the novel only presents episodic daily life events.

⁸¹ Howard Goldblatt, *Hsiao Hong*, 45.

⁸² Xiao Hong, *The Field of Life and Death and Tales of Hulan River*, trans. Howard Goldblatt and Ellen Yeung, (Bloomington: Indiana Univ., 1979), 72.

Let us read the beginning of the 11th section carefully, which reads “one snowy day a flag never before seen by the villagers was raised and began to flutter under the open sky...The villagers were wondering: ‘What is happening now? Has the Chinese nation had a dynastic change?’”⁸³ And let us consider all the episodic anecdotes in the novel thus far. A clear message will come out: the cycle of “life and death,” just like the cyclic “dynastic change,” is the prevailing leitmotif of the first part, which then sets the stage for the development of the serial. In this first half, the writer aptly presents a rural world in which suffering peasants barely eke out a tremendously difficult life.

For the villagers of the area, lands and livestock are always their preciousness, and indeed for them “life has always been a bitter struggle” and their “attitudes towards life reflect the harshness of their existence.”⁸⁴ It is in this sense that Howard Goldblatt perceptively notes: though “a few characters rise to the surface as their stories are told, but it is the village and not any particular person or family that is being portrayed, a community in action, as it were.”⁸⁵ This does not mean the characters are less important or their activities can be neglected, however, as we can see that the paramount issue that receives the most extensive treatment is the suffering of women. The women’s tortures are mainly shown through numerous painful births, their maltreatment by men, and their ensuing suicide, sickness, and death. The most macabre one is the gradual process of dying of Yueying, the most beautiful woman of the village, out of paralysis and careless abuse by her husband. The scene is

⁸³ Ibid., 73.

⁸⁴ Howard Goldblatt, *Hsiao Hong*, 45.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 46.

graphically presented, leaving the strongest visual impression on the readers. Their sufferings are also displayed in their loss of their children: Golden Bough's baby daughter is casually dashed to the ground by her husband (due to his poverty and so his incapability in raising the baby); Second Aunt Li has a miscarriage; Mother Wang's three-year old daughter also dies by her incidental disposal (she mistakenly throws the baby to the haystack, where there is a rake under it), and her grown-up daughter dies heroically in the resistance; the old woman from North Village loses her son in the resistance fights.

That the author stresses the suffering of women who are oppressed by men is surely bearing a heavy dose of the memory of her own experience. Noting her intentional management of the narration to convey this message, Lydia Liu aptly points out that "the few deaths of men are meaningful only inasmuch as they affect the lives of the women." For instance, "when Golden Bough becomes a widow and is forced to make her own living, we are not told when, where, why, or how her husband died, whereas the manner of women's deaths, such as Mother Wang's suicide, receive extended treatment."⁸⁶ In this narrative, on one hand, women's tragic destinies in the hierarchical gender relation is mainly represented as being caused by the (male) peasants' backwardness, their ignorance and narrow vision, which is over-determined by the patriarchal "feudal" system; on the other hand, what the narrative presents, or the impression it gives the readers, is mainly their animalistic existence due to their poverty and animalistic instincts.⁸⁷ Especially in terms of the latter one, which is

⁸⁶ Lydia Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity-China, 1900-1937* (Chicago: Stanford Univ., 1995), 204.

⁸⁷ Read the following paragraph, "Cows and horses in their ignorance plant the seeds of their own

exemplified by rural women's experiences of sex (their physical desire rather than emotional passion), the message is emphatically articulated through Golden Bough's affair with a man (who eventually becomes her husband) in the field. Her experience is shown as a cycle,⁸⁸ but what the narrator tries to pinpoint seems to be that "the female body serves the interests of men,"⁸⁹ as evidenced by the conclusion that Golden Bough makes, "men are heartless human beings, a feeling shared by the rest of the village women" (73). Here, the narrative attributes the causes of the "woman problem" to the peasant's poverty, ignorance, and eventually to the "problem of men." Couched on the peasants' own petty existence, the narration at most articulates an enlightenment discourse of the ignorance of peasants due to the evilness of the patriarchal system, including the gender inequality.

But in addition to this message, which seemingly prevails in the first part of the novel, there is another message about class conflict that is subtly released, through a separate chapter mainly, which is full of symbolic connotation. Old Woman Wang (or Mother Wang), out of her demanding debts of land-rents to the landlord, has to sell her aging horse to the knackers. The "emotional intensity" as well as its "starkly hideous scenery" of this episode is

suffering. At night as the people sat in the cool breeze, they could here odd noises coming from the stable or cowshed. A bull that was probably battling for its mate crashed out of the shed, breaking the fence...In the village men and beasts busied themselves at living and at dying." Trans. Howard Goldblatt., *The Field of Life and Death and Tales of Hulan River*, 56. As Lydia Liu aptly comments, "the narrator's insistence on drawing the parallel between animals and humans in sexuality and childbirth sometimes verges on sarcasm." Lydiu Liu, *Translingual Practice*, 204.

⁸⁸ As noted, she treads "the path of Fufa's wife, but she is seduced by none other than Fufa's nephew Chengye. Like Fufa before him, Chengye does not care much for the woman he seduces." Lydia Liu, *Translingual Practice*, 206.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 206.

noted by critics,⁹⁰ yet its symbolic import and its structural position in the text is not sufficiently explicated.

When “they drew near the slaughter house...the city gate was now directly ahead. Mother Wang’s heart turned over.” The narrative voice, a seemingly narrated monologue, informs us,

Five years ago it had been a young horse, but because of farm work it had been reduced to skin and bones. Now it was old. Autumn was almost over and the harvesting done. It had become useless, and for the sake of its hide, the master had to send it to the slaughterhouse. And even the price of its hide would be snatched away from Mother Wang’s hands by the landlord.⁹¹

Mother Wang’s farm work relies on the cooperation of the horse. But now she has to sacrifice the latter to pay for her rent.⁹² Class oppression and exploitation is worsened to such an extent that to drag on a living she must sacrifice the most precious of her personal belonging – she had developed an intense emotion with the living stock in years of labor. The latter also has an emotional attachment to her: when she leaves, the horse also follows behind her,

Not knowing what was happening, it was heading for home. Several men with their hideous faces came running out of the slaughterhouse, prepared to lead the horse back in. Finally the horse lay down at the side of the road...There was nothing Mother Wang could do but walk back into the courtyard, and the horse followed her back in. She scratched the top of the horse’s head, and slowly it lay down on the ground, seemingly about to go to sleep. Suddenly Mother Wang stood up and walked briskly towards the gate. At the head of the street she heard the sound of a gate slamming shut.

... She wept all the way home until her two sleeves were completely soaked with tears. It seemed as if she had just returned from a funeral procession.⁹³

Mother Wang’s emotional torture and psychological paralysis is touching. Symbolically, she has just attended a funeral of her companion, almost one of her family member: she has

⁹⁰ Ibid., 50.

⁹¹ Howard Goldblatt, trans., *The Field of Life and Death and Tales of Hulan River*, 32.

⁹² “Mother Wang got three bills. That should be adequate to pay the rent for a *mou* of land.” Ibid., 33.

⁹³ Ibid, 33-34.

raised it, taken care of it, and is also benefited from it. Now since she vicariously kills it, it is tantamount to a symbolic action to take away her own life force. “The sound of a gate slamming shut” behind her is a strident blow signaling her own doomed destiny, which is enforced and precipitated by the incarnated evil, the landlords:

A servant from the landlord was already waiting by the door. Landlords never let even a single penny go to waste on the peasants. The servant left with her money.

For Mother Wang, her day of agony was all for naught! Her whole life of agony was all for naught.⁹⁴

“Her whole life of agony was all for naught” is predetermined by the landlords who “let even a single penny go to waste on the peasants.” Therefore, the novel shares the view of Xiao Jun’s novel *Village in August* that “there were more evil forces afoot than those which had customarily tormented the peasants since time immemorial,”⁹⁵ although for Xiao Jun this evil force refers mainly to the Japanese invaders, which quite fits in with the discourse of the mainstream resistance literature; while for Xiao Hong, in addition to the peasants’ ingrained traditional mindsets brought about by the patriarchal society, the evil force has also an incarnated form. It is in this sense that she shows her courage to present life “as it is” rather than just follows the “call for arms” of the epochal “main melody”.

But if Mother Wang has no choice but to sacrifice the living stock at this moment, in real life in the following days she still takes care of Yueying before the latter hopelessly dies, and even has the courage to fight against this oppressed life imposed by the oppressors. She has encouraged her second husband, Zhao San, to join bravely in a rebellious scheme against

⁹⁴ Ibid., 34.

⁹⁵ Howard Goldblatt, *Hsiao Hong*, 47.

rent-accretion. Although shortly later, she has tried to kill herself by taking poison because she learns that her son by her first husband, being one of the “Red Whiskers,” is executed by the government; – it is only now that we learn her life experience: earlier she has divorced her former husband because of his abuse – when her suicide fails, she has taught her daughter to avenge for her brother. Her courageous behaviors are also greatly admired by her husband Zhao San, so even though the latter mistakes the death of the boy to be an outcome of his desire to keep a woman (a fantasy by himself), when he recalls Mother Wang’s tenacity, “he could not help but feeling admiration for the boy,” because “at least no one had dared to bully him while he was a bandit.”⁹⁶

But this latent plotline about a series of Mother Wang’s experience, together with the episode about Zhao San’s aborted scheme of violent rebellion against landlords’ increased rent, both of which contain the ideological information about class conflicts, is overshadowed by the secondary theme of the novel, the nationalist resistance, which is assumed mainly by the personae of Zhao San. The latter’s scheme of riot, though aborted because of a real incident of mistakenly-committed misdeed in the first part of the novel (taking a thief to be the one sent by landlords to burn his house, he accidentally kills him), becomes another subtle yet also important plot-point that leads to the development of the second part of the novel, in which he repudiates his weak mind of “conscience” towards the landlords and strengthens his national consciousness to fight the Japanese. The *raison d’être* of this new type of resistance is also offered: the Japanese deprive the villagers’ means of living by

⁹⁶ Ibid., 62.

forbidding them raising livestock and farming the land, thus driving them to rebellion; and they kill numerous villagers, some of whom their relatives. But the most often noted episode by scholars is still Zhao San's suddenly raised national consciousness,

Zhao San knew only that he was a Chinese. No matter how many times other people explained things to him, he was still unsure as to what class of Chinese he belonged. ...but he now represented the progress made by the entire village. In prior days he had not understood what a nation was. In prior days he could even have forgotten his own nationality!⁹⁷

The nationalistic discourse transpired from this statement (and from the overarching actions occupying the second part of the novel) obviously displaces the message of class conflicts expressed subtly yet forcefully in the first part. As if to legitimize this displacement, we are informed that although he has been oppressed to such an extent as to considering of a revolt, he “was still unsure” that he was oppressed by another class! Indeed, although this barely plausible mind now finds its incarnated enmity – the Japanese, this shifted priority that suddenly covers up the class problem is a miscalculated choice. Obviously, the writer's treatment of these two social contradictions is not skillful and balanced, thus the transition from one social contradiction of class conflicts to another contradiction of national conflicts appear abrupt and haste, without logical consistency and thematic coherence. Perhaps the only tenured connection between the two parts lies in the fact that the much-stressed persistent cycle in the first part has implied that if there is no fundamental transformation of the agricultural society and its ingrained and exacerbated class exploitation, a national resistance would not by itself bring about a qualitative change of the peasants' mindsets and their customary behaviors, including the patriarchal practice of subjugating women. But now

⁹⁷ Howard Goldblatt, trans., *The Field of Life and Death and Tales of Hulan River*, 86.

let us temporarily shift our attention to her way of dealing with this secondary motif: national resistance, in the second part of the story.

In general, the writer's description of the peasants' spontaneous resistance against the Japanese touches on the issue of peasants' awakening to a political consciousness, or sends out a message that "nationalism enables the poor village males to transcend their class status by giving them a new identity."⁹⁸ This is particularly shown in the character of Two-and-a-Half Li, who had not been willing to devote his aged goat for the sacrificial ritual of the peasants' oath of resistance; but after his wife and daughter are killed by the Japanese, he finally is willing to give up his cherished goat – although only by entrusting it to a friend – to join the ranks of the fighters. The awakened nationalist consciousness even beckons women into its ranks (because their husbands or their scions are killed by the Japanese): they reply to Zhao San's call to arms against the Japanese with the oath, "Yes, even if we are cut into a million pieces" (120). In this sense, while the work's "primary purpose" was surely not "to incite its readers to action against the Japanese" (though we also have to admit that it is indeed the author's intension to instigate patriotic sentiments of the readers for resistance efforts), the latter part of the novel is still indisputably "essentially...about the birth of resistance and political awareness."⁹⁹

It is the consensus that because the writer neither had resistance experiences, nor did she have any direct knowledge of the atrocity of the Japanese, that her description of the

⁹⁸ Lydia Liu, *Translingual Practice*, 208.

⁹⁹ Howard Goldblatt, *Hsiao Hong*, 47.

resistance is not convincing. Nevertheless, her incompetence in treating these materials is not merely because of these empirical matters, as writers do not necessarily always have to engage personally and directly with the war. And we can also note that her presentation of stories about the Japanese ferocity, though often not done through vivid representation of bloody scene but merely via vicarious retelling or simply through a sentence of message (for example, “Two-and-a-Half Li’s pockmarked wife was killed. Tunnel legs as well”), still can effectively convey the messages of the evilness of the Japanese – thus the peasants’ lack of choice but to revolt. Especially since the contemporary readers had their pre-knowledge to imagine the real happenings through the succinct information, due to the bombardment of such descriptions rapidly emerging at the time, the literary effect is not necessarily compromised. And if we can acknowledge the fact that the novel “holds an undeniably important position in the social history of the twentieth century, for its influence on the youth of its day was substantial,”¹⁰⁰ then its artistic appeal is also beyond doubt. The story’s problem lies elsewhere – in its diversion from the subject by inserting a message which is not closely knitted into the plotline of a gradually intensified resistance.

This message is conveyed by Golden Bough’s experience of being forced to sell her body, when she leaves the village to the city of Harbin to seek job opportunity, where she finally settles down to mend the cloths of customers. Obviously, as noted, the placement of this episode here only “effectively destroys what little intensity of feeling the author has

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 49.

created against the Japanese.”¹⁰¹ What we need to ask, however, is why this bizarre design?

Would not this gifted writer realize the existence of this jarring juxtaposition?

Obviously, here the writer includes some autobiographical elements, and her presentation of this dire picture, a disappointing episode, is divergent from many works of resistant literature at the time which single-mindedly eulogize resistant efforts. The complex and conflicting message is best conveyed by the woman’s painful proclamation,

Golden Bough snorted, “I used to hate men; now I hate the Japanese.” She finally reached the nadir of personal grief: “Do I hate the Chinese? Then there is nothing else for me to hate.”¹⁰²

What this complaint articulates is that she now hates the Japanese and the Chinese (men) simultaneously. The inclusion of the element of a leftist story¹⁰³ here has lent it to many interesting interpretations couched on feminist perspectives.¹⁰⁴ It seemingly presents an ironic picture of the resistant ranks: Are the Chinese men, or better, the Chinese society, with its patriarchal gender relations and class oppression and exploitation, less evil than the Japanese (colonization)?

What these feminist viewpoints bypass, however, is that here it is less a paradox or conflict between patriotic resistance and gender equality, even less about the collaboration between traditional patriarchy and nationalism, but it only shows that without a fundamental adjustment of class structure and the change of patriarchal system that undergirds this class

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 49.

¹⁰² Ibid., 100, with my slight modification of the translation to let it be more literally faithful to the original text.

¹⁰³ In addition to her own tragic experience, we need to note that she is merely “sharing the fate of other hapless women who have reached life’s lowest rung” Ibid., 49.

¹⁰⁴ For instance, see the relevant discussions of the novel in Lydiu Liu, *Translingual Practice*

structure, the national consciousness is still a vulnerable political awareness. The new collective national identity irrespective of class distinction will not by itself solve the domestic social inequality. However, what compromises the narration here is that it does not show how this concern over the existing unfair gender inequality, which is predicated upon the class hierarchy, could be organically integrated into the resistant efforts. For the latter, the message is sometimes rambling and not cohered with each other: Two-and-a-Half goes to pursue the resistance is for the revenge of his wife (and child) who are subjected to the atrocity of the Japanese, but this important reason is only briefly mentioned; and sometimes the message does not exist at all: as said, Zhao San in the first part of the novel has tried to revolt against the landlords, but in the second part the landlords appear nowhere.

All these drawbacks that impair the artistic unity of the novel are not merely out of the author's careless negligence, but it is probably because the writer fell into the pitfall of her feminine (or feminist) concerns, thus being incapable of integrating the three aspects of social contradiction – patriarchal gender relations, (which is undergird by) class oppression, and nationalist resistance (which helps to lessen, but not to solve, the two other problems) – together in her mind and in her work. Therefore, it appears that “men” are the overarching enemy of women, even without a distinction between the fighters and the invaders, between the oppressor and the oppressed.

Indeed, without a new horizon beyond the existing social structure and its culture, the goal of “resistance and state-building” (*kanzhan jianguo*) could not be satisfactorily achieved. This is so not only because, without a new revolutionary ethics and moral value, the resistant

army can commit the same misdeeds as the bandits (they discard their badly injured soldiers), but this inhuman, customary practice also weakens the morale of the populace and destroys the image of the resisters themselves, as best exemplified by the suicide of an old mother with her three-year old granddaughter. The old mother sacrifices her only son for the resistant efforts; she denounces the villager for not taking care of him, and hangs herself and her granddaughter together. This is also shown in the narrative portraying the peasants' view regarding the politically ambiguous "Patriotic Army:" "Some of the men fell in behind it. They did not know how to be patriotic, nor did they know what good would come of their patriotism, but they only knew they were hungry."¹⁰⁵ But the author seemingly notes the difference between this army and certain "revolutionary army" In some passing narrative. So Li Qingshan refuses to join the self-styled "Patriotic Army" for the reason that it is consisted of bandits, while praises the other one: "What's good about the Revolutionary Army is that they don't do things rashly. They have discipline. This time I really believe in them."¹⁰⁶ Though he also complains that this army, composed of mainly inexperienced students, is short of military efficiency;¹⁰⁷ nevertheless, a new form of army with a new discipline is obviously, though only subtly, called for here.

Humanist Concern and the Mediocrity of "Resistance Stories"

If in the novel we have seen that Xiao Hong could not differentiate clearly various layers of social contradictions, partially out of her prevailing humanistic emotions and weak

¹⁰⁵ Xiao Hong, *The Field of Life and Death and Tales of Hulan River*, 104.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 103-104.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, see section 13.

capability of political/theoretical thinking, then in the second period of her creative career, she kept her spontaneous humanist spirit unabated. This brought out some touching pieces. But also because of her reservation towards participation in real wartime reality and her apathetic indifference to real social politics, although she, out of patriotism, aimed to produce some “resistance stories,” her humanistic feeling oftentimes only led to some stories with mediocre quality.

Around November 1934, because the newspaper where Xiao Jun worked experienced serious financial crisis, and because their earlier contact with Lu Xun received the latter’s favorable response, they left for Shanghai after their five months stay in Qingdao.

Out of her lonely life in childhood, Xiao Hong desired much for a surrogate father figure to satisfy her yearning for love and safeguard her sense of being protected. Apparently Lu Xun played such a role. She often came to the master’s home for solace and consultation. Under Lu Xun’s patronage, her second book *Market Street* (Shangshi Jie), which is a collection of autobiographical essays about her life in Harbin, came out in less than one year after the publication of the previous novel and sold well. In November 1936, *The Bridge* (Qiao) was also published. It includes mostly sketches, but the only two short stories included, with their symbolic skill and subtle yet touching humanistic leitmotif, both show excellent literary quality. It confirms the writer’s continuous concerns over the life of the subaltern and the oppressed, but what is outstanding is her particular emphasis on human dignity and humanistic values.

“Hands” is about a country girl’s experience of discrimination in the school by classmates and teachers around her. Cherished the only educational opportunity her family gives her among her brothers and sisters, she works hard with a strong will; yet with little help from the others, the many difficult issues she faces in her studies prevent her from achieving what she desires. Furthermore, her humble family background – she is from a dyer’s family – together with her blackened hands out of her tough labor, becomes her original sin. She is evaded by her elitist classmates, only allowed to sleep on a hallway bench, and becoming the target of their satire and teasing. The epitome of the social pariah, she is refused to enter the elite club – though nominally she is given the opportunity of receiving a proper education. A stringent class-divide still exists despite the rhetoric of equality. What makes us moved that contributes to its literary effects, in addition to her naivete, is her all-forgiving, and even self-effacing manner. She never shows resentment towards those snobbish people. Her experience not only reveals the omnipresent class division (in the form of discrimination between the superior and the inferior, in terms of intellect and social status) in the society, but also bespeaks the predicament of the “New Culture” enlightenment program which falls short of attaining its proclaimed goal of an authentic equality among all peoples. When the headmistress says “when one is filthy her hand is also dirty,” we cannot help but thinking of the other way. Obviously, only in a different social structure can her treatment and destiny be fundamentally altered.

“The Bridge” uses a physical object that appears as the transitory medium between a boy and his mother (a nanny for a social rich) and between the poor and the wealthy of the

divided local community as the symbolic vehicle to deliver its central theme about class hierarchy. A dilapidated bridge across a ditch, with only two railings remained, prevents the crisscrossing of the river between the two separated banks, where people of differing class strata reside respectively. "If only the railings, too, had disappeared, then she would have felt easier about it; then she could believe that the ditch was a natural one, and that man would be powerless to conquer it." This epigraphic sentence has invited much critical attention, but has not received full explication. If the ditch is "unnatural," then it is manmade, and it implies that men can and should clear away the arbitrary obstacle. This sort of symbolic language is used cleverly throughout the text, a narrative that focuses on the nanny's attitude towards his son and the child of the rich whom she helps to raise.

The mother is forced to steal food for her child; her monotonous muttering is sentimental though it might appear a little unnatural: "you poor little devil, in your destiny there should have been a bridge." The wish that her child can cross the divide, to evade his predetermined destiny, is conveyed vicariously. When her son is beaten by the child that she helps to raise, she dares not intervene publicly; but when the reverse case happens, she has to chasten harshly her sweetheart. However, it is the new bridge which now seemingly connects the divided that leads to the tragedy, which implies the superficial and ineffective vehicle to patch up the deep, wide chasm, the gulf between classes. When at the end of the story she learns that her son falls into the river because of his eagerness to meet his mother, the description of her reaction is short and non-melodramatic, nevertheless it successfully captures the rarely-noticed yet cruel daily happenings of the society, and the woman's guilty

feeling of being a mother who had been forced to abandon her child; a touching atmosphere is produced accordingly. Alternating between short narrative and long, sensitive psychological movement (through interior monologue and psychonarration) of the mother as the single protagonist, with a poetic language in her characteristic episodic plot structure, the prose is well-written. While containing leftist message, it bears a strong tone of liberal humanism, which subtly yet emphatically poses the question: how to redress substantially the inequality between the rich and the poor.

However, this apparent humanitarian concern frequently shifts to a humanistic spirit, which we can clearly witness in “At the Foot of the Mountain” (Shanxia), a story written in 1933 and included in a later collection. Here the message of class inequality is tone down, while the self-dignity of the poor is standing out. A story about a maid servant’s sense of pride out of her dismissal from her duty by her host family (due to her mother’s mistake in heeding to her jealous neighbor’s advice to require an unreasonable increase of salary), it shows the author’s interests lies less in the social problem of class politics than in the humanistic concern over the moralistic value of the subaltern.

Between September and October of this year, Xiao Hong published five stories and sketches, which later on were collected in *On the Oxcart*, coming out in public only in the middle of 1937. Among them, the title piece stands out as the one bearing the strongest social concern. The “story” within the story is delivered by the heroine, Wuyun Sao, a maid employed by the maternal grandfather of the narrator (who is a girl and a relative of the driver of the ox-driven cart). In the cart, she tells the girl and the driver the tragedy of her

husband, a soldier. It invites the reader's interests by keeping the emotional intensity of the woman and the suspense about her husband's destiny unabated; only until the end the enigma is vicariously revealed in a totally unsentimental way: he was executed on site, before the band of deserters that he leads met the same punishment. The juxtaposition of a subtly-conveyed, barely noticed tragic drama with the straitened rural life that the heroine and the coach driver drag on, show a skillful manipulation of literary technique to bring out messages of social criticism. This story about the dire reality of the people living in a circumstance of rampant warlordism in north China is a representative piece of "critical realism." It also shows the inheritance of the tradition of "native place literature" (xiangtu xiaoshuo), which was initiated in the early 1920s, and was popular ever since.

As said, the short stories in this period show a strong humanist concern, though they are not very different from her stories of the earlier period which apparently stress class conflicts. What this indicates, however, is the ambiguous distinction between stories with the spirit of liberal humanism and stories with leftist information. It is hard to separate the two is not merely because in modern China, they both fundamentally narrate the lamentable, unfortunate life of the downtrodden and the oppressed, thus both belonging to the category of "critical realism;" but it is also because Xiao Hong, as a writer with a spontaneous humanistic feeling and little equipment of theoretical knowledge of class politics, stops short of exploring further areas apart from what she observed within her own (somewhat narrow) life circle – the latter of which, furthermore, mainly comes from her childhood experience.

Without a broadened social experience and without taking part in the dramatically shifted social reality, the largely unchanged pattern shows a predicament difficult to break through.

Although Xiao Hong now found a sense of home under Lu Xun's indulgence and care, her relationship with Xiao Jun was worsened. The latter's "overpowering protectiveness, intellectual disdain, and physically demanding attitude toward her" was unbearable to her.¹⁰⁸ The emotional crisis forced her leave for Japan in the summer of 1935. But her feeling of loneliness and frustration was not overcome when she was there, because she barely knew the language and had rare friends there. This self-imposed sequestration ended when she learned of Lu Xun's death on October 19.

After returning to China, she reestablished her ties with Xiao Jun, and for a while they were in friendly union. Acquiring acquaintance with more friends, Xiao Hong had been in high spirits for a moment. But Xiao Jun's male-chauvinistic manners remained, and she was abused quite often. With the outbreak of the full-scale Resistance War, they moved to Wuhan. The city had just become the new center for literary activities. The Chinese Writer's Anti-Aggression Association that was just established there advocated writers' active participation in frontline and village life. But Xiao Hong's idea was different. While many other writers held that to keep being separated from the wartime reality and to remain in the city would be a great obstacle for them to be in touch with the people, Xiao Hong held the

¹⁰⁸ Howard Goldblatt, *Hsiao Hung*, 56.

same opinion as of Hu Feng's,¹⁰⁹ believing that "life is everywhere." For her, even "taking refuge during an air-raid alert is a part of wartime living conditions;" for "the problem is that we haven't grasped its significance."¹¹⁰ However, her works during this period show a quality of shallowness and mediocrity, which we will soon analyze.

Because of Xiao Jun's enthusiasm for joining real resistance activities, Xiao Hong had to accompany him to Linfen, Shanxi Province, to work in the People's Revolutionary University. It is here that Xiao Hong met Ding Ling, who had just arrived there with the Northwest Battlefield Service Troupe that she led. Xiao Hong's experience apparently reminded the latter of her own earlier days, and they became closely associated. Nevertheless, she never had had the thought of becoming a revolutionary soldier such as Ding Ling. One month later, the bombing of Japanese airplanes forced them to leave again. As the university headed towards Yan'an, Xiao Jun again pondered the possibility of becoming a fighter in real life. Longing for a peaceful and secure life, Xiao Hong urged him not to go, but to no avail. As "personal problems remained uppermost in her mind," she ended their relationship and "was forming a new liaison with a man whom she didn't particularly like personally," Duanmu Hongliang.¹¹¹ In February 1938, she became the latter's common-law wife.

In April this new couple was returning to Wuhan. In Xi'an, they again met Ding Ling. Xiao refused again the latter's suggestion for her to go to Yan'an, due to its harsh material

¹⁰⁹ After Lu Xun died, Hu Feng became a self-styled holder of "Lu Xun's banner" and Xiao Hong's works were mostly published in his journal *July* at this period.

¹¹⁰ See "Kanzhan yilai de wenyi huodong dongtai he zhanwang" (Development and Attitude in the Literature and Arts Movement since the Beginning of the War of Resistance), *Qiyue*, No.7 (January 16, 1938), 195. Quoted from Howard Goldblatt, *Hsiao Hung*, 80.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

environment and her long-term skepticism of any political forces. She finally went to Chongqing by her own, as her new husband had arrived there earlier. But Duanmu had been tired of her. When she arrived there, she gave birth to a dead infant. She lamented that “I am always walking alone ... It’s as though I am fated to walk alone;”¹¹² nevertheless, it is aptly noted that it is “her peculiar brand of tunnel-vision” that lends her many problematic choices “a degree of inevitability.”¹¹³

In Chongqing, she had produced a story collection *A Cry in the Wilderness* (Kuangye de huhan), and a first draft of her autobiographical “novel” *Tales of Hulan River* (Hulanhe zhuan). Overall, the stories included in *A Cry in the Wilderness* display the writer’s efforts to contribute her energy to war efforts, to join the currents of resistance literature yet without doing simplified propaganda. Nevertheless, the mediocrity and lack of meaningful theme of these stories only prove the impossibility to achieve the goal without experiencing the new social reality emerging in the war-time life.

The title piece of the collection is a long short story vicariously touches on the subject of resistance, yet it is a dramatic regression compared to her first novel. In terms of theme, it is very ambiguous. In all aspects, it reads like a conflict between filial love and nationalistic consciousness. The father loves his son, and has an anxiety over the possibility that the latter has joined the resistant guerilla. At the beginning, there is a long digression describing the mother’s activity of praying for his son’s safety (she makes sacrifice at the family altar). This

¹¹² Mei Lin, “Yi Xiao Hong” (In Remembrance of Xiao Hong), *Mei Lin Wenji* (Hong Kong: Lison Book Company, 1955), 35.

¹¹³ Howard Goldblatt, *Hsiao Hong*, 87.

episode might partially aim to strengthen the anxiety of the family's, especially the father's, sense of distress over the safety of their son; but perhaps the writer devoted too much of her personal feelings out of empathy. After this digression, the plot finally develops further when the son returns home informing his parents that he was only away for hunting. When the father knows shortly later that his son is actually employed by the Japanese to construct a railway, he even feels proud of him, because to him his son becomes a wage-earner. But this presentation is in conflict with his nationalistic consciousness, as shown earlier in his monologue over the courageous behavior of the patriotic guerilla fighters. Yet, we are even informed that the father feels his son being "far-sighted, considerate, and capable," and boasts it to the villagers. However, it turns out that his son is indeed an underground fighter who is working secretly to explode a train. When the father is informed that his son is arrested by the Japanese, in the mood verging on madness, he staggers out searching for his son in a blooming windstorm. But what does his cry in the wilderness signify? It seems that the author does not see very clearly the relation between the parental love that she aims to eulogize and the patriotic resistance she vicariously presents, to the extent that it becomes a paradox or an ethical dilemma between individual love and national sacrifice, which reminds us her early unsuccessful story "Flying-kite Observation."

At the most, the story can lend it to be read as a transformation of a man with weak patriotic consciousness to one with an awakened political awareness, as a result of the unexpected experience of his heroic son; but this message is very weak. This surmise is partially justified by the other stories in the collection, which have more salient thematic

motif of resistance. Still, they are all digressive and ambiguous. “The Child’s Speech” (Haizi de yanjiang), written in October 1938, for instance, narrates a young soldier’s inexperienced attempt at a public speech. His immature appearance as shown in his innocent patriotic talk invites a friendly laughter from the audience, which he mistakenly takes as mockery. Almost a sketch, the story does not have much literary or educational value. “Yellow River” (Huang He) is apparently also related to the resistance motif, yet in the rambling and aimless discussions between a boatman and a soldier, mostly about their daily lives, we can hardly pinpoint any central concern. Except in the last dialogue, in which the soldier is being asked: “if China wins this time, will the ordinary people lead a better life?” With the soldier’s confirmative answer, the exchange barely gives out a feeble patriotic message. But the story might be more aptly interpreted as expressing an anxiety over the import of the resistant efforts, which is also conveyed in another story, “Vague Expectations” (Menglong de qidai). It tells of an innocent maid’s longing for marrying herself to her boss’ bodyguard. In her night dream about his return from the front lines, she is informed by the latter that “I’ve come back to establish a home for us; from today on everything will be fine.” This is followed by a self-contradictory sentence: “We had to win; how could we have lost? It doesn’t make any sense!” She then “had a gentle smile on her face.” The “story” might also be interpreted as an anxiety over the prospectus of the war, in particular over the destiny of the couple, but it has no salient central leitmotif.

The writer’s ineptitude in representing the wartime society furthermore is exemplified in her last novel *Ma Bole*, which was completed when she was in Hong Kong. On the surface,

it is a work of satire literature, which is generally regarded as following Lao She's style of lampoon. This should be seen as a progress of the writer's horizon towards a broader reality with its gigantic historical momentum and dynamic. Yet, the protagonist that she aims to satirize lacks the literary "typicality," which probably is due to the fact that the writer merely based her model on the persons around her. However, while the latter might be vulgar, they not necessarily have any representative value in terms of "national character." Simply put, the protagonist Ma Bole is not a "typical" member of the wartime petit-bourgeois intellectual class stratum that the writer intended to portray.

To be sure, there are many traits of him that can be regarded as broadly referring to the defects of Chinese intellectuals in particular, and the middle-class citizens in general at the wartime: His life philosophy is to flight away from any tough situation and difficult question, which is materialized in his experience of exile, the major event running through the text. The prototype of this character has appeared a little earlier in a short story "Flight from Danger" (Taonan), where he is named He Nansheng. Both men articulate the complaints, "When the time comes, then what'll we do?" and "Those God damned Chinese!" They are both hypocritical in terms of their assumed patriotic gestures, hypocritically courageous behaviors, mercenary mannerism, and snobbish attitudes towards Chinese and the foreigners discriminatively. His manner of "self-serving and self-deluding," and his way of being "content to mouth platitudes, air his own numerous grievances and real imagined...and bask

in his own pessimism,”¹¹⁴ are indeed common features of quite a lot “petit-bourgeois” citizens. The writer’s critique through her exposure of some other less significant characters, such as Ma Bole’s blindly foreign-worshipping, Westerners-fawning father, is also on the point with comic effects. But the protagonist’s “sometimes raucous, sometimes pathetic, sometimes cunning, and sometimes hapless bundle of paradoxes,”¹¹⁵ just like these random and incoherently-connected adjectives generalized by Howard Goldblatt show, is not unified into a personality that has an integrated character. Many narrowly-linked episodes of events are put together, but most of the times the satire does not appear humorous.¹¹⁶

Economic considerations might be one of the reasons that contributed to the digressive narration of this work, the parts of which were serialized in a Hong Kong journal (and it was not completed before she died). But Xiao Hong might also intend it to echo the popular current of wartime satire literature, the masterpieces of which were produced by such writers as Zhang Tianyi (1906-1985), Sha Ting (1904-1992), and Ai Wu (1904-1992). She also probably aimed to carry on the tradition of Lao She’s humorous satire, which was produced during the late 1920’s and early 1930’s,¹¹⁷ as the similar stylistic languages show. But while they “both directed their satirical barbs at many of the unsavory aspects of the Chinese character,”¹¹⁸ Xiao Hong’s work was not on a par with Lao She’s. This was so not only for

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 99.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 98.

¹¹⁶ It is Howard Goldblatt’s view that “the major flaw in Ma Po-le is the author’s tendency occasionally to overdo the humor that she so uncharacteristically brings to the novel. ... it sometimes degenerates into burlesque and grows a bit tiresome.” There is also some “overworked detail” and “somewhat characteristic carelessness” which leaves “too many loose ends, especially regarding her characters.” Ibid., 102.

¹¹⁷ Howard Goldblatt has made this point. See Ibid., 99.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

technical reasons, but also because the time had changed: the enlightenment literature could not keep in step with the new epochal tide, and Xiao Hong did not have much opportunity to observe the newly developed character of the intellectual class. Thus while other writers of satire literature could vividly portray the “unsavory character” of arbitrary bureaucrats and coward intellectuals with effectiveness, Xiao Hong’s work did not leave strong impression on the readers, now and then.

Tales of Hulan River and a Dispossessed Nostalgia

With the death of Lu Xun, Xiao Hong lost not only her surrogate father, but also her intellectual mentor. As observed, throughout her life, she did not join any political party, nor was she active in any significant literary organization, which was quite unusual for most of writers at the time. Even her long memorial of the revolutionary thinker, written in 1939, only narrates some “trivial” affairs, but “makes no attempt to delve into the workings of his mind or to discuss his political activities, influence, position,” etc.¹¹⁹ Apparently, Ma Bole’s “flight from the war, from the family, and mainly from reality” (words of Glodblatt’s; and we should add one, flight from politics), is shared by the writer herself, which proves to be more tragic than the character, however. Indeed, in this third and also the last period of the writer’s life, Xiao Hong furthermore struggled to retreat to her own narrowed life space for security and peace. However, as most part of China was under imperialist colonization and in resistance war, this individualistic consideration not only did not bring to her what she desired, but also led her to various irresolvable predicaments, and finally cost her life. In the

¹¹⁹ Howard Goldblatt, *Hsiao Hung*, 92.

wartime reality, there was no peaceful place for an ordinary couple, against what the seemingly fortunate Eileen Zhang had fantasized. Disregarding the advice of most of her friends, when Chongqing was subjected to the Japanese's air-attack, in the spring 1940 she again decided to flee, now to Hong Kong, where it turned out to be the locale of her premature, tragic death.

There, "Spring in a Small Town" (Xiao Cheng sanyue) is the writer's last creation, which is beautifully written yet has no much significance, as it is basically a simple story about a semi-traditional fille's unfulfilled love towards a stripling, who is a "new youth," her forced betrothal to an ugly man, and her sickness and death out of the unrequited longing and sorrow. No matter whether the theme of the story is regarded as a traditional one of a-beauty-meet-a-talent, or as a May Fourth enlightenment narrative about the awakened dreaming of the modern, it was not new and freshing any more. While it can also be afforded to an allegorical reading – by telling us a story of an immature death of an energetic youth, a buried and passed spring, it signifies the unfortunate destiny of the unblessed modern surrounded by a traditional social web – the story is better to be read "literally": Xiao Hong's re-rendition of the centuries-old narrative is probably a nostalgic lamentation of her own unfulfilled yearning for love.

This sorrowful tune extends into her last masterpiece, *Tales of Hulan River*. If it can be acknowledged that "the most noticeable effects" from her experiences of these years were her "strongly developed feminist tendencies, pronounced self-pity, and a further drawing

inward,”¹²⁰ then all these features are crystallized in the novel. Mao Dun’s appraisal of its aesthetic features is still the most trenchant, “it is a narrative poem, a colorful genre painting, a haunting song.”¹²¹ In fact, it is a cultural critique founded on a personal memory of childhood experience, thus it has two observational angles: one is the adult narrative, which is premised upon the other angle of the children’s horizon. This narratological setup simultaneously strengthens and undercuts its thematic effectiveness. But I will argue that the ultimate reason for its incapability to achieve its potential still lies in the culturalist discourse that the writer relies upon.

The first chapter lays out the general natural and humanistic environment of the small town. Symbolically, in the very start it is presented as a “frozen land.” This apparent presentation of a still nature soon turns to a mapping of the cultural physiology of the country folks and their way of life. Four cases of instance vividly show the local people’s tradition-bound mentality and the idiosyncratic mannerism that it brings about: first, their ignorance and refusal to accept new knowledge and modern practice, as illustrated by a modern-styled dentist’s experience of changing to become a midwife in order to make a living because of her lack of customers; secondly, their want of rationalization and the more problematic, their ways to adapt the new to meet the old, as presented through an anecdotal tale: while the “agricultural school” nominally “is for the study of raising silkworms,” it is humorously revealed to be just a place that “when autumn arrives the silkworms are fried in

¹²⁰ Ibid., 32.

¹²¹ Mao Dun, “Preface to *The Hulan River*,” *Mao Dun Wenji* (Beijing: Renmin Wenxue, 1961), X, pp.89-98.

oil, and the teachers enjoy several sumptuous meals;”¹²² the third case which occupies the largest textual space none other than bespeaks their fundamental life philosophy: an attitude of passive existence, avoiding any challenge and new way of thinking, evading real praxis but engaging in pleasure-seeking idle talk, as typified by their ways of dealing with a mudhole that lies in the road, which is a topic of idle conversation but never the object of an concerted action; and finally, their ingrained habitus of dragging on a muddled life by self-cheating, which is represented by their handling of an infected, dead swine that is reminiscent of “the emperor’s robe.”

This emaciated life philosophy is further revealed as being premised upon a tedious life cycle of “birth, age, sickness, and death,” which, however, has more the imprints of an agricultural society than being a universal form of life. This is evidenced by the two forms of re-production: physical reproduction and men’s self-reproduction, which are closely intertwined with each other, as illustrated by three incidents: a murder case in which two apprentices fight for the owning of a woman in the dyer’s workshop and as a result, one kills the other; the scuffle between two employees of a bean-curd workshop accidentally breaks the leg of a donkey, which is a big event for a woman, who is the mother of the man breaking the donkey’s leg. Her eyes become blind out of her long-time crying – this is because the turn-the-mille donkey is the key instrument for physical reproduction; and finally, the starved-to-death of a bastard child. The backwardness and the muddled life of the local

¹²² Xiao Hong, *Hulanhe Zhuan*, For English translations, see *The Field of Life and Death and Tales of Hulan River*, trans. Howard Goldblatt (Bloomington & London: Indiana Univ. Press, 1979), 116.

community in this way is shown to be both the result and the cause: the suffocation of one's desire, the ignorant way to live one's life, and the retarded development of relations of reproduction are all correlated with each other. They are a social totality that is hard to be separated.

This centuries-old, persistent totality facilitates the growth of a mentality of resignation: "man lives to eat food and wear clothes;" and, "when a man dies, that's the end of it" (136-137). They hold such an attitude is not because they do not cherish life, but because they are forced to drag on such a listless living. Nevertheless, they do want to enrich their life; the way they achieve this, however, is again to do a self-benumbing job of building magnificent ornament-houses for the dead, and to pay much emphasis on eating. The description of the selling and buying of flat cakes, dough twists, rice pudding, and bean-curd presents a seemingly self-fulfilled, highly-poetic, simple and naive, idyllic way of life, the norm of an agrarian, pre-industrial society. Even the natural scene of the phantasmagoric change of the shapes of "fire cloud" provides an enjoyable leisure picture for the carefree form of life. "Spring, summer, autumn, winter – the seasonal cycle continues inexorably, and always has it since the time immemorial," the narrator laments; only the last sentence of this chapter offers an ominous tone: "those who have not yet been taken away are left at the mercy of the wind, the frost, the rain, and the snow ... as also always."

The second chapter delves more into the spiritual world of the people by presenting vividly various forms of local customs and numerous festival parties. Ostensibly, it is "more about ghosts and goblins than about people, more a tale of superstition and fear than the

interaction of human beings;”¹²³ however, the “interaction of human beings,” especially the gender relations in which women are always subordinated to men in matrimonial affairs, leading a less-than-happy life, is subtly presented everywhere. The seamless integration of the sorrowful women affairs with the apparently boisterous folk customs skillfully presents the local world as a “natural,” long-perpetuated social totality.

With a change of narrative persona from the third-person one to the first-person, the narrative turns from a “custom study” to the human society and in particular to a more intimate personal world. The third chapter delivers the narrator’s remembrance of her close relations with her grandfather – his love and care of his innocent, little granddaughter in the cold and stifling household, as well as the latter’s childish psychology of curiosity and her eagerness for love. Like the first two chapters, here the secular affairs are oftentimes observed from a children’s perspective, and because of this the text is filled with a lively atmosphere.

In the following chapter, however, this children’s perspective is mixed up with an adult’s narrative (though still couched in a first-person narrative) of the downfallen condition of the family garden – which is a “natural being” yet a cultural symbol traditionally signifying the flowery prosperity and sophisticated cultivation of the gentry-class world. A specific reference is applied to a steel plow, the most important tool for production in the agrarian society,

¹²³ Howard Goldblatt, *Hsiao Hong*, 107.

I don't know why, but the steel plow didn't look as though any new life was associated with it; meanwhile, it was falling apart and covered with rust. Nothing was born of it, nothing grew from it – it just lay there turning rusty. If you touched it with your finger, flakes fell to the ground, and although it was made of steel, it had by this time deteriorated so much that it looked as though it were made of clay that was on the verge of crumbling to pieces. When viewed alongside its mate, the wooden trough, there was absolutely no comparison – it was covered with shame. If this plow has been a person it would doubtless have wept and wailed loudly: "I'm made of better stuff than the rest of you, so why has my condition weakened to its present state?"

Not only was it deteriorating and rusting, but when it rained, the rusty pigment that covered it began to run, spreading with the rain water over to its companion, the hog trough, the bottom half of which had already been stained the color of rust. The finger of murky water spread farther and farther away, staining the ground they touched the color of rusty yellow.¹²⁴

The symbolic message is more than clear: a corrupted and outdated mode of production not only is deteriorating, but also stains and corrupts the land and the people. This natural-historical object is undergoing its "shameful," "rusting" and disintegrating period.

Just like this listless, still object, we are informed that "my home" is also "a dreary one." This is the refrain the narrator numerously articulates. In addition, the country bumpkins who live in the three dilapidated old rooms attached to the house lead a squalid existence;¹²⁵ they depend on the nature to get food (they are quite happy with the mushroom growing up in the roof of their rooms, not heeding to the possibility of poisonous elements within); they are selfish and parochial; and their stoical way of life contains a deeply concealed, hopeless sorrow,

Their songs (during and after they're making the noodles) were not an expression of the joys of their work; rather they were like sounds of someone laughing with tears in his eyes.

Stoically they accepted their hardships: "You say that the life I live is a pitiable one; well, that's all right with me. In your eyes I am in mortal danger, but my life gives me

¹²⁴ Xiao Hong, *The Field of Life and Death and Tales of Hulan River*, 209-210.

¹²⁵ For the narrator, "from the outside these buildings didn't look bad. But to my eyes there was an emptiness about them." *Ibid.*, 210.

satisfaction. And if I were not satisfied, what then? Isn't life made up some of pain than pleasure anyway?" (218)

Their negligence of the dangerous condition of the dilapidated house is not out of their manliness, but it again is a result of their shortsighted, self-conceited life philosophy. "As for the question of whether or not the building would someday collapse, and whether it would bring good fortune or ill to those inside, that was considered by everyone something too far in the future to warrant any thought" (Ibid).

Having laid out the general lifestyle and spiritual world of the county folks, in which their vulnerable character of an ingrained inertia and weak-mindedness are once again stressed, chapter five through seven is devoted to three concrete case studies of their mentality and behavior, in which a macabre murder stands out.

We are already informed at the end of the fourth chapter the background of a cater family, for which there is always a sorceress-dancing being performed there, a superstitious practice for the health of its matriarch. The sounds of drums were mournful, which "confused one's sense of time" (220). We are told that on the surface,

This family was more blessed than any other in the compound, with its three generations living together. Their family traditions were the best defined and the neatest: they treated one another with respect; there was mutual understanding and good feelings among the siblings, and a great deal of love between parent and child.

Nevertheless, beneath this exemplary surface, there are always internecine fights between siblings, which is the characteristics of traditional Chinese extended household in which several generations lived together. Although this "model household" leaves almost everyone the impression that "providence has smiled on old Hu's family, and one day wealth will come to them as well," a gruesome incident narrated in detail in chapter five offers an appalling

case of the maltreatment and final murder of a child bride by superstitious convention. She is abused merely because her robust appearance and bold manner contradicts the concept that the tradition holds for a newly married woman, thus a process of disciplinarization is regarded as a necessity – this was a usual practice perpetuated in traditional China, and most of the wrongdoers themselves had undergone the same “training” when they were newly married to the family. They are both the victim and the injurers: the sufferings are oftentimes the perpetrators of their own destiny, out of the traditional mindset. Here, a subtle exposure of the ignorance of the neighbors is also presented with their curiosity and cold indifference towards the public punishment of the young girl. The episode is reminiscent of many May Fourth enlightenment stories which were popular two decades ago before this novel was written.

The next chapter is about “a family outsider,” Second Uncle You, whom the writer had described in an earlier story with that title. Although the man is a close relative of the narrator’s father (and in reality the author’s, too), his now resourceless status contributes to his downtrodden life in the household. It is aptly observed that as “a loser who has developed register of queer ways he invites the rancorous teasing of the whole family including the servants.”¹²⁶ He himself also seems to yield to the concept that destitute man owns no rights to many things. Still, his sense of bitterness bears a subtle tone of class resentment,

... He started cursing even smaller things...if there were birds flying overhead and something dirty landed on his sleeve or somewhere, he would shake it off while he turned his head towards the sky and spoke to the birds that by that time had already flown by,

¹²⁶ Vibeke Bordahl, “entry of *Sketches of Hulan River*,” *Chinese Novels of The Period 1900-1949*, 180.

“You dirty...hah! You sure know how to aim, right here on my sleeve...what are you, blind? If you have to drop something, then drop it on someone who’s wearing silk or satin! Drop it on me and you just waste...you bunch of crippled beggars...”¹²⁷

But in actuality he is a kind-hearted man with an innocent animism. He refrains from eating lamb because in his childhood, his life has been saved with the help of a goat’s milk. What he demands from the family is respect from the others; which, just like love and care is what the narrator (a persona of the author herself) desperately longs for, he substantially lacks. If the family buys something and does not give him a share or a portion, he would vicariously rebuke; but if he is given, he would say: “Your Second Uncle You does not eat it, you take it!” He steals some things from the host to sell in order to get some pocket money, yet when the cases are juxtaposed with the child narrator’s own analogous deeds, both feel greatly embarrassed; the comic effect of which dispels any moralistic qualms that might emerge.

The last person being introduced is about a poor mill worker, Feng Waizuizi, or Hare-lip Feng. He is honest and very nice to the child narrator. But the most important thing about him is that he is courageous enough to acquire a beautiful and robust wife from a peasant family, which invites the indignation of almost all (apart from the grandfather who apparently harbors sympathy towards him). They had praised the woman for her appearance before, but now they charge her for not obeying woman’s virtue. Defying traditional customs strong-mindedly, the woman unfortunately dies when she gives birth to a second son. The caring husband shows a tenacious perseverance against all odds to raise their scions. Humbleness they may be, what is outstanding is the will of the subaltern to live a decent life

¹²⁷ Quoted from Howard Goldblatt, *Hsiao Hong*, 72-73.

and their unyielding self-respect. Humanistic sentiments over human dignity prevail over any humanitarian concern.

Taken all these together, this beautifully written novel of “poetic prose,” while ostensibly merely a study of local customs and morals, with its “mild sarcasm and humor,” it targets “not at ‘the human condition’ as such, but rather at the conditions that human create for each other.”¹²⁸ What the novel neglects, however, is the social-historical elements that lurk behind and over-determine all these lamentable creatures. It is again Mao Dun that perceptively points out this defect, “we are shown no trace of feudal oppression and exploitation, no trace of the savage invasion of Japanese imperialism. But these must surely have weighed more heavily on the people by the Hulan than their own stupidity and conservatism.”¹²⁹ To be sure, the narrative sometimes vicariously touches on this “unspoken history:” Underside Second Uncle You’s pitiable existence is his traumatic personal memory of the Russian invasion of his homeland during the Russian-Japanese War in his childhood. Whether there is causality out of this for his despicable status in the household we are uninformed, yet his suddenly emotional burst to tears – which is quite unusual given his daily carefree and cynical mannerism – bespeaks a large territory that is concealed in the darkness and mysterious to us. Whether it is due to the author’s childish innocence at the time (we have to remember that the “novel” to a large extent is an autobiography) when she was not intellectually mature enough to know his history, or it is due to the writer’s incapability to

¹²⁸ Vibeke Bordahl, “entry of *Sketches of Hulan River*,” *Chinese Novels of The Period 1900-1949*, 180.

¹²⁹ Mao Dun, “Preface to *The Hulan River*,”

dissect the origin of his double-sided character, in any case the readers share an impression of a man worthy of pity and sympathy; but that is the only thing we get.

Therefore, although this novel has shown many of the undercurrents beneath the surface of the apparently joyful and carefree peasant life, it still leaves the readers the impression that “if not for their own stupidity and conservatism, and the trouble they bring on themselves, their life has its pleasant side.”¹³⁰ In other words, “the peasant appears as their own worst enemy,”¹³¹ it is their “collective slavish conservatism and ignorance” that are exposed in the “novel.”

To be sure, the author leaves many traces that expose the social reality of class exploitation, such as the following description of a ledger in the fake house for the dead: “a look at this ledger shows that there is no haphazard accounting of debts in the nether world, and that there is a special type of individual whose job it is to manage these accounts.” It “goes without saying” that the master of the grand ornament-house is a landlord (133). But these intermittent narrations are merely appearing as careless comments not seamlessly knitted into the structure of the text, which thus could be completely omitted.

Not only do the peasants here appear their own enmity, but the writer also “sees the peasants themselves as their only true hope for betterment, and therefore praises their innate

¹³⁰ Ibid. Howard Goldblatt thus aptly points out that “They could not see a bright future ahead of them, nor even that they know there could be a bright future at all...These people were just like this: they did not know where the brightness was, but they were fully aware of the cold that enveloped their bodies. It was their struggling to break free from the cold that brought them to grief...Fouully the affairs came, fairly they were accepted. Not in the course of their lifetimes did affairs ever come fairly.” Howard Goldblatt, *Hsiao Hong*, 219.

¹³¹ Ibid., 108, 110.

potential.”¹³² What we can get from the descriptions, as a result, is a list of adjectives about the personalities of the peasants, which is mixed up with virtues and drawbacks.¹³³ Premised on a culturalist perspective, this narrative fundamentally sticks to the enlightenment discourse of the New Culture movement. Thematically, when compared with the first part of *Field of Life and Death* and her numerous early stories about peasant’s lives, this “novel” also implies a reticent regression, or involution, of the author’s views in regard to the unyielding spirit of the subaltern.¹³⁴ Therefore, although to a great extent it successfully “put under a microscope the entire town, and by extension much of early twentieth-century Chinese rural society in the Northeast,”¹³⁵ this work has much more aesthetic value (in the sense of being a poetic “pure literature” or “belles lettres”) than a masterpiece of ethnography that trenchantly takes a social-historical study. To be sure, this was probably what the author intended in the very beginning: it was a nostalgic remembrance of her childhood experience for her self-solace in a very painful moment when she reluctantly came to the end of her life in her sick bed.

The Premature Death of a “New Woman”

Xiao Hong had long been weakened by her long period of wanderings and bad health. Leaving her cohorts in the hinterland, now in Hong Kong she again became desperately lonely and gravely ill. In late 1941, she was helped by a foreign friend to enter the Queen

¹³² Ibid., 118.

¹³³ Howard Goldblatt provides such a list: they are “cruel, morbidly curious, naive, well-meaning, cowed, misfortunate, mistreated,” and “‘unchanging’ and ‘shortsighted.’” Ibid., 109.

¹³⁴ As Mao Dun says, “Harelip Feng of the mill has [the] most vitality of them all...and yet we find nothing outstanding about his character, apart from the outstanding tenacity of his will to live, and that is a primitive tenacity.”

¹³⁵ Howard Goldblatt *Hsiao Hong*, 108.

Mary's Hospital. Shortly later, on December 8, the Japanese attacked Hong Kong (which unraveled the curtain of the Pacific War) and soon occupied it on the Christmas day. In January 1942, she received a lethal surgery for suspected throat tumor, and died nine days later out of throat infection. "To die like this...my heart is heavy" was her last word.

Ironically, as noted, she died "under Japanese occupation almost nine years after fleeing from Japanese-occupied Manchuria."¹³⁶ There was no way for a liberal humanist and an individualist to seek a room of her own for peace and security, when the entire nation was in great crisis and undertaking a life-and-death struggle. Xiao Hong's vulnerability shown in her early wretched existence (in terms of both physical and emotional disasters) confirmed her own naïveté and unworldly behaviors. She was partially responsible for her own tragedy: her self-imposed isolated life cost her life. Her tragic experience is symbolic of the dilemma of the Chinese "new culture," in particular the predicament of the "new woman.

If iconoclasm/ radical anti-traditionalism, including the attack of neo-Confucian values and superstitions (and classical Chinese language), and a promotion of gender equality and freedom in marriage characterized the New Culture Movement between 1915 and the 1920's, Xiao Hong's creative works produced since she resigned from her early leftist tendency were precisely along the same line. When other writers had gone to the frontline of the resistance and/or explored more thoroughly China's social malaise, she somewhat turned towards the early New Culture direction of a culturalist discourse. The predicament her later works exemplify shows none other than the impasse of this direction.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

And Xiao Hong's own consideration of defection furthermore poignantly underlines the dilemma. Indeed, her intended compromise with the patriarchal system that she had so vehemently attacked is more than alarming. In a 1936 story "Chu Dong" (Early Winter), the narrator, who is the alter ego of the author, indicates her unyielding resolution to never return to her father's house, "I will never think of going back to a home like that. My father and I are adamantly opposed to each other, and I simply cannot live on his charity."¹³⁷ But towards the end of her life, she confessed that "now I want to surrender to my father, accept my bitter defeat, and throw away my weapons, because my body has failed me; I never thought I would see this day ... Didn't I already make I clear? I want to go back to the puppet state of Manchukuo ..."¹³⁸ To explore the cause for this tragic ending of an intentional surrender, a brief survey of her creative trajectory in the context of the cultural-historical dynamic-shift of the era is helpful.

The May-Fourth enlightenment project, in its calling for social equality, had harbored a nascent class perspective. This sprout, due to the nurture of modern China's intense domestic class conflicts and its suffering of international imperialist invasion, as well as the introduction of socialist thoughts thereafter, developed into a full-bloomed "New Enlightenment" program in this period which called for class liberation and national emancipation. However, due to the historically long-term oppression of woman in Chinese "feudalistic," patriarchal society, female writers, if they had not taken the perspective of class

¹³⁷ Ibid.,

¹³⁸ Luo Binji, *Xiao Hong Xiaozhuan (A Short Biography of Xiao Hong)* (Shanghai: Qianwen shudian, 1947), 151-152.

analysis, would be easily inclined to understand their sufferings merely from gender perspective. With this tendency, when the “New enlightenment” agenda – which saw gender inequality as an intrinsic component of the traditional, patriarchal system and a side effect of the class problem, and so the settlement of which requires a total social revolution – was seen as displacing the priority of these women writers’ gender agenda, the (New Culture) Enlightenment mentality which single-mindedly promoted gender equality would prevailed over any other concerns, by which the writers would tend to interpret social contradiction from a cultural angle, insisting it as an ingrained drawback of a corrupted “nationality” (guominxing).

In this light, the reason that “she did not confine herself to the ‘triviality’ of women’s lives but reached out to broader themes of national survival and anti-imperialist struggle”¹³⁹ is less due to her sense of social responsibility than an outcome of her early experience of being subjected to patriarchal discrimination (by family members) and class oppression (she was forced to sell her body), and the class exploitation that she witnessed during her childhood from the miserable lives of the peasant tenants. But this spontaneous indignation over the social inequality did not naturally lead to a theoretically-guided differentiation of the various layered contradictions. Thus, when she substituted humanistic sentiment (with a distinct gender perspective) for class analysis and political-economic interpretation, her understanding of the social problem and her diagnosis of the symptom led to an irrevocable

¹³⁹ Quoted from Lydia Liu, *Translingual Practice*, 200.

impasse, and her personal choice of flight from the society to seek a room of her own was doomed.

Xiao Hong has written in the wake of the Resistance War, “for me, it always comes down to the same thing: either riding to an alien place on the back of a donkey, or staying put in other man’s home. I am never keen on the idea of homeland. Whenever people talk about home, I cannot help being moved, but I am perfectly aware that I had become ‘homeless’ even before the Japanese set their foot on the land.”¹⁴⁰ Indeed, for a homeless soul, her road in exile was endless before the nation-state was liberated and the national identity of its citizens was solidly founded. Holding no firm belief in any political doctrine, she was ultimately a humanist and an individualist who had tried to seek “a room of her own,” yet the relentless Chinese society did not allow her to do so. Her tragedy shows the predicament of liberal-humanist intellectuals in the transformative era, and the dilemma of the New Culture agenda in general.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 211.

Chapter Two

Matrimonial Anxiety in a Besieged City: Identity Complex in Zhang Ailing's "Boudoir Stories"

Introduction

Witnessing in her formative years the irrevocable decline of the Chinese mandarin gentry's class, Zhang Ailing held unapologetic individualism. Located at the cracks and gaps of history, situating her in a besieged society, as fragments and residues of a previous world congealed, her writing is seeking to enter the soul of a particular class that she belongs, to "dream its dreams and roam inside its unconscious."¹⁴¹ This effort brings out the interior life-being of Chinese urbanites, in particular the middle-class Shanghainese, of their anxiety on love, marriage, and personal identity, which then "becomes an allegorical stand-in for the world of things and commodities through which a narrative totality of a historical experience can be held,"¹⁴² particularly the ambiguity and dilemma of this precarious class situated within the unsettled contradiction of history.

This chapter consists of four sections. Firstly, I will briefly examine her upbringing and her trajectory, which is the source of her literary inspiration as well as her positional stance in the cultural field; then I discuss her two stories, "Fengsuo" (Sealed Off) and "Qingcheng zhilian" (Love in a fallen city), both providing the archetypal theme for most of her stories: individualism in crisis. The third section will study the most prominent category in her stories:

¹⁴¹ Xudong Zhang, "Shanghai Nostalgia: Postrevolutionary Allegories in Wang Anyi's Literary Production in the 1990s," *Positions: east asia cultures critique*, Volume 8, Number 2, Fall 2000, 382.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

the troubles caused by marriage and love. They show the predicament of marriage and love as social institutions in a semi-colonial, semi-traditional society. What follows is an inquiry of the second category: stories expressing an anxiety of self-identity.

Zhang Ailing as a Middle-Class Female Writer in 1940s China

Zhang's family background is unique among most of modern Chinese writers. She was born in Shanghai in 1920 in a household enjoying high social distinction. Her father was the son of a once high-ranked official in the Manchu court. While he was well-versed in traditional Chinese culture and dabbled in Western literature, he led the life of a decadent, traditional-styled gentleman: smoking opium, visiting prostitutes and taking concubine, with a bad temper that abused his daughter severely. But Zhang's mother was intellectually progressive. She read widely works on Western culture and even went to France to study Fine Art when her daughter was four. During this period, because of the sumptuous life of her father, Eileen had the opportunity to watch "with absorbing interest the gaily dressed courtesans periodically called upon to decorate her father's parties,"¹⁴³ which intensified her sensitivity to the exquisite style, artistic design, and refined dress of traditional upper-class, to be shown in her stories.

On other hand, the metropolitan aura appeared in the writer's works were apparently derived from her next experience. When her mother returned from abroad four years later, the couple had reconciled for a short period. Living in a Western-styled house with gardens and well-dressed relatives, Zhang spent several months of happy life. From her westernized

¹⁴³ C.T.Hsia, *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. 1999), 390.

mother, she studied Western culture. Her father also provided her classes in classical prose and poetry. Since Eileen also read Lao She's fiction and the magazine *Fiction Monthly* that her mother subscribed to, she was also well exposed to the tradition of New Literature. This cultivation of aesthetic habitus from both domestic gentry-aristocratic tradition and Western bourgeois resources in her formative years established the foundation for her distinction of literary tastes.

But this happy life did not last long, and what Eileen experienced after that contributed to the claustrophobic and oppressive atmosphere we find in her stories. As her father soon relapsed into his perverse habits, the couple finally divorced and her mother left for France again. Her father remarried an opium-addicted wife. There was no love between Eileen and her step-mother. She was badly treated; one time she was even confined for more than half a year in her bedroom during which she was seriously sick. She ran away to her own mother's home, who now had returned to the country.

In all, her first-hand experience and observation of the declining and decadent upper-class life offers the concrete materials for her literary works. Her tragic vision towards life and her anti-romantic view of the world is partially traceable to her torturous childhood experience (and partially from her war-time experience that will be discussed soon).

But her life with her mother did not inscribe in her mind the Enlightenment ideas that her mother held fast: because the financial strain her mother suffered from made her painfully aware of the importance and necessity of financial independence for women, she did not believe in the May Fourth romantic view regarding women's emancipation. She insisted that

she is a stubborn money-worshipper.¹⁴⁴ These two aspects – her resentment towards her father’s degenerate habitus of the traditional gentry’s class, and her distrust of the romantic attitudes of her mother’s faith in the New Culture ideal – made the tension between tradition and modernity one of the major motifs of her stories.

What followed in Eileen’s life thereafter more or less can find their fictional treatment in her works. The outbreak of the war forced her to study in the Arts Faculty in the University of Hong Kong. For the subsequent three years, she received formal training in both Chinese and Western literature. Her experience in Hong Kong offered her prototypes of various literary characters and settings: the Eurasian, British, and Indian figures in her stories are characters adapted from her acquaintances there. When Hong Kong was occupied by the Japanese in the end of 1941, around the time when Xiao Hong died there, Zhang returned to Shanghai before completing her last year of education.

She soon a celebrity in the cultural arena with her stories published in Shanghai’s middle-brow literary journals. Shortly later she married a high-ranked collaborator who appreciated her art, yet who soon turned out to be not only a political chameleon, but also a freakish man. Eileen’s literary brilliance, meanwhile, apparently subsided once the resistance war was over. She had created a few movie scripts and, after the PRC was established, went to Hong Kong and then the States.

Sealed Off in a Fallen City: Individualism in Crisis

¹⁴⁴ Zhang Ailing, “The guileless word of a child,” 8.

Both “Sealed Off” and “Love in a Fallen City” are about flirtations and pseudo romance, though one aborted and one apparently consummated. To the extent that both stories read like wild daydreams come true in an experimental condition taken place in a lab situation, they can be interpreted as modernist allegories.

The first story is almost plotless. It is about a brief encounter between a university tutor and a married accountant in a trolleybus during a short duration of blockade, which springs from a flirtation, develops into an illusionary romance, and ends when the man repudiates what he has said and returns home. Insofar as it only contains dialogues and psychological movement, expresses such modernist themes as anomie, ennui, alienation, etc., it is a crystallized form of modernist writing in a realistic sketch.

A superficial reading would take this story as nothing more than a description of the middle class psychology: it exposes the cynicism of the bourgeois class. Yet if the motif of the story is none other than this, the story can take place anywhere and any modern time; it does not necessarily occur in a tram car, and in a moment of blockade.

To delve into the secret of the text, we need to go into the details. The origin of the flirtation comes from the man’s intention to evade the bothering of a relative he happens to witness in the same car, who “as a destitute youth who aims high, in his whole mind wants to marry a madam owning substantial properties,” and who has “coveted on” his 13-years old daughter. Therefore, for the man, from the beginning this flirtation is a result of an intention to safeguard his property. And while the woman is wrongly moved by his hypocritical appearance and is willing to shoulder the responsibility, we are informed that her decision is

derived less from her sympathy with the pitiable man than from her own unhappy living as a professional woman, and her naughty will to anger his family members, who demands her to marry a wealthy husband. Thus her psychological state: since the man “has no money yet he has a wife – it is even good just to irritate them (her parents)!”

For the man, we never feel his cold-heartedness from his caring words. His dispassionate mind is also explained by the ending of the story, which describes a scene witnessed by him after he returns home, has dinner, and steps to his bedroom. This is a Kafkaesque scene: a beetle crawls in the constrained room and stops in the middle of the floor, motionless. “Is it feigning to be dead? Is it thinking? Crawling here and there all the day, there must be rare time for it to think? But to make reflection is painful anyway.” Sweat exudes through the pores of his whole body, “he switched open the light again, the beetle was absent, it had crawled to its nest.” The allegorical meaning is obvious: he is not a complete hypocrite, for what he behaves and performs is only practicing daily routine for survival and family sustenance. In this light, the central theme becomes less a critique of patriarchal hypocrisy than an exposure of alienation and ennui of urban residents.

But this is still partial of the story; the ultimate decoding of the story has to go to subtler nuances. While the man, Zongzhen, has received certain middle-to-higher-level education and now being an accountant, the fille Cuiyuan comes from a “new styled model family with religious background,” which implies that her family has received the baptism of Western, modern concepts and even Christian ideas, which were imported to and propagated in China since the late Qing. She has achieved substantial deeds in her educational history and now

teaches in a university, which “breaks the new record of female profession” at the time. Besides, “all members in her family are good people” because they adopt sanitary modern life styles and have Westernized hobbies. But it is also this new-styled family that urges her now to find a wealthy husband which irritates her, because “wealthy men” at the time more often than not refer to vulgar (at least less educated) *nouveau riche*, or earthy power-holder.

But Cuiyuan herself is neither a perfect “new woman.” A paragraph immediately following the introduction of her family reads:

Life is like a Bible. It is translated from Hebrew to Greek, from Greek to Latin, from Latin to English, from English to Chinese. When Cuiyuan reads it, the Chinese is rendered into Shanghai native language in her mind. That inevitably will bring about certain estrangement (*gehe*).

Ostensibly, this passage refers to life as an estranged form for this inexperienced girl. But in designating the origin of life, just like the origin of Bible, to be from the West (more precisely, from the Hebrew as the origin of Western civilization), and when this is read against the sentence right before this metaphor: “Good people outnumbered real people (*zhenren*) in this world,” what it conveys is that the Western culture is more “true” or “authentic” than the Chinese culture, and the Shanghai culture is the most inferior as it appears to be the most alienated and estranged one; moreover, though she dislikes her family members, who are “nice” but not “real (or genuine),” she herself leads a life alienated from her authentic self.

On the surface, because her family worship things foreign to such an extent that they repudiate Chinese culture completely and merely enjoy Western way of life superficially, they are not sincere. We note that many other characters in the tram car also show the same

features: when a medical student portraits a picture of a human skeleton for scientific use, one man with a Western-style pant whispers to his wife: “I just dislike these cubism and impressionism in vogue today;” another one from the court house explains confidentially to his colleague: “An influence from Chinese-style painting. Nowadays Western-styled picture also favors inscription. It is clearly a case of ‘Eastern ways spreading westward.’” These comments deliver their ludicrous behavior of feigning to be knowledgeable of Western ideas.

It is in light of this picture – the superficial grasp of modern concepts and the fundamental insistence on traditional mentality and manners of the Shanghai’s proto-bourgeois urbanites – that I read this story furthermore as an allegorical picture of the difficulty of cultural embourgeoisment – the obstructed process of rationalization – for Chinese middle class. The traditional force of this semi-traditional, semi-modern transitional society is still so strong that most of its citizens, while open to modern ideas, still harbor or scruple to residual traditional mentality: due to the seemingly residual yet actually still dominant social custom and customary ideas, Cuiyuan is forced to get married rather than concentrate herself on her career, and Zongzhen’s relative wants to marry his 13th years daughter to secure his financial security rather than seeks his adventures in society; under the same pressure, Zongzhen has married a wife who has attained merely primary school level of education (because the traditional Chinese saying mandates: “That a woman has no talents is exactly her virtue”). But since the society also has been subjected to the influence of the “Enlightenment values,” the scenario for Zongzhen to keep Cuiyuan as concubine falters when considering the public opinion.

Yet this incapability of arriving at full-scaled rationalization is only partly due to the strong persistence of traditional force. All the discussions thus far bypass another dimension of the content of history. What is the force that has such a power that makes the bustling business transactions of the domestic merchandisers, national capitalists, and foreign investors, as well as the quotidian daily lives of the urban middle class in this giant commercial-finance center, come to a stop? It is the Japanese occupiers. This is the reticent yet ruthless political truth-content that is roaring underneath the motionless surface. Only a sound of pistol can break up this still life of middle class phantasmagoria of eternal peace, as Jameson has reminded us in a different setting.¹⁴⁵ And Shanghai citizens indeed now and then heard such sounds of gunshots during this period. Although the story does not offer salient textual evidences of this picture, the ingenious writer did provide a subtle detail which is often neglected by average readers as well as veteran critics, “there is a burst of chaotic scenes in the street, thunderingly there came two trunks, filled with soldiers.” Here even the identity of these soldiers is not disclosed, not to say their mission and activities. But from history we do know that these Japanese soldiers come to search for and arrest resisters, oftentimes underground Nationalist assassins, which is the reason for the blockade. The blockade could last from several months to several hours, until the targets were arrested.¹⁴⁶ Apparently, the duration of the blockade in the story is much shorter, and it is the omission of the brutal scene that it falls short of giving us any feelings of shock.

¹⁴⁵ Fredric Jameson, “Third-world literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism,” *Social Text* 15 (1986): 65–88.

¹⁴⁶ For historical background, cf. Frederic Wakeman Jr. *The Shanghai Badlands: Wartime Terrorism and Urban Crime, 1937-1941* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

But the omission was also not merely due to a careful self-censorship, as blockade was part of the “normal,” daily life conditions endured by the local residents. What they yearned for are dragging out an ignoble existence and waiting for the return of the Nationalist government. For the urbanites, most of whom “petit or proto-bourgeois,” they felt enfeebled and powerless, but had to accept any harsh treatments the occupiers had imposed upon them, and kept a distance from the resistance efforts. Thus in the text, we see that when witnessing the cruel suppression of the underground nationalist force, the couple can still engage in sophisticated flirtation and erotic fantasy. In this light, what the heroine realizes at the end that “everything that had happened while the city was sealed was a non-occurrence. The whole of Shanghai had dozed off, had dreamed an unreasonable dream,” can be interpreted as not only her disappointment of an aborted romance, but also a disclosure of the substantial core of the class consciousness of these urbanites: stubborn and unmoved, focusing on its economic interests and irrespective of the outside social-political onslaught.

From this perspective, the failure of a developed, rationalized life is also a result of the blockade brought about by the war, and in particular, by the Japanese invaders. The imperialists controlled the daily business and sealed the prospectus of developing a robust national economy and a “normal” middle class life-world in China. Accordingly, the story is an allegory of the failed romance of the bourgeois ideal, which, as a fantasy, dies out under the sealed state of foreign occupation. By this pre-determined failed romance, this story also bespeaks to the difficulty of forming the bourgeois rationality in a precarious middle class in modern Chinese society.

Living in a seemingly “most-modern” yet still “semi-traditional” society under the real foreign colonization, the atomized and individualistic heroes and heroines have to elevate their egoistic individualism to protect themselves. Their hesitation, oscillation, sense of exhaustion, yearning for improvement yet falling in the trap of traditional network (both mentally and physically), as well as their living state of being blockaded by foreign embargo, not only testify to the intrinsic shortcoming and the political dilemma of this specific class which was the crucial component of Chinese modernity, but also showcase the predicament of the semi-colonial, semi-traditional China in its fate controlled by imperialist invaders and its ensuing incapability of developing a full-scale rationality. In this light, the story ultimately is an allegory of a historical moment of embourgeoisement (and a bourgeois nation-state building) in crisis, its disturbance and even its abortion.

In this story, Zhang sees the persistence of tradition underneath change, or to be more specific, the old in the new, the mingling and coexistence of differing historical “structures of feeling” in the daily fabric of Shanghai’s “petty urbanites.” The old constitutes the social unconscious, and is also internalized and followed by the middle class citizens. This motif, together with its unsettling sense of mockery and irony, becomes the staple running through most of her stories in this period.

If “Sealed Off” is a disappointing (but not sentimental) story about an aborted romance, “Love in a Fallen City” seems to be a romance finally comes to true. But this is only another illusion of love, which now seizes even the narrator herself into its phantasmagoria. To be sure, it shows an irresistible desire to turn an existent social-cultural structure upside down

and to turn the dystopian moment into the moment of utopia; but ultimately, it is only a protracted variation of the tramcar theme. Ostensibly, it is the involvement of history that intervenes into the personal affair, but in truth it is a relentless exclusion of the social and the historical – though this exclusion does not prevent the story from becoming a social allegory. Apparently, the story breaks down the big bourgeois myth of love by repudiating romantic emotions; in actuality, it falls more deeply into a fantasy of a self-determined, possessive individualist prevailing over the social through thorns and brambles by freely crisscrossing the class line. But to the extent that this transgression is not wholly unimaginable theoretically, its apparent realization constitutes a deeper illusion.

Typical of the writer's story about social mannerism, the story is "filled with witty conversations and relentless gossip; intricate codes of dress, dining, and socializing...; and arabesque patterns and mannerisms in both private and public domains that are taken as matters of life and death for those leisurely regulars."¹⁴⁷ But the heroine Liusu, though a "typical" semi-traditional Chinese woman who has received little education, is nevertheless a rare figure in Chang's stories, as she takes the initiative to divorce his husband because of unbearable abuse she has suffered. After having returned to her own clan family for more than seven years, now she is at the age of 28. She is satirized and expelled by brothers and sisters-in-laws, who apparently still hold the old mindset and follow traditional ways of life.

¹⁴⁷ These descriptions are originally for a novel written by a contemporary writer Wang Anyi, but they are also valid for this story in particular, and for many of Eileen Zhang's stories in general. See Xudong Zhang, "Shanghai Nostalgia," 359.

She has to find a prospectus of remarriage to secure her precarious economic and social status.

From this urge to rise above her situation, an impulse to ascend into a higher class to ensure her security and avoid further humiliation, comes a “narrative experiment” that develops the whole story, which “opened up a space unrealizable in the asphyxiating conditions of a reified existence and of an empirically unchangeable destiny.”¹⁴⁸ A relative offers her a perspective of finding a man for her. Returning to upstairs, she appreciates closely herself in front of a mirror, when a cinematic “close-up” in a subtle way conveys her psychological nuance:

Following the undulating tune (of *Huqin*, a traditional Chinese music equipment), Liusu’s head tilted to one side, and her hands and eyes started to gesture subtly. As she performed in the mirror, the *huqin* no longer sounded like a *huqin*, but like strings and flutes intoning a solemn court dance ... Her steps seemed to trace the lost rhythms of an ancient melody.¹⁴⁹

Her performance is a rehearsal, a tryout of seduction to be performed in reality. Her behavior is like “a solemn court dance,” to trace the trajectory of ancient beauty represented in classical Chinese romance. This narration implies the feature of her adventure: a modern rehearsal of the traditional motif of a woman seeking her master’s favor. Yet precisely due to this, it also casts a shadow over her fate: just like ancient beauties mostly did not have a happy ending, her will to acquire her fortune with the same trick also would not beget a differing scenario in the modern society.

¹⁴⁸ Fredric Jameson, *Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1981). 20.

¹⁴⁹ *Romances*, 158-159. *Renditions*, 67.

Liusu's self-appreciation does not end in this: "Suddenly, she smiled – a private, malevolent smile – and the music came to a discordant halt. The *huqin* outside continues, yet the tales of fealty and filial piety, chastity and righteousness the *Huqin* tells of had nothing to do with her." The melody in her mind is her own internal movement, which aims to break out the old world and its moralistic straitjacket to make adventure into a new world. Hypocritical or not, this role-play would define her new identity, individual as well as national, insofar as her current identity of being a Chinese woman is specified by the traditional code, which now is "nothing to do with her." This repudiation of traditional Chinese ethical-moral code is simultaneously a process of formation of a new subjectivity, which is also a new class identity; before this process is completed, she is still a woman torn between two incompatible worlds.

In a party, She accidentally meets Liuyuan, a Hong Kong-based, British-educated dandy and an over-thirty overseas Chinese who just returns from England. He is the mirror image as well as the "other" of the devastated Shanghai middle class, who seemingly owns some refined tastes in this vulgar age, as he harbors a sort of nostalgia towards sophisticated Chinese traditional high culture. But a dandy is only "a substitute for the aristocratic who has lost its castle...a middle class aristocrat, a figure who could make its entrance only in the cities that were becoming the milieu for the bourgeois."¹⁵⁰ In contrast to its image in its original Western context, where the poet as a dandy "distances himself from the bourgeois

¹⁵⁰ Wylie Sypher, *Loss of the Self in Modern Literature* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1979), 36.

values that brought his cultures into being,”¹⁵¹ Liuyuan’s dandyism is much less a mockery than a by-product of Shanghai’s proto-bourgeois middle-class values. Yet also analogous to Baudelaire’s dandyism, he has a “nostalgia for a spiritual homeland or city that existed beyond the visible world,” with an internalized “sense of decay and decline” of the culture.¹⁵²

A series of flirtations take place at dance halls, restaurants, the hotel’s lobby, on the beach, and in the heroine’s room, all of which the living rooms of leisurely middle class, though now it is in the colonized Hong Kong.¹⁵³ Liusu puts aside her female dignity, as well as traditional ethical-moral code, to fantastically pursue her dream. Leo Lee has subtly insinuated that this is not a realistic scenario, because Liusu, as “a traditional, nearly illiterate woman,” seems unable to conduct these “sophisticated flirtation and witty repartee” (it seems “almost out of character”).¹⁵⁴ However, the unsettling of rigid class sectarianism in a turbulent moment, as well as the particular taste of Liuyuan due to his peculiar experience, might help to explain his interests in Liusu. Moreover, Liusu’s will to remarriage is necessitated by her hardship in the life of the extended family, and Liuyuan only wants to court her to be his mistress; for both, love as a passionate emotion and will of self-sacrifice is only a luxury.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 382.

¹⁵² Richard Lehan, *The City in Literature* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998), 75.

¹⁵³ Hong Kong was a British colony since Qing’s defeat of the Opium War in 1942. It is more fully imbued with colonial aura than Shanghai (thus in this exotic place, we can even see an alleged Prince Saheyini, who Liuyuan dates and flirts with and uses her as a stimulation to wet Liusu’s jealousy), yet in terms of their inalienable and intricate relations with traditional Chinese culture, Hong Kong is Shanghai’s mirror image.

¹⁵⁴ Leo Lee, *Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of New Urban Culture in China, 1930-1945*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 293.

In traditional China, love is not merely an individualized emotion, but an emotion with ethical significance as it is embedded in a social network and community welfare. Those personal affairs outside of this boundary were regarded as unethical and immoral. Marriage is for the prosperity of the community as well as to ensure the continuity of family lineage. This socio-historical institution was only challenged in the modern period together with the sweeping epistemological change of traditional world of view and with the change of social relations – especially the disintegration of large gentry class household. The modern Western idea which holds that love, as a personal passion on which a morally legitimate marriage is based, is unrelated to any other persons, communities, or the society, was popularized. Yet this “enlightened” new idea in modern China was less blessed by the semi-traditional socio-economic conditions, not to mention rejected by the strong residue of traditional mindset. As said, Liusu, though baptized by modern ideas to such an extent as to have the courage to divorce her husband and seek for a second marriage, is more driven by a need to secure financial necessity than by any genuine concern of love.

Since Liuyuan apparently knows her intention, he only “treats her as an exotic Oriental woman under his ‘colonial’ gaze.”¹⁵⁵ This in fact is also a humiliated experience for her. But alas, since Japanese bombarded the treaty port on the day when Liuyuan departs to England, he has nowhere to go and have to stay, so they finally get married. The narrative voice celebrates this success,

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 295.

In this world of turmoil and tumult, wealth, property and all other things that used to last forever were now all unreliable. All she could count on was the breath within her throat and this man sleeping beside her... They looked and saw each other, saw each other entirely. It was a mere moment of complete understanding, but it was enough to keep them happy together for a decade or so. He was just a selfish man, and she just a selfish woman. In this age of military turmoil, there was no room for individualists, but there was always a place for an ordinary couple.

We cannot distinguish here whether this is the narrator's voice or it is the interior psychological movement of the heroine. In fact the two are now inextricable, which is a rare case for the author, who mostly keeps an ironical distance in the narrator voice. From the perspective of Liusu, this is a consummate moment, which is also the climax of the melodrama. To her, the man sleeping besides her is really the only one she can count on at the critical moment, and the vice versa for Liuyuan. But if this is a mutual "complete understanding," then they both would know that when the temporary war is over, how long will they live together is hard to predict.

But the illusion of an eternally still life extends to such a magnanimous proportion that the narrator even lets out such a passionate exclamation:

Hong Kong's defeat had given her victory. But in this irrational world, who knows what is cause and what is effect? Who knows? Perhaps it was for her fulfillment that a great metropolis was leveled. Countless thousands of people die, countless thousands of people suffer, and what follows is an earthshaking reform...Liusu didn't feel that her place in history is anything remarkable. She stood up, smiling, and kicked the pan of mosquito-repellant incense under the table.

The legendary beauties who felled cities and kingdoms were probably all like this.¹⁵⁶

This exaggerated and alarming articulation of a private feeling is not merely a metaphorical expression conveyed by an obvious womanly narrative voice; but insofar as this repudiation of exploring the socio-economic contradiction as well as the political

¹⁵⁶ Zhang Ailing, "Qingcehng zhilian," 190; *Renditions*, 92.

over-determination of wars and conflicts (which are condemned in a breath to irrationality, not aware of this explanation itself is irrational) is not merely an individual choice, but a general practice owned by a certain social group, it is less a literary rhetoric than a manifestation of a particular political unconscious.

But this expression of a privileged feeling also subtly produces an ironic twist that finally deconstructs what it meant to convey. As easily recognized by average Chinese, the last sentence echoes and brings out the theme of the title (and the story in general), because the original Chinese phrase for “love in a fallen city” can also be read as “love that topples cities,” which, as a historical idiom, narrates a historical story in which a concubine enchants a king to such an extent that, to satisfy her idiosyncratic taste in order to please her, the king signifies false alarming signals to call back his forces; numerous turns of such a hoax leads to the loss of vigilance of his army and when the true enemy comes, nobody arrives for his order and as a result, the kingdom is toppled. From a feminist perspective, this traditional story can be read as a misogynic narrative (regardless of whether it is a real historical fact or not). Yet the narrative voice here (which goes beyond psychonarration, borders on narrated monologue, and even confuses itself with the female character’s psyche) precisely articulates such a discourse to utter a wholly irrational feeling and absurd rationalization: it is the contemporary war that levels the city, brings thousands of people’ (are they not “ordinary”?) to death to “fulfill” (a literal translation of the original word of *chenquan*) her dream. It indeed subverts conventional ideas of male-dominated history, or patriarchal historiographical writing, yet this womanly indulgence in her “success” not only emits a strong pull of chilly air among

readers (or at least some readers), but also falls into the same traditional pitfall of misogynic representation. Put in other way, although what the sentence expresses is apparently a feeling of revenge against the misogynic, patriarchal history and historiography, this malignity, when put side by side with the fact that because of her behavior (or alongside her “happiness”) “countless thousands of people died, countless thousands of people suffering,” shows its unapologetic egocentrism. Insofar as this malignant pleasure is shared by many with a sense of aesthetic enjoyment, the rhetoric is underwritten with a fundamental code of an elitist class consciousness.

To be sure, this repudiation of civilization has its own rationale, which is conveyed in the imagery of a dilapidated wall. According to Liuyuan’s confession, if their marriage indeed indicates that there is any sincerity between the two, then at least partly it is because in his eyes, the civilization has almost come to its end. The wall is a monument of symbolism of death, but it is also a vehicle through which to express the idea of universal love. Insofar as it is the inextricable object and tool of this expression, through a metonymic displacement, it becomes a substitutive symbol of love (just as Liuyuan takes it to be). Such a political (un)conscious correlating death and eternal love is really ironic. What links them together is a historical consciousness towards the ruthless world that they live, which destroys any prospect of genuine and eternal love. It is an alienated world that makes inhuman the human world, to the extent that only death equals everyone. Facing this “irrational world,” they feel hopeless.

We need to go a step further into this “natural-historical image,” which apparently endows certain epiphany on Liuyuan, by dwelling for a moment on the concept of “natural history.” While in Benjamin, “it is the fallen nature which bears the imprint of the progression of history;” in Eileen Chang here, it is the piles of ruins which attest to the imprints of historical catastrophe, that becomes the symbol of unchanged authenticity of love as nature. Put in other way, if Max Pensky has explained Benjamin’s dialectic of natural history as this: “petrified, transformed into the specter of repetition, history is transfigured into dead nature; mortified, nature becomes the elements of historical ruin and the universality of death;”¹⁵⁷ then here, it is the wall, as the ruin of history, taken to be nature, becomes the symbol of the universality of life and love. In short, this ostensible picture of natural history in its essence is but the diametrically reverse of “natural history” in its original sense. This elevated and sublimated image of the wall is a metonymic displacement of a historical account of socio-political changes. What it conveys is nothing but a resignation of self-will and self-determination in front of the gigantic, inhuman, naturalized historical force. The atomized couple has no power to combat it, no matter how strong an individualism they elevate to protect their maximum individual interests. The ostensible symbolism of (a will to) love represented by the sublime wall (together with the symbol of life-vitality incarnated in the metaphysical puppet-icon of a robust, unabashed dancing women upon which Liusu is modeled), in this light, turns on its allegorical counterpart: it is none other than an egotistic

¹⁵⁷ Quoted from Xudong Zhang, “Shanghai Nostalgia”

individualism in a historical crisis. And this crisis, as we will see, is a crisis of the formation of a class identity/subjectivity.

Marriage and Love in Predicament

Most of the writer's "love stories" in *Romance* are not about love as a romantic feeling and emotion, but are about desire, as the various episodes of flirtation, courtship, or affair have as much physical instincts its objective as economic consideration its stake. C.T.Hsia has perceived this dimension in his comment on the non-tragic nature of the apparent tragic and desolate romances: "Miss Chang professes not to abide by the classical formula of tragedy because it is her belief that the sheer weight of habit and animalism precludes the possibility of any prolonged flights of sublimity or passion."¹⁵⁸ Indeed, love as a romantic emotion oftentimes demands willing self-sacrifice, a passionate feeling of sublimity; yet more often than not what the frustrated physical and social desires in Zhang's stories bring about are nothing but many perverse pursuits and cruel calculations. However, these various apparent "inhuman" tricks do not indicate that the characters are less human, but they point to love and marriage as social institutions; and in modern China, these institutions have peculiar features and functions, which display the morbidity of the culture in an "abnormal" society. Four stories here are analyzed as case studies.

If Liuyuan's seemingly casual comment that Liusu treats marriage as "long-term prostitution" unveils the real nature of marriage to some women at the time as a social institution to ensure social security, then this motif is more relentlessly expressed in

¹⁵⁸ C.T.Hsia, *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction*,

“Aloeswood Ashes: The First Burning,” where the heroine, rather than being angry at such a disclosure by the partner, self-willingly confesses this real status of her marriage; though unlike Liusu, the heroine is reluctantly forced to get married, rather than willingly seeking for it.

It is a story about a woman who becomes spiritually debilitated in Hong Kong. Weilong, a Shanghainese middle-school girl who immigrates there, in order to complete her study, seeks help from her well-off aunt, erstwhile a concubine of a wealthy merchant and now widowed. Yet her aunt is indulgent in seducing gigolos and playboys, so her consent of offering financial assistance to Weilong is harboring a concealed intention of exploiting the latter as bait for her to lure young men (later on she indeed snatches away one Weilong’s admirer). Weilong tries to keep herself away from the nasty affair, yet she is soon submitting to the overwhelming material luxury her aunt offers, and then the physical attraction of George Qiao, a mixed-blood gigolo.

A notorious playboy, Qiao is the thirteenth son in his big family. His mother is a Portuguese prostitute from Macau, while his father has acquired an English title. Yet because he has stopped receiving financial assistance from his father because of his dissolute life and bad repute, he is by no means rich. As a young girl, Weilong soon falls to the prey of her desire by accepting the sexual advance of this good-for-nothing boy. Yet, immediately she finds that he also plays around with one maid in the house. Her hysterical disruption exposes her affair. To gloss over the scandal, Mrs. Liang arranges their marriage by persuading George that he can find an easy excuse to divorce Weilong when he has no interests any

longer on her. Apparently a comfortable life is proffered as George's father renews his funding for his son because of this marriage.

Compared with Cao Qiqiao (to be discussed soon), Weilong's marriage would be what the former has dreamed of; and with Liusu, this marriage would also be what she seeks for. The difference between Weilong and the other two figures, however, lies in her particular social status. Though these women all need social-economic security, for the other two women, who come from declining households and without much education, material independence is the only concern; yet for Weilong, a student with a middle-level learning and being more open to modern ideas, she knows her own degradation: coming from a self-supported middle-class family, she can expect a more handsome husband with a higher social standing and reputation. Meanwhile, unlike Liusu, she is more clear-minded: she knows far more better the true nature of his husband, the nature of the marriage, and the final unpropitious prospect.

So when Qiao teases her by insinuating that the European marines have mistaken her to be prostitutes, she admits that the only difference is that "they have no choice. I've done it of my own free will." She recognizes unambiguously the ruin of her youth innocence and the dire prospect of her future:

Beyond these lamps, people and goods there are sadly limpid sea and sky – boundless desolation and boundless terror. Her future is just like that – she could not bear to think of it, for these thoughts could only give rise to endless fears. She had no long-term plans. Only in these trivial matters could her fearful and agitated heart find some momentary rest.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁹ Zhang Ailing, "Aloeswood Ashes: The First Burning," trans. by Stephen Cheng, with a few of my modifications, "Themes and Techniques in Eileen Chang's Stories," *Tankang Review* 8, no.2 (Oct 1977), 178.

To find solace in forgetfulness by immersing in trivial goods and curios is the last resort for a helpless woman to dawdle away her decadent life in a colonial society. She has no way to extricate herself. This indeed is a desolation that wants salvation.

Apparently, this degradation is brought out as much by the society and its culture as by Weilong's mind of calculation. For the former, Leo Lee has aptly commented, "Mrs. Liang...embodies a culture in Hong Kong which is stagnant and materialistic. George Ch'iao and his sister, both Eurasians, represent the plight of those doomed to entrapment in this culture, rejected by both Chinese and Europeans, save in a purely commercial setting. Thus, Weilung's marriage to George is the final burial within such a culture."¹⁶⁰ Edward Gunn also perceptively points out that "ultimately, such a society is portrayed not for itself, but as a representation of the failure of the human condition in which the protagonist must either destroy herself or submit her vain longings to the destruction that life inevitably carries out."¹⁶¹ It is of little doubt that the fundamental motive behind Weilong's series of decisions is a desire to earn her social-economic security.

Similar consideration was taken by Cao Qiqiao, the cardinal protagonist in "Golden Canguie" (*Jinsuoji*), with a result more than a tragedy for the heroine alone. As the most acclaimed literary piece of the author, the story has received many perceptive analyses, I will only propose a different perspective: differing from the interpretations thus far which focus on the vulnerability of human nature (vanity, mammonism, and sometimes even sexual desire

¹⁶⁰ Leo Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 310.

¹⁶¹ Edward Gunn, *Unwelcome Muse*, 224.

as the “golden cangue”), I will argue that her perversity is a result of the social system (in particular to the system, or the social institution of love and marriage), as her tragic fate is preconditioned – if not predetermined – once she is married into the family.

The endless series of formalities and rituals introduced throughout do not invite blissful feelings in the readers, but they bring about a claustrophobic atmosphere. This is an aristocratic family household in decline and its fortunes going down: they immigrate to Shanghai as refugees due to chaotic dynastic changes. The physical web and cultural institutions of the traditional-styled family household remain almost intact, appearing as ancient as an archeological site.

When Qiqiao is firstly introduced, she appears as the object of maids’ gossips, which not only reveals her original family background – located in the lowest social stratum selling sesame oil, but also exposes the cause for her marrying to this gentry family: she at best can be a concubine in this upper-class family due to her humble origin, yet since her husband is crippled and so could not find a woman of comparable fortune and social status, she becomes his official wife. The chitchat of the maids also reveals the reason that she is held in contempt by others, even by these maids whose status is lower than her. This is as much to do with her humble origin as the class habitus internalized in her unconscious, inscribed in her psychology, and shown in her behaviors: the slang comes out of her mouth is so improper that it shames even these maidservants. Worse, she is indulged in opium-smoking.

That she is so entrenched in her own class habitus also appears in the fact that, although she knows that she is despised by everyone, she is still actively urging the matriarch to marry

one of her daughter out, implying that this can forestall improper affairs. Since she moves to an upper class she does not belong to, she is not used to its mores and conventions, but still holds ideas and habitus of the lower class and projects them onto her contemporary living circumstance. She wants to behave like an upper class woman, yet she doesn't fit in the family. A tangential remark articulated by her niece affirming her superstition of the medical function of opium substantiates the fact that the tragedy of her degradation is partly a result of her poor and ignorant upbringing which does not match the life style of the high class she lives in.

Qiqiao's frustration and her own impetuous temper are attributable to her cripple husband, who because of his tuberculosis becomes a puny invalid. She has to repress her sexual desire in order to get the inheritance she is expecting for. When ten years later, the time finally arrives for her relief from her boredom and endless anticipation, it only turns out that her life of humiliation does not pay off. She does not get as much as she expected in the property-division; moreover, her dream for a better private life is thwarted. During these years, she has contained a desire for her brother-in-law. A good-for-nothing in his nature who plays around outside notwithstanding, this man dares not engage in affairs with her. Only when the time now comes and Qiqiao wishes to realize her dream, he arrives with an ulterior motive. Yet Qiqiao's feeling of sweetness swiftly changes to be a rampant rage when she suspects his sweet words are just snares to swindle her hardly-acquired money by catering to her fantasy of love. Her angry expulsion, however, is self-destructive as it not only destroys the simulacrum of love, but also her spiritual and psychological prop. Immediately after he

leaves, she falls into remorse. The narrator here is completely empathetic with her feelings in an ostensible narrated monologue: “Today it is completely her faults. He is not a good man, she knows this. Yet if she wants him, she has to pretend ignorance, has to bear his perversity. Why did she expose him? Isn’t the fact of living in the world just that case? In the final reasoning, what is true, and what is false?” As her mind is enclosed by the golden cage to secure material independence, her past, present, and future lives are leveled to be the same one and are sealed off. Yet the reason that genuine intention is equated with false perception, and veritable life with muddled living, can only be appreciated with the particular social conditions in mind: in this society at the time the demand of genuine emotion was more often than not compromised, surpassed by, and sacrificed for the imperative of survival.

When this last sprout of love is pinched off by her, Qiqiao’s life is a hopeless drift muddling along homogenous, empty time. Worse, her unsatisfied desire and yearning transforms her to be a ruthless monster that destroys the lives of her own scions. She keeps an ambivalent relationship with his son Changbai (who has become a docile weakling, having little schooling, and indulged early in dissipated life), requiring him to accompany her all the nights chatting, urging him to tell her the secrets of his wife. Unable to suffer the humiliation, Changbai’s wife commits suicide. As macabre as this is that she passes her own tragedy to her daughter, Chang’an, by treacherously crushing the latter’s love in her calculated calumnies, out of her perverse envy of their genuine emotions.

This unnamed, inhuman malevolence towards everyone around her is her metamorphic revenge on the inhuman society. Although she never fits in with the manners and mores of

the upper mandarin class she lives in, she turns up to be its most poignant spokeswoman. The transgressing of class boundaries makes her pay much more than she has expected, her nature is distorted in this process and she is devoured by the system, which punishes any unblessed attempts at boundary-transgression in terms of class division and distinction.

In this light, the story is a narrative elaboration of the macabre silence of a petrified history. In her malevolent struggle against the nothingness of meaning behind the death mask of history, Qiqiao arouses sympathetic and disgusting feelings simultaneously for readers, and the suffocating density and intricacy of this world is exposed. The silent, ghostly appearance of Qiqiao is an allegorical figure of the shadowy existence of traditional form of life in the passage of time. The residual way of life and its ethical straitjacket, appearing not as concept but as image and material concreteness, shows its aging face and merciless code. Embroiled with the relentless social conditions of traditional family structure and class hierarchy, the tragedy is decidedly antiromantic.

In this world, authentic passion is impossible, which is expressed by the question raised by the narrator again and again “in this world, what is real, what is false?” The misgiving itself shows the confusion of human emotion in a transitional society in which love and marriage, as “structures of feeling,” or social-cultural institutions, are drastically shaken and shifting. The narrative voice, due to a perspective of universal human nature, attributes the tragedy to certain human cyclicity as if this is an everlasting cycle with no hope of escape. This proclamation is deeply rooted in a belief of ingrained human nature regardless of the permutation of social-economic structure.

Yet this apparent distrust of love as a genuine emotion that requires self-willed sacrifice met a drastic turn in her third novel, *So Much Regret* (“Duoshao hen”), written in 1947. Adapted from a movie script “Endless Love” (Buliao qing) produced earlier that year, this is a story in a light, popular style, in contrast to the previous novels and stories which have strong flavors of traditional novel.

The story itself is a conventional, yet for Eileen Chang an unusual, love story. Jiayin is a twenty-five year girl, and Xia Zongyu a factory manager ten years older. Two chance occurrences help them develop emotional attachment: they meet by chance in a movie theater (a modern institution) at the beginning of the story, and later encounter each other again when Jiayin happens to be introduced to work as a family tutor for Zongyu’s daughter. Unfortunately, Zongyu has an uneducated and sick wife living in the rural area that he married earlier following the traditional practice of parents’ order. In order not to harm the child, Jiayin sacrifices herself by pretending that she will return to her hometown to marry her cousin, while in reality she is leaving for a remote city to teach. Jiayin’s father, a minor character in the story and an old, degraded philander, serves to accentuate Jiayin’s selflessness: he tries to get his best from their relations, even by sacrificing his daughter’s happiness with a promise to Zongyu that he could urge his niece to become the latter’s concubine.

If not put in the historical context, this story would appear merely as a mediocre middle-class melodrama. The cause of the unfruitful love of the couple now is not a result of some evil, powerful figures, as what we have seen in the *Mandarin* and *Butterfly* stories, nor

the reactionary, traditional force such as what had appeared in the May Fourth stories (Jiayin's father may look like such a candidate, yet he is not obstructing their romance). Living in a society in rapid transition, they cannot satisfy their wish only because of the hindrance of the residual social relations and traditional leftovers.

What is new that emerges from the story, however, is a new passion arising from this middle class stratum. Jiayin sacrifices self-willingly her own romance to fulfill the prospectus of this new institution of love (and marriage). Because she is now capable of financially independent (though her educational background is not introduced, she can work as a tutor now, and later will become a school teacher), she needn't rely on men nor her father to support her life, so she can entertain her romantic feelings and envision a promising prospect. A will to make self-sacrifice, a crucial element in genuine, romantic love, thus rises up. The author was so enamored of this feeling that she "felt a subtle attachment to this story." To this extent the story indeed can be said as a sort of "wish fulfillment" which the writer yearned for yet did not enjoy in her own life, at least until this moment.

Marriage as a social institution receives a different treatment in one of Zhang's early stories. Though "Chenxiangxie: di er lu xiang" (Aloeswood Ashes-The Second Burning) is appearing as a serial to *The First Burning* (they are the first two stories that the writer submitted to journal editors as her maiden work), and its setting is also located in Hong Kong, yet its content is vastly different from the other story. On the surface, the story is nothing but an incident about an ignorance of sexual knowledge by the colonial subjects that leads to a tragedy, with Freudian undertone of abnormal psychology. In showing the distorted,

“unnatural” form of life under the strict colonial control and seamless blockade, the story is a disclosure of the hypocritical manner of the dominant class in the colonial society. But another dimension of the historical subtext must be brought in, which is also closely related to its prose style. It is noted that the story is “framed in a third-person narratorial voice (presumably Chinese) that has subtly humanized and ‘Sinicized’ them.”¹⁶² The feeling of reading this story, with all of its characters being British yet their words and gestures “sinicized,” is quite awkward. In my analysis, this stylistic choice has a close relationship with the author’s intention to conduct a subtle dialogue between Chinese and Western cultures.

This is not merely shown in some repetitive imagery reminiscent of Chinese derogative reference of Westerners at the time.¹⁶³ When we notice that the story takes place in a colonial land, and the community (a Hong Kong university) in which the tragedy appears are mostly Chinese, an allegorical reading brings out a subtle comparison between Western culture and Chinese culture, in particular their differing mores of sex. If the colonizers who allegedly undertake the honorable mission of civilizing the ignorant people of the colonized, is exposed of their hypocrisy with their own treacherous life, then the bankruptcy of their sexual ethics and morality falsifies the grandiose civilizing narrative itself; and if their strict,

¹⁶²

¹⁶³ These descriptions such as “a row of tiny teeth,” “so white they were blue,” and that “they suddenly shot outwards, reaching out as two-inched sharp fangs,” etc., will immediately invoke in the mind of an average Chinese the image of ghost which is generally regarded as “ferocious in appearance; with a green face and jagged teeth like a saw,” as the Chinese idiom “Qingmian liaoya” indicates. If we remember that Chinese at the time often referred to foreigners as “foreign devil” (*yang guizi*), such imageries in Chang’s stories invite more associations.

Victorian-style sexual more looks inhuman, Chinese sexual conventions would seem more “natural,” pragmatic, and so “civilized.” This implicit comparison of sexual regulations (as institutions related to marriage) subtly subverts the hierarchy of cultural sophistication (modern versus tradition) between the Westerners and the Chinese.

But this underlying cultural comparison becomes more obvious only in another story “Red Rose and White Rose” (*Hong meigui yu bai meigui*), which goes a step further to explore the overlapping and blurred boundaries between what is regarded as Chinese (but not modern) and what is modern (yet not Chinese), through the narrative vehicle of the writer’s staple theme: unhappy love and marriage. Yet the subtle sense of superiority is now apparently replaced by an anxiety, in the disguise of irony and mockery.

Anxiety of Self-Identity

The leading role of the story is Tong Zhenbao, an accomplished textile engineer occupying a high-ranked position in a foreigner-controlled company at his hometown Shanghai. He received advanced education in Edinburgh and has recently returned to serve his country. Shouldering the high expectation of the society towards Westernized social elites, he “is determined to create a ‘correct world’ that he can carry with him. In that pocket world, he will be the absolute master.” This “correct world” is also what the society expects of him, who has enjoyed the then rare privilege of studying abroad. But his unfailing conformity with social convention and order could also be seen as what he learned from the Britain, where the social rationalization has brought about a highly rationalized society, in which a British gentleman would be expected to behave properly in an unconscious way. So when he returns

to China, he brings (and is expected by others to bring) this rigorous mannerism to his homeland. Cast in this light, his apparent robust will-power is a manifestation of a promising subjectivity. Yet in face of China's social reality, this subjectivity collapses even before it is solidly formed.

The central plotline is Zhenbao's emotional experience, alongside with his comparison, of various women. His first sexual tryst is conducted in Paris with a local prostitute, during which he sees her in mirror an image reminiscent of the writer's description of the physiognomy of Western women in "The Second Burning,"

Her eyes were blue, but for a moment these spots of blue sank into the green make-up under her eyes, and the eyes themselves turned into transparent glass balls. It was a severe, cold, and masculine face, the face of a warrior from distance ages. Zhenbao's nerves were jolted.

Apparently, he feels that he is threatened. At Paris, the "capital of romance," this experience is unusual. What it reveals to him is that Western girl, or Western culture in general, is cold rather than passionate, like "a warrior from distance ages." In facing with this image, certainly the master is the woman who has subjected him to her manipulation. Hereafter his impression towards Western woman is unsounded, which foretells his interests in and evaluation of various Chinese women. But before this to be unfolded, he needs another (Western) woman to test his caliber. And this one is properly to be a semi-British, semi-Chinese girl. Though she loves him dearly, he controls himself not to consummate his desire. All the descriptions of his behaviors and mentality meant to show that he is "fundamentally a (traditional-typed) Chinese" who has no concept of gender equality; on the contrary, patriarchal, male-chauvinistic mentality defines his beingness in the world.

These two incidents may look like a sort of Bildungsroman for him, as from the first instance he grows up as a “man”, and from the second one he brings out a sort of “subjectivity” to control his desire. Yet according to Hegel’s master-slave dialectic, a subject needs to be formed via a subject-object relationship, in which the “object” needs to be one having comparable subjective spirit, which he can challenge with his wisdom and strength. As the girl with a half-Chinese blood is so free to accept men’s advancement, and too meek to spare him any stamina, Zhengbao’s “subjectivity” is not formed at this moment, not to mention that he always feels regretful for not taking her from then on.¹⁶⁴

This girl bears blue eyes; “when her eyes opened wide, the whites shown blue as though she were gazing into the deepest of the skies.” Therefore, she is still too “Western” to satisfy his taste – her outgoing behavior and nonchalant manners make it impossible for him to accept her, as he fundamentally is a conservative man sticking to traditional Chinese morality. Thus when he returns to the motherland, he is a man equipped with both Western rationality and Chinese ethics; or, Chinese (morality) as his essence, Western (reason) his appearance. This is a dichotomized world, yet the tension is seemingly balanced very well in his split mind.

The story begins with a metaphorical description of two types of women: “there were two women: he says one is her white rose, one is red rose. One was a spotless wife, the other a passionate mistress. – Average people is always speaking of “jie lie” (chaste and passionate)

¹⁶⁴ Hegel says: “what now really confronts him is not an independent consciousness, but a dependent one. He is, therefore, not certain of being-for-itself as the truth of himself.” G.W.F.Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V.Miller (Oxford: Clarendon press, 1977), 117.

by separating the two words. Maybe every man has had two such women—at least two.” Just as the phrase refers to a particular Chinese moral standard, we also need to subject this pun into the particular moment of Chinese context: his differentiation between chaste wife and passionate mistress is less from what he learns from Western experience than from Chinese tradition, especially the one since the late Qing period, when many gentry class men kept one wife and (at least) one concubine. In his time, this practice had been less popular, yet its residual influence was still prevalent: some allegedly enlightened “new youth” kept passionate mistress outside of the parameter of marriage. The New Culture Movement did not institutionalize new morality regarding gender equality in society. Even in the realm of marriage, many Chinese still managed to make the Western standard accommodate their customary ways of behaviors.

It is in terms of this phenomenon that here the narrator makes ironical comments on Zhenbao’s personality, which would constitute a sharp contrast with what to be happened: “Zhenbao is not this kind of person. He is always carrying things through to the end and in an orderly way. He was, in this respect, the ideal modern Chinese man. If he did bump into something that was less than ideal, he bounced it around in his mind for a while and—poof!—it was idealized: then everything fell into place.” What this “idealist modern Chinese man” learns from the West is that he can develop extra-marital relations to a certain extent; yet unlike in Western society, where such an extra-marital relations can “naturally” lead to divorce and re-marriage, the Chinese social custom requires him not to break up the formal marital institution, but to uphold an upright image at any cost. Because in Chinese tradition, if

a scholar visits prostitute or keeps a concubine, he can be called “romantic” (*fengliu*) and is forgiven by the society so long as he keeps his official marriage unaffected. While if he divorces because of his passion with the woman having affairs with him, he would be regarded as dissolute and irresponsible and would be reproached and despised. It is due to this strong conceptual restriction, which is “half-modern and half-traditional”, that Zhenbao, as an “incomplete man” (*bu chedi de ren*, what the writer refers to Shanghai’s “petty urbanite”), tries his best to fin in with the social expectation.

Therefore, although he submits to the temptation of his friend’s wife, Wang Jiaorui, an overseas (Singaporean) Chinese and once a party girl when she studied in London, no matter how she loves him, and how she is willing to divorce for him and reforms herself to be a “chaste” woman, he does not want to discard his social mask and ruin his long-term career plan. Therefore, he goes on carrying the image of being an upright man and a promising engineer as well as a filial son that Chinese morality requests of him, and abandons her and follows the social convention to marry an obedient bride named Meng Yanli, who is from a proper family and also received college education, which was rare at the time. She gives birth to a daughter for him. Everything goes the normal track, appearing idealistic as the society expects. When the story opens, her daughter is nine years old and “the fee for her college education is already prepared.”

Yet Meng Yanli is not a woman with the modern feminist consciousness of “lady first” and appears too meek and bland. She is even sexually frigid. Zhenbao soon loses his interests in her and visits prostitutes outside. What happens the next falls out of Zhenbao’s expectation

and control. Yanli's blasé towards her tasteless family life and her disrespectable status at home (she is so often rebuked by her husband and her mother-in-law that she is despised by her maid) leads her to having an affair with her tailor. Zhenbao, again, does not divorce her. But he falls into a more degenerate life in his private life. Several years later, when he meets Jiaorui again in the car, after hearing that Jiaorui has learned to control her desire, put down her vanity and led an honest and simple life, "suddenly his face begins to tremble. In the mirror he saw his tears streaming down. Why, he didn't know himself." Is he envy of her apparently "happy and genuine" (or rather, mediocre and vulgar, as she turns fat and less charming) life, the dream of middle class women; or is he regretful over his earlier hesitation and his betrayal of his "genuine love"? Differing interpretations of this seemingly unusual move aside, for him, life is still a painful struggle, which demands the self-sacrifice of his own happiness. So, after many times of dissipation, he "makes self-reform and changes again to be a good man."

On the surface, with a subtle authorial intervention running throughout the text, this story shows the protagonist's resolution and willpower. Yet nobody will miss the barely concealed satiric tone and the ironic twist, which reveals his resignation and willingness to settle for a more than unhappy life. In contrast to the impression the narrative voice strongly imposes on us, Zhengbao in fact never believes or views himself as a "good man," or has unperturbed confidence in his ability to control his destiny. His rash and futile attempts, like his tears trickling down before Jiaorui in the bus, exposes his feeling of impotence, enfeeblement, and failure. Yet the crucial fact that is generally neglected by most readers and

critics is that, what he does not want to ruin throughout his career is not his reputation or his marriage, but rather, his long term professional scenario.

While the narrative voice seemingly holds an untouched, cold depiction, it now and then betrays a tone of ridicule, which belies its feminine overtone – this is a narration articulated by a feminine figure.¹⁶⁵ Even though this womanly voice cannot help but stand out numerous times commenting on the hero, what supports Zhengbao and his unremitting efforts is rarely explained by it. It is not difficult for us to feel that it tries to impose us an impression that it is Zhengbao's vanity of keeping his face that he acquires a double personality and lives a double-sided life. To be sure, this voice also does not overtly shows that he is only a hypocritical man, but we need to go by ourselves to find the ultimate motivation that keeps him working with his idiosyncratic behavior, which the narrator apparently shows no interests to explore.

The story as whole is a story about some years in Zhengbao's life. Although he is always perturbed and harassed by his own desire and outside enticement, and is always skeptical of himself, he has a strong will to maintain a "correct world." He could not, but neither does he desire to, break out of the social order. What helps him maintain a united ego is his long-term plan, for which the narrator has informed us as "boosting his professional position, then after he has social status he would do some things beneficial to the society, such as opening a technical professional school for poor students, or building a model cloth

¹⁶⁵ For instance, she narrates that when Zhenbao considers his social responsibilities, he feels that "not only one mother, but everywhere standing in the world are all his mothers, tears full in their eyes, what they see is only himself alone." There is clearly an authoritative intervention here.

factory in his hometown.”¹⁶⁶ As social elite, he consciously shoulders this burden to contribute himself to the society, which is still highly bounded by traditional moral conception and falling short of rationalization. His anxiety, disturbance, dual personality and double life, and even both his hope and degeneration, can only be understood with these social-historical conditions in mind.

Yet towards such a self-sacrifice, the narrator, from a feminine or womanly perspective, keeps an ironic distance, and coldly observes his struggles and his failure. From this perspective, Jiaorui’s later marriage life is “authentic,” yet Zhengbao’s sacrifice is hypocritical and unworthy. His self-reform, as self-discipline of a middle class man to fulfill his socially expected goal, is regarded as unreal and is subjected to ridicule. But we can not afford to neglect the narrative irony: as a whole, this description of the “incomplete” figures, both Zhengbao and the two female figures Jiaorui and Yanli included, shows the incompleteness of Chinese “modern consciousness” promoted since the May Fourth era (or the inefficiency of the New Culture Movement as a social-cultural project), in which not only the concept of “new woman” did not, and could not, accomplish its ideal, but the idea of “new man” in general also could not lead to a fruitful direction of modernity. As a social melodrama, the story reveals both the moral hypocrisy of the Chinese middle class stratum (its decadence) and its inexorable struggles, thus finally speaking to the shaky condition of the semi-traditional Chinese society itself, which was stranded on a dubious and doubtful hope of achieving full rationalization, due to the intrinsic defects of the elite class carrying

¹⁶⁶ No. 2, 148.

out the mission (Zhenbao, as noted, is incapable of “transcending his flawed vision,”¹⁶⁷ and is engaged now and then in self-delusion and dissipation). Put in other way, Zhenbao’s failure to form his subjectivity is itself a symptom and an allegory of the failure to forge a new, modern identity, with the “bourgeois” reason as its core.

“Jasmine Tea” (*Moli xiangpian*) is another story about quest for self-identity. This quest is through the identification of and seeking for a father figure. It is also a play crisscrossing the twin cities: the hero is moving with his family, an opium-addicted father and stepmother, from Shanghai to Hong Kong to seek refuge away from the Sino-Japanese War.

Nie Chuanqing is a twenty year old college student, who appears older than his real age yet is effeminate in his physique and spirit. He is nervous after he finds that his deceased mother, Feng Biluo and his professor, Yan Ziyue, once loved each other. He becomes fantasizing that he would have been the professor’s son if his mother (now deceased) was courageous enough to elope with Yan. He makes no efforts to improve himself but only blames his destiny.

This fantasy leads to his distorted view of Professor Yan’s daughter Danzhu. Jealous of her identity of being the descendent of her mother’s true lover, he displays various symptoms of paranoia: love, hate, jealousy, self-abhorrence, and even impulse to kill and self-destruction. Yet, as an egocentric adolescent, he does not love anybody, what he wants is to attain a weird love between him and Dangzhu in order to empower himself and to

¹⁶⁷ Edward Gunn, *Unwelcome Muse*, 212.

jettison his visionary, inglorious past. In one instance, he says passionately to the girl, “to me, you are not only a lover, but also a creator, a father and a mother, a new environment, a new heaven and earth. You are the past and the future. You are god.” A seemingly narrated monologue helps to strengthen his sense of doom,

No escape! No escape! If there had been absolutely no alternative, it wouldn't have mattered. But now...he for the first time realized that over twenty years ago, before he had been born, he had had the chance for escape. There had been the possibility of his mother marrying Yan Ziye. He could have been Yan Ziye's son, Yan Danzhu's brother. Probably he would have been Yan Danzhu. If there were he, there could not have been she.¹⁶⁸

Given that this absurd rationalization is possible only from a state of delirium, it can only be an indirect deliverance of Chuanqing's own hysterical thoughts. But is it really so? We further see that his paranoia metamorphoses to be an unreasonable impulse to revenge, which is enforced upon Dangzhu,

Chuanqing forced these words out of his clenched teeth: “I'll tell you. I want you to die. If there were you there wouldn't be me. As there is me here, there should not be you. Understand?” He clasped tightly both her shoulders with one arm, and with the other hand he pushed her head down so hard that it seemed as though he wanted to shove it back into her neck. She should have never been born into this world...He couldn't help kicking her savagely a few more times for fear that she might still be alive...He ran as if he was in a nightmare ...”¹⁶⁹

His resentment releases his anxiety, which is a projection of his envy of the “Other.” In his mind, this other also defines negatively his ignoble identity. Ashamed of his own family background (because he was born in this family, but not out of a crystallization of “love,” as the new morality of the society mandates), he simultaneously fantasizes of creating a “new heaven and earth” with this “Other,” and shows a possessive mania: what I cannot

¹⁶⁸ Translation by C.T.Hsia, *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction*, 409.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

get, you also should not possess it. The resentment is a transformation of this envy. Thus he tries to push Dangzhu's head into the abdominal space, which vicariously shows his own anxiety of being an abnormal human growing out of a deformed fetus.

Without correlating with the social-historical experience, critics mostly resort to the Freudian interpretation of abnormal psychology to explain the incident and all his uncanny phenomena. But if we read this story allegorically by associating it with the social-historical subtext, we will witness more fruitful direction. It is due to the incongruence of family backgrounds – one from a merchant family, another from a mandarin gentry-class household – that Yan Ziyue and Feng Biluo were not allowed to be married. It was out of this stimulation that Yan Ziyue left for foreign country to study. Yet although he had the courage to implement his will, the Chinese society still foreclosed his dreams: his lover dared not go with him together abroad for fear of public opinion, and reluctantly married a rich relative instead; when he returned to his homeland after graduation, Chinese society did not allow him to advance his career. Instead of teaching the knowledge he studied from the West, he teaches Chinese traditional literature. His flights of anger in the class only release his sense of defeat.

Yan's sense of powerlessness and enfeeblement is shared by Chuanqing. But the latter's sense of frustration and feeling of anxiety is more serious: not only is he unable to inherit his "real" father's will to break social tradition, but he falls into the social web, where his patriarchal, old-styled, biological father abuses him, and his step-mother spurns him. His Electra complex thus is a search for a model Father figure to define his "true"

identity. But though he is eager to looking for a new socio-temporal order, this world could not be found in reality, so his identity could never be formed.

Thus said, we still need to go a step further by linking the specific temporal and spatial order. The introduction by the narrator at the very start reminds readers that what follows is a sad story related to Hong Kong: “This pot of jasmine tea that I made for you may be too bitter. I am afraid the Hong Kong romance which I am to tell you is as bitter – Hong Kong is a fabulous city, but heart-breaking.” In addition to creating a critical distance between the reader and the events to be unfolded, this narrative framework has stressed that what follows is a romance closely related with Hong Kong as a wailsome place. As a British colony closed to yet also aloof from its mother country, Hong Kong was at the time a place where many “old fogies and leftovers from the old dynasties” (*yilao yishao*) lived. Chuangqing’s family there is from Shanghai. Like many leftover households in Zhang’s story, they never catch up with the tide of the contemporary society.

In this family, Chuangqing received traditional education since childhood, so his level of Chinese culture supposedly should be higher than his classmates in Hong Kong. Yet even in the Chinese literature history class that Professor Yan teaches, thanks to his laziness and lack of confidence, he scores low and appears listless and shy. But only we correlate Yan’s sense of defeat in his concern with the fate of the country, can we understand why he rebukes Chuangqing like this, “If Chinese youth all like you, China would be conquered long time ago.”

But I will go a step further by proposing a hypothesis: would it be more inspirational if we read Chuanqing as an allegorical figure of Chinese juvenile bourgeois class, which, as a new, weak social stratum, was metamorphosed from traditional merchants and gentry-official class? Because this newly emerged, slowly developing class was despised and abused by the repressive, old-styled, patriarchal regime, a sense of being second-ranked citizens, without an authentic self-identity and protection from an upright forebear, transformed itself into an inferior complex. But while Chuangqing's perplexity with his bloodline, which shows her shame with his ignoble upbringing, can be read as the moral quandary of the bourgeois class towards their direct forebears, his entanglement with the past, indulgence in illusions, and refusal to confront the contemporary situation and reform himself shows the inclination of this class towards willful evasion of the reality. Without a solid social-economic power and status, and the ensuing cultural-political confidence of its self-image and identity, this new class lacks virago and stamina. Worse, this anxiety can change itself to an impulse revenging the outside world, in particular the weaker and the more unprotected, for its own inferior complex, as shown in Chuanqing's fascist inclination of sadism, which exposes his possessive mentality that wrangles with the world to claim the right and justice that he believes that he himself owns.

In this light, this story ultimately can be read as a story about two generation of Chinese intellectuals: the May Fourth type of intellectuals such as Yan Ziyue, who did not accomplish their dream and found no way to contribute their skills in face of the retarded, conservative society; and some post-May Fourth youths, such as Chuanqing, who lacked

virago or even the will to reform the society as their inferior complex imposed a restraint on them. This obsession with an existential quest for self-identity thus persists in Chuanqing, an allegorical figure of the generation, who now and then feels that “there is no way to escape.” This sense of no way out is due to his entrapment in his own flawed vision and his incapability to accept the reality, a result of the stringent social-historical (including the familial) circumstance. As a weak and crippling youth, an allegorical yet personified figure, who owns no vision of breaking out of the predicament by self-reform, his sense of helplessness and doomed destiny is socially and historically (over-)determined.

“Heart Sutra” is another story apparently about Electra complex, a pursuit for an idol as well as an object of love by another egocentric, adolescent figure, now a girl. Having an attachment to her father Fengyi, Xiaohan sees herself as a superior goddess. Like Danzhu, she also has a vanity to manipulate men. She not only successfully despoils her father’s love on her mother by sneering at the latter’s decoration and sign of intimacy, to him but also appropriates the love of her suitor Gong Haili in order to arouse his father’s jealousy. To appease Gong’s passion, she tries to be a matchmaker for him and her classmate Lingqing (who resembles her in appearance). But against her will, later on she only finds that her father has taken Lingqing as his mistress. It is clear that her father has found a substitute to avoid his incestuous feeling. She also finds that her mother has long ago discovered the affair of his father, yet remained silent to keep the family from breaking apart. Disappointed with the reality, “she suddenly has a strong feeling of disgust and

horror. Who is she afraid of? Who does she hate? Her mother? Herself? ... She starts to cry. She has sinned.”

What does this story signify? The use of the title “Heart Sutra,” which bears a strong Buddhist connotation, implies that the evil quality resides nowhere but in human nature, and we see that self-deception and illusion is harbored by various characters. Xiaohan’s father has explained to her that her desire to preserve her security and the memory of his love in her childhood years accounts for her attachment to him. This egoistic consideration is born of her sense of indulgence, and she refuses to be mature enough to enter adult relationship. The failure of her selfish scheme and the defeat of her extreme egocentrism belie the myth of individualism. However, this ethical complexity needs to be brought further into the social arena to be examined; only through this procedure can we understand the social cause of the psychological abnormality.

The characters live in a Western-style apartment building, with “a roof garden, rooms with glass doors, an elevator, and a long stairway.” Leo Lee has noted that “a Western-style house or apartment building is often the site of estrangement and disturbance.”¹⁷⁰ It means that not only their psychological tensions are strengthened by the architectural designs, but their psychological abnormality an indirect result of the anxiety and anomie arised by living in a semi-Western locality, where stimulations of erotic desire frequently transpire in the commercialized daily setting. When combined with traditional

¹⁷⁰ Leo Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 272.

decadent life-style, the erotic phantasmagoria can yield to a new variety of psychological disorder and incestuous instincts.

But if we go beyond this empirical inquiry and read this story as a social allegory, then the immature status of Xiaohan, together with her other friends who are seeking a father-figure for security, as well as her mother's determination to preserve order without justifying it, all of which can find their symbolic import from the historical perspective. For instance, in regard to Xiaohan's Electra Complex, a critic has noted that her

reasoning and lying are both evidence of the ... self-deception that she is above the human lot, that she is different and superior, that she can put something over on the world. In essence, it is to preserve the time in her life that was "the golden age" of seven or eight years past, the time of security and unquestioned love.¹⁷¹

This nostalgic remembrance of "the golden age," this inextricable attachment to a father-figure, is a call for a custodian who can take care of the development of an underdeveloped living being; it is a psychological need of a sense of security, which is only a result of feeling threatened by alien others and precarious in its socially un-formed identity. Lingqing is eager to finding a man around her age to go out of her unhappy family, yet she is willing to be Fengyi's mistress due to financial considerations. Xiaohan also once tells to her father, "You should have understood long ago, Dad ... as long as I do not give you up, you will not give me up." This earnest petition is out of a juvenile sense of reliance and the ensuing uncertainty about her identity. But this ostensibly personal existentialist quest is merely a displacement of a social predicament, a substitution of a

¹⁷¹ "The life and works of Zhang Ailing: A critical study," by Hoyan, Carole Hang Fung, Ph.D., The University of British Columbia (Canada), 1997, 126?

cultural-political confusion, and a projection of an economic necessity, with a distinct class nature.

In this light, these adolescents cannot simply be understood as ruthless people with no sense of shame, but their self-deception and flawed vision which leads to their degradation should be examined with the historical context and experience as its subtext and, furthermore, be read as modernist allegory. Their psychological morbidities springing forth both from their intellectual/political immaturity and economic dependency, their psychological and physical reliance on and callings for patron-like figures to secure their precarious sustenance of life, are an allegorical correspondence to the lack of economic and political power, sense of security, and finally a solid cultural-political identity of a newly developed, yet weak and unprotected, proto-bourgeois class, in an extremely precarious, semi-colonial, semi-traditional society.

Part Two

Rethinking the Disintegrated Modern Fiction Writing in the Nationalist-Controlled Area

The Shift of Social-Political Momentum

The eruption of the full-scale Japanese invasion in 1937 ruined the Nationalist government's state-building agenda, and aggravated the domestic economic situation. Yet the establishment of the United Front also helped different political forces work together against the invaders. The long-weakened "national morale" had surged up once again during the campaign. "Resistance and nation-state building" (*kangzhan jianguo*) became a widely-circulated slogan. Most people believed that this war would offer a good opportunity not only to drive imperialist forces out of China, but also exterminate evil traditional forces and propel the state to be more democratic.

The CCP tried to play an important role in the wartime cultural enterprise. Guo Moruo (1892-1978), a leading Communist intellectual, re-entered the Political Department of the Military Affairs Commission of the government in charge of propaganda. The formation of the All-China Resistance Association of Writers and Artists (*Zhongguo quanguo wenyijie kandi xiehui*; ACRAWA) in March 1938 called on writers, artists and other cultural workers to join forces in building a robust culture of resistance. In particular, cultural workers realized that they must develop a mass-oriented popular culture and foster a mass movement to arouse patriotic consciousness of ignorant peasants, who were the majority of the population. Thus, they claim that "literature must go to the countryside! Literature must join the army!"

(*Wenzhang xiaxiang, wenzhang ruwu*). In early period, urban-based writers and artists mainly utilized modern urban culture forms, such as spoken dramas, cartoons, and newspapers for their purpose of agitation; but they more and more realized the effectiveness of local, folk form of art, especially regional drama for the rural audience, and so tried to study and apply them.

The united front of the KMT and the CCP, however, was shadowed by mutual suspicion and intermittent frictions. After the victory of the Resistance War, “the major weakness in the government: massive corruption, harsh censorship, and political repression, the inability to control a vicious inflationary spiral,” and its “increasingly centralized, authoritarian rule” worsened, which greatly undermined the government’s mandate to rule.¹⁷² In view of this drastic transformation, we cannot study the cultural field of this area effectively without understanding the fundamental shift of the conditions of cultural production and concurrently, the various positions of the writers within.

The Restructuration of the Field of Cultural Production

After the division of the first United Front in 1927,¹⁷³ the New Culture elite or the Enlightenment intelligentsia broke into two camps. Though both regarded themselves as the legitimate inheritors of the New Culture movement, they had different and sometimes

¹⁷² Hung Changtai, *War and Popular Culture: Resistance in Modern China, 1937–1945* (Berkeley: Univ. of California, 1994), 7-8.

¹⁷³ The First United Front between the two parties was formed in 1923. It aimed to end the rampant warlordism in China. In 1927, the right-wing KMT, under the leadership of Jiang Jieshi, launched a party-purge movement to annihilate the Communists in the KMT party and in the society in general. The ensuing civil war lasted until the Second United Front was formed in 1936, when Jiang was forced to put aside his priority of civil war and reluctantly united with the CCP against the invading Japanese.

antagonistic views regarding the function of literature and art, which are predicated upon incompatible ideological convictions.

The cultural left was led by the communists and their sympathizers. Seeing cultural sphere as an extension of political arena, they promoted a “literature of national revolution” (*minzu geming wenxue*) or a “proletarian mass literature” (*puluo dazhong wenxue*), in which literature and art were entrusted a political-propagandistic role to participate in a collective effort of class struggle aimed to transform the social system. As regards intellectuals of the cultural rightwing, they included a few writers closely attached to the government and its ideology, but many more self-styled liberal writers. In general, these writers all resisted the emergence of Left-wing cultural front, seeing violent class struggle as hindering the fundamental project of constructing Chinese modernity when the national survival was in peril. They supported or acknowledged the government’s unification policy and modernization efforts. Although sometimes, some of these liberal intellectuals also articulated their discontent on the authoritarian government’s autocratic rule.

What is often neglected in this disintegration of the New Culture elites, however, is the ensuing transformation of literature as a literary and social institution. Since the mid-twenties, modern Chinese literature as a cultural and social institution has undergone another dramatic change. The concept of New Literature established in the May Fourth Literary Revolution had emphasized an individualistic orientation as an iconoclastic gesture against the tyranny of tradition. This agenda now gradually lost its urgency and appeal. Instead, because of the deepened crisis of the Chinese society, the idea that saw literature as instruments “for

society,” “for the nation,” and “for the state” gradually became the mainstream. As this collectivistic reorientation was premised on and propelled by the worsened class conflicts and imperialist threats, the leftists requested the new literature to represent epochal spirit, in particular to portray the lives of the suffering masses and the spirit of the awakening “proletarian.” They called this as a shift from the “Literary Revolution” to a “Revolutionary Literature.” This indicated a fundamental transformation of the conceptual institution of literature.

Witnessing the growing influence of the left-wing writers (who in February 1930 established the League of Chinese Left-wing Writers in Shanghai, inviting sympathy across the society), the KMT’s cultural bureaucrats proclaimed that they needed to lead the cultural field with the Three Principles of the People, so they urged the government to make a cultural policy strengthening its control over the cultural arena and developing their own cultural force. But ever since the KMT established its regime in Nanjing in the year 1928, aside from issuing a series of publication regulations and censorship codes and engaging in tight ideological control,¹⁷⁴ its endeavor to make a consistent cultural policy, if there was any, to a large extent did not succeed to win the battle over cultural hegemony. Facing the offensives of the leftist writers, in correspondence with its political ideology, in 1929 the government determined to create a “Literature of Three Principles of The People” (*Sanmin zhuyi*

¹⁷⁴ Aiming at suppressing the left cultural movement, these measures affected cultural activities across the political spectrum and met resistance of not only the leftists but the liberals as well. This attempt to eliminate the cultural left (as a support for its military “encirclement” against Soviet China) and the latter’s fierce resistance occupied the main stage of the field of cultural production before the full-scale Resistance War.

wenxue).¹⁷⁵ But only a few writers devoted to this cause, and the literary works they produced are shoddy and mediocre, oftentimes merely inserting the message of the “Three Principles” directly into the texts. Because the conservative nature of the KMT’s ideology, these works also often bear a strong tone of cultural conservatism, advocating traditional virtue and taste. In early 1930s, the government furthermore sponsored a Nationalist Literature Movement (*Minzu zhuyi wenxue yundong*), which was promoted by a group of literati advocating nationalism the highest principle of literature. The purpose of the Nationalist Literature allegedly is to strengthen the weak and divided nation-state by cultivating a unified “national consciousness” (*minzu yishi*). Since it helped the consolidation of the legitimacy of the regime threatened by warlord regionalism and mass revolution, although after 1934 some of the writers in this camp also proposed that the “nationalist literature” should simultaneously shoulder the burden of criticizing and exposing negative phenomena in social life, writers of this literature were vehemently attacked by the cultural left-wing as assisting the government to gloss over its “reactionary” domination and serious domestic social problems.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁵ For a study of the Nationalist government’s cultural policy and the literary movement they propelled, see Ni Wei, “*Minzu*” *xiangxiang yu guojia tongzhi: 1928-1949 nian Nanjing zhengfu de wenyi zhengce ji wenxue yundong* (“National” Imagination and State Domination: The Literary and Artistic Policies and Literary Movement of the Nanjing Government, 1928-1949), (Shanghai: Shanghai jiaoyu chubanshe, 2003).

¹⁷⁶ As it has been observed, “nationalism as a guiding principle was never totally discounted by the leftists themselves. However, they often interpreted it in terms of patriotism or anti-imperialism and always linked it with internationalism, proletarianism, or socialism.” Tien-yi Li, “Continuity and Change in Modern Chinese Literature,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 321, No. 1, (1959), 93.

Nonetheless, the structural transformation of Chinese society – the development of Chinese middle class in the past ten years with the reconstruction of the economy, the growth of modern industry and commerce, the institutionalization of transportation and public sanitation systems, mass media, and professional associations, etc., as well as the intensified international conflicts – contributed to high-spirited nationalistic sentiments. Accordingly, in the mid-1930s the “nationalist literature” became one of the three most important trends in the national cultural arena, with the other two being the “proletarian literature” and the “literature of Humor.” The last one was a trend of essay-writing appeared in familiar style focusing on light satire of social phenomena and stressing distinction of refined tastes for entertainment and “pastime” (*xianshi*). Inheriting the domestic literary tradition of the gentry-class as well as imbibing the nutrition of Western satirist literature, it was promoted by some liberalist writers and targeting at educated class.

Ultimately speaking, what both the “nationalist literature” and the “proletarian literature” believed and advocated is that, literature, as a new social institution, is and should be instrumental to the propagation of certain ideal or ideology. This constitutes a sharp contrast to the concept of “pure literature” shared by the liberalist writers. The latter maintained a seemingly apolitical gesture without noting that the concept of “pure literature” itself was a particular institution that stressed self-appreciation and even indulgence, which sprang forth in the West as an idea against the pressure of a highly commercialized society, where the intellectuals felt greatly alienated. The coexistence of these three literary trends, though merely a temporary phenomenon, reflects the fact that the cultural production at the

time was neither subjected to the mandate of a single “heterogeneous principle” – either the latter was determined by market force or by political imperative – nor wholly to the autonomous cultural principle.¹⁷⁷ The co-existence of all these elements showed the hybrid and uneven conditions for cultural production in a precarious “civil society” at a tumultuous age. It is also symbolic of the uneven development of the Chinese middle class in the drastically diversified class hierarchy, in which it was located in an embarrassing level: sandwiched between the autocratic regime and the radical intellectuals promoting mass revolution, with various ideologies competing for hegemony. These ideologies, such as nationalism, socialism, liberalism, conservatism, etc.; were themselves sometimes overlapped, yet they offered the social-political foundation for the cultivation of hybrid tastes for both the revolutionary literature (either the leftist’s or the Nationalist’s) and the “literature of leisure.”

¹⁷⁷ The concepts of “heterogenous principle” and “autonomous principle” are from Pierre Bourdieu’s (1930-2002) theory of “field of cultural production.” See Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, edited by R. Johnson, (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1993), pp.38-39. Simon Marginson has aptly summarized the concepts in the theory as the follows, “For Bourdieu the field of cultural production is structured by an opposition between two sub-fields – the sub-field of restricted production, and the sub-field of large scale mass production tending to commercial production. Each pole has a distinct principle of hierarchization. In the mass or ‘popular’ institutions that principle involves economic capital and market demand, and is heteronomous; though from time to time the mass institutions renew themselves by adapting ideas from the elite sector. In the elite institutions, which define the high status products, the dominant principle of hierarchization is cultural status and is autonomous and specific to the field itself. Between these poles lie a range of intermediate institutions which combine the two opposing principles of legitimacy to various degrees. The more autonomous the field, the more clear-cut is the division between restricted production and large-scale production, and the more the latter is symbolically excluded and discredited.” See Simon Marginson, “Global flows and global field: Imagining worldwide relations of power in higher education,” http://www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/people/staff_pages/.../ESRC_seminar0602067.pdf (accessed March 3, 2010).

The full-fledged anti-Japanese war facilitated the solidarity of the cultural left and right. Earlier, the cultural left, in the leadership of the underground Communist's cultural leader Zhou Yang, had dissolved the League of Left-Wing Writers in the spring of 1936 and promoted the slogan "Literature for National Defense." But this slogan prioritized nationalistic concern over the perspective of class conflicts, which invited discontents of some other leftist intellectuals. As a result, Lu Xun and sixty-six intellectuals proposed another banner – "the People's Literature for the National Revolutionary Struggle" – as the alternative. In October 1936, the two divided groups reached a compromise and a document of "Literary Workers' Manifesto on the United Resistance and on Freedom of Speech" was released. Many famed leftist and liberal writers signed on the file. The two concerns showed in the title of this Manifesto became the bottom line shared by patriotic intellectuals of all political persuasions. To work against the influence of the leftists, the KMT government in the end of 1936 issued a document entitled "Essentials of Literary and Artistic Propagandistic Work," reiterating its promotion of "national literature and art".

With the establishment of the United Front, most writers devoted whole-heartedly to the resistance efforts. But there were also some other writers who, with more radical liberal belief, maintained more or less a distance from, if not indifference to, the patriotic propaganda activities, and "regarded its likely effects on literature – and their own careers – with considerable dismay."¹⁷⁸ They refused to endow literature and art with an active social role and function even when the nation was in a critical crisis. This attitude, in addition to its elite

¹⁷⁸ David Holm, *Art and Ideology in Revolutionary China* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 45.

consciousness, should be understood with the commercialized, industrialized environment of publication that these writers enjoyed which developed and matured before the Resistance War in mind.¹⁷⁹ The maturation of the publishing industries (in particular those in the coastal areas) within a burgeoning commercialized urban culture in earlier decades had cultivated a cosmopolitan literary taste with a proto-bourgeois distinction that repudiated most forms of “lower culture,” meaning vulgar urban popular culture and especially folk genres.

The latter, however, at this time received a renewed interest by other cultural workers for mobilization purpose. But now, this popular, folk literature had changed its focus from the “literary and romantic value of the plebeian culture” promoted in the May Fourth era, to issues pertaining to “politics and nationalism.”¹⁸⁰ Because the political principle of legitimacy now superseded the cultural principle of legitimacy as the dominant one, some liberalist intellectuals felt that a process of retrogression had taken place. But their elite consciousness, which held fast to a literary taste and critical standard with a class distinction that disregarded to a large extent the reception of the broad masses, made them mistake an essentially political movement aimed at incorporating the masses into the national political life for the salvation goal to be only a literary-cultural movement that debased the New Culture.

¹⁷⁹ For a succinct study of the publishing industry at the time, especially that of Shanghai, see Leo Lee, *Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China, 1930-1945* (Boston: Harvard Univ. Press, 1998), especially the second chapter “The Construction of Modernity in Print Culture,” pp.43-81; and the fourth chapter: “Textual Transactions: Discovering Literary Modernism through Books and Journals,” pp.120-150.

¹⁸⁰ Hung Changtai, *War and Popular Culture: Resistance in Modern China, 1937-1945* (Berkeley: Univ. of California, 1994), 190.

Since the New Fourth Army Incident of January 1941 in which the KMT inflicted heavy losses on the troop of the CCP,¹⁸¹ the KMT government again tightened its control of publication and enforced rigorous censorship policy. But in terms of a positive cultural policy, they still achieved less. In 1942, they established a journal entitled *Literary and Art Vanguard* (Wenyi xianfeng); in the next year, they created a “Literary and Art Prize of Three Principles of the People.” However, both did not have effective influence on the cultural field. With the worsening of domestic political situation, in late 1940s many famed leftist writers went to Hong Kong before the establishment of the People’s Republic.

The Diversified Writing of Fiction

Lots of intellectuals at the time shared the feeling that although the wartime displacement added to the tribulation of the Chinese people, it also offered a rare opportunity for the regeneration of Chinese culture and society: it “pushed forward literature’s progress, broadened the influence of literature, educated the writers, enriched and fill their lives.”¹⁸² Kirk Denton also points out that “the disruption of the war diversified and decentralized the literary voice and ... helped to destroy the bourgeois superciliousness of the May Fourth language.”¹⁸³ Because the war delocalized the writers and pushed them into the “wilderness,” namely those hinterland and rural areas far away from the coastal, metropolitan

¹⁸¹ The New Fourth Army Incident (also known as the Wannan Incident) signifies the end of real cooperation between the two parties in the anti-Japanese war. To this day, the KMT argues that it was a punishment of Communist insubordination, while the CCP denounces it as a Nationalist conspiracy aimed to annihilate the army of the party. For reference, see Gregor Benton, *New Fourth Army: Communist Resistance along the Yangtze and the Huai, 1938-1941* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

¹⁸² This feeling was expressed by a scholar shortly after the end of resistance war. See Lan Hai, *Zhongguo kangzhan wenyi shi* (A history of the literature of the Resistance War), (Shanghai: xiandai, 1947), 38.

¹⁸³ Kirk Denton, *The Problematic of Self in Modern Chinese Literature: Hu Feng and Lu Ling* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 128.

urban center, these cultural workers had closer contact with the masses and had deepened understanding of the grassroots lives; consequently, their horizons were extended and the resource of writing enriched.

In the early era of the War, wartime dispatches and reportages which reported the heroism of Chinese soldiers as well as the brutality of the Japanese army flowered. These frontline correspondences employed a simple, poignant writing style to register the reporters' personal observation. Fictional stories also committed to the same purpose of national mobilization, and writers oftentimes self-consciously portrayed the process of various characters' awakening from individualist indulgence to collective enterprise. However, it is generally held that because of the unfamiliarity of most writers to real war situation as well as lives of lower class due to their class background and habitus, many of the actual productions fell into formulaic and superficial narration, falling short of authentic presentation of the minds of subaltern characters and real battleground happenings.

This promotion of patriotic literature in temporarily suspended the May Fourth type of critical realism which tried to expose the dark, semi-traditional reality and to enlighten the "ignorant" people. But when the Resistance War dragged on (especially after the fall of Wuhan in October, 1938) and seemed to enter a protracted stalemate, the early enthusiasm and optimism waned and the writings now assumed more multivariant hues. Veteran writers increasingly turned their critical attention from issues of national defense to domestic social problems, seeing the latter inexorably influence the effectivity of the resistance efforts. The dark side of the society and in the resistance rank, such as the inertia of the agrarian society

with the persistence of traditional patriarchal family system, its power structure and its relentless “feudal” customs, the suffering of the masses under its repression, the bureaucracy of the government and its conflicts with other patriotic forces, etc., were presented or “exposed”. The Resistance War provided both the momentum to motivate the writers’ will, and a prism for them, to observe the social problems and conflicts that more or less had been glossed over by the rhetoric of wartime patriotism. In the meantime, popular-styled writings developed and had more variants. Some writers mixed the resistance theme with the motifs of Mandarin and Butterflies stories, producing “tabloid novels” or a new brand of love-plus-revolution fiction, which oftentimes incorporated such elements as espionage scenario and detective plots, and were imbued with exotic flavor.

The “New Fourth incident” in 1941 was another significant turning point of war time literature. The national crisis led to a deepened leftward turn in the cultural circle. This social climate brought about a trend of social satire which exerts a sharp critical edge. These works emphatically describe the travails and hardships of the downtrodden class, including both the laboring masses and the “petty bourgeois” intellectuals and average citizens. Writers like Sha Ting, Ai Wu, and Lu Ling (1923-1994) once again took a serious critique of internal social problems. This is especially true during the Civil War, in which the restless social violence, the “awakening” of the masses, and the agonies and anxieties of the intellectuals were presented.

The first chapter in this part will study the popular writing developed in the Wartime by Wumingshi (1917-2002) and Xu Xu (1908-1980), which tried to incorporate Chinese and

Western literary techniques such as realistic, surrealistic, expressionistic, and futuristic elements, and to express such motifs as love, death, and alienation in a baroque style. The stylistic mannerism was not only a result of strategies of self-positioning in a rapidly changing sociological space, but more importantly, it had to do with a nascent national bourgeoisie which found itself caught in-between ruthless class struggle and ideological conflicts that defined modern China. The two writers engaged history by imagining, fostering and affirming a different world of life, a different sense of time and a different order of things. They both preached a new Chinese culture, or even a new civilization. For them, this new culture, in its very nature as the renaissance of the old Chinese civilization, must seek its fusion with western culture. This belief was based on the general supposition that the war would help fostering a national consciousness, which would strengthen the nation's rejuvenative potential; and it was also boosted by an international intellectual trend favoring Eastern values and criticizing Western civilization, as well as a resurgence of Nietzschean thoughts in the 1940s out of nationalist sentiments. But the conviction assumed itself as merely a "philosophical" contemplation that lacked a substantial social-political ground. From a safe distance guaranteed by their symbolic and cultural prestige, these writers positioned themselves in a way which revealed the persistent utopia and the historical defeat of Chinese "New Culture."

The next chapter will discuss the leftist "July school" led by Hu Feng (1902-1985), using its representative writer, Lu Ling, as a case study by situating the latter in the various positions of the cultural field. Hu Feng in the wartime shared the liberalist elites' view and

was staunchly against using traditional, especially folk, literary forms for cultural production, because he, like those liberalist elite intellectuals, “viewed folk culture genres as unsophisticated and unworthy of study because of their predominantly rural basis, vulgar content, and oral mode of transmission.”¹⁸⁴ Put in other way, he believed the utilization of urban popular culture forms only led to inferior, debased products with feudal consciousness or pornographic content. Interestingly, his targets also include the stories written by Wumingshi and Xu Xu. To combat this tendency as well as Mao’s “Yan’an Talks” which urged “petty bourgeois” intellectuals reform their class consciousness based on Marxist-Leninist doctrine and the party’s policy, Hu Feng proposed a realistic theory called “subjective fighting spirit,” insisting that intellectuals, with their progressive, advanced consciousness, should lead the masses of the people, to exterminate the latter’s “spiritual trauma perpetrated by feudal enslavement for thousands of years.” Their supposed advanced knowledge is not to be acquired by going to the front (which implicitly means “going to the masses,” as the CCP required), or by reading Marxist theory; but because “life is everywhere and literary material is everywhere,” one just need to acquire this “subjective fighting spirit” to expand himself, establish a subjectivity, and seek the experience of what he himself imagined to be significant to master the truth. The criterion of the truth is set up by the individual writer himself. Hu’s views were criticized by the Communist intellectuals for its subjectivism, which was fundamentally at odds with the Marxist’s theory of class nature of humanity.

¹⁸⁴ Hung Changtai, *War and Popular Culture*, 9.

Lu Ling shares many of Hu Feng's viewpoints, especially the views of the "subjective fighting spirit" of the writers and the "wild nature" of the subaltern characters in times of unbearable oppression. In his works, politically innocent and ideologically ignorant "masses" often fight against their oppressors out of primitive anger and instincts of desire. The expression of self-discovery and self-realization in his fictional writing is worked out through a confirmation of a natural humanity. But a careful analysis of his fiction will yield to a conclusion that does not support but deconstruct Hu Feng's theory of realism.

Interestingly, while Wumingshi in his voluminous *Wuming Shu* (Book without a Name) presents a "Bildungsroman" of a leftist-turned-liberalist youth, which will be revealed to be a pseudo- or reverse- Bildungsroman; Lu Ling in his two volumes of *Children of the Rich* also offers an ostensible Bildungsroman of another brand of modern Chinese intellectual, which will be shown to be an anti-Bildungsroman, or an aborted one. Both are rare genres not only in modern Chinese literature, but perhaps in world literature as well.

Chapter Three

Alienated Minds Dreaming for Integration

Constrained Cosmopolitanism in Wumingshi and Xu Xu's "Modern Literati Novel"

Wumingshi and Xu Xu were among the most popular writers of this period. Their stories, apparently located at the intersection of popular literature and “vernacular modernism,”¹⁸⁵ are at odds with the orthodoxies of social realism, in particular that of critical realism, that were predominant at the time. They share many similar features: both focus on legendary subject matters of contemporary society in the turmoil of modern history; both are also fond of surrealist description and “unnatural” languages; and both have idiosyncratic writing styles reminiscent of some traditional and modern literary schools: the Mandarin and Butterflies school, Shanghai’s “Neo-perceptionalist school,” and even the late Qing “literati novel.” They both reject realism to various degrees. Wumingshi even says that his fundamental style, either in life or in art, is to “stubbornly reject realism, and perennially embrace futurism.”¹⁸⁶ Xu Xu’s modernist *zhiguai* (tales about the strange) stories, which ostensibly concern the strange, the foreign and the quotidian, were also a remarkable phenomenon at the time. Meanwhile, some of their works are regarded as belonging to an

¹⁸⁵ The concept of “vernacular modernism” was created by Miriam Bratu Hansen in her comparative study of early Chinese silent films and classical Hollywood cinema. In her view, “classical Hollywood cinema could be imagined as a cultural practice on a par with the experience of modernity, as an industrially-produced, mass-based, vernacular modernism,” and the Chinese silent films of early twenty century shared similar features. See Miriam Bratu Hansen “The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism,” *Modernism/Modernity* 6.2 (1999), 6. Also see her “Fallen Women, Rising Stars, New Horizons: Shanghai Silent Film as Vernacular Modernism,” *Film Quarterly* 54.1 (2000): 10-22. Zhang Zhen accepts this concept and takes it to study early Chinese film produced in Shanghai. See Zhang Zhen, *An Amorous History of the Silver Screen: Shanghai Cinema, 1896-1937* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

¹⁸⁶ Wuming Shi, *Luse de Hushing* (Echoes of the green) (Guangzhou: Huacheng Chubanshe, 1995), 8.

unusual genre of “philosophical fiction.” Interestingly, what Yvonne Chang has characterized the modernist literary movement in post-1949 Taiwan can be applied to them as well: “the appeal to some forms of ‘eternal myth’ seems to inform” their “Herculean enterprise of constructing a verbal edifice as a material vehicle for some idiosyncratic aesthetic visions.”¹⁸⁷ Because of this feature, some scholars contend that the two writers constitute a modernist school, or develop a “popular modernism.” Yet because most of their stories deal with romantic subjects and engage in passionate reveries, their literary oeuvres are also called “post-romantic literature,” or “neo-romanticist writing” by some other scholars.¹⁸⁸

Still, the two writers also have their own specific features, which make them appear less to be a “school” in itself. The apparently serious themes and motifs of their stories also make categorization of these works as “modernized” popular stories, or “middle-brow fiction,” somewhat controversial. It is the purpose of the chapter to contend that to understand the aesthetic characteristics and political import of their works, we have to put aside, at least for a moment, the hierarchy between high-brow and middle-brow fiction, or high culture and low culture. What we need to do is to examine the works in the context of the contemporary history, in order to appreciate what these adjectives, such as “high” “middle,” and “low,” meant in the era.

¹⁸⁷ Yvonne Sung-sheng Chang, “Revisiting the Modernist Literary Movement in Post-1949 Taiwan,” <http://www.soas.ac.uk/taiwanstudies/eats/eats2008/file43157.pdf>.

¹⁸⁸ Yan Jiayan calls their works “post-Romantic literature” because their stories are “imbued with the hue of the Romanticism,” see Yan Jiayan, *Zhongguo xiandai geliupai xiaoshuo xuan* (Anthology of stories by diverse literary schools in modern China) (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubenshe, 1986). For the naming of “neo-romanticism,” see Geng Chuanming, *Qinyi yu chengzong zhijian: ‘xiandaixing’ wenti shiye zhong de ‘xinlangmanpa’ wenxue* (Between Lightness and Heaviness: The Neo-Romanticist literature in the perspective of modernity) (Tianjing: Nankai daxue chubanshe, 2004).

I will call their works a brand of “modern literati fiction.” My study reveals that the similarities of their works were originated from their same intellectual position and political attitudes towards the era, which led to their highly homogenous ways of dealing with the subject motifs. Briefly speaking, they both place themselves outside of the mainstream realistic writing to construct an individualistic narrative aimed to transcend the dominant discourse of the time. Nevertheless, the liberal cosmopolitanism that they share and was inscribed in their fictional works was constrained by the social-political momentum of the time, resulting in many fissures and gaps. Only through this analytical procedure, the true significance, import, and the inexorable dilemma of their “neo-romanticist” modern literati fiction – a genre of “fiction of conception” – will be fully appreciated.

From Left-leaning Intellectual to Liberal Individualist

Though the vicissitudes of their lives are different, the intellectual trajectories of both writers are analogous, which brought about comparable personal habitus and literary dispositions, best shown in their stories: they started from leftist stories, through anti-war patriotic writings, on the way to a sort of “popular fiction” that combined nationalist impulse and “bourgeois” tastes. Yvonne Chang, in her work *Literary Culture in Taiwan*, in citing Ba Jin’s novel *Jiliu* (Rapid torrents) as an example, has made the following keen observation of the “popular fiction”, which is also applicable to these writers, “it is possible to attribute their simultaneous appeal to high- and middle-brow readers to a happy convergence between the nationalist-moralist impulse and popular taste ... we may consider this new formula’s appearance ... that flourished in the 1920s and 1930s as a replacement of the earlier, more

traditionalist popular genre, the Mandarin Duck and Butterflies School.”¹⁸⁹ This is a replacement, and it is also inheritance or transformation. In their shift from writing social satire stories to composing popular novels of historical romance, they did inherit and transform the formula.

Wumingshi (literally means “anonym”) was the pen name used by Bu Naifu (original name Baonan). Born in 1917 in Nanjing, he was the son of a Chinese-medicine practitioner and a mother with little education. His father died when he was five, and he was sent to Yangzhou where he spent a solitary childhood with his maternal grandma. During his student days, he had acted in plays written by the left-wing playwright Tian Han (1898-1968), and had participated in patriotic protests against the Japanese invasion. Dissatisfied with the education system, he refused to participate in the National Entrance Exam, quit high school in April 1934 just two months before graduation, and went to Beiping (the then name for Beijing) himself. He had audited in Beijing University, but spent more time in Beijing Library, engaging in self-study.

Thus began his left-leaning period. In Beijing Library, he avidly read books on Marxism. In 1935, he briefly entered a junior college to study Russian, only to be forced by his family to return to Nanjing when the school was closed by the authority because of its supposed ties to the Soviet Union and Communists. But even at this period, the liberalist thoughts outlined in the books written by Hu Shi and Zhang Dongxun which criticized the Materialist Dialecticism balanced his leftist-leaning tendency.

¹⁸⁹ Yvonne Chang, *Literary Culture in Taiwan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 60.

After the outbreak of the War in 1937, he joined the exodus team to the interior and finally settled down in Chongqing as reporter for the government-sponsored *Saodang Bao* (Wartime Daily), and also worked as publication inspector for the authority. The year 1939 marked a great transformation for the writer's political stance. In his capacity as inspector, the reading of the materials about the Stalinist purge of Tolstoy and the Soviet's unilateral negotiation with the German fascists and its betrayal of Poland stroke a heavy blow on his mind, and redirected his belief from leftism to liberalism. But even before this, the writer's subscription to the discourses of "human nature," love and beauty and his curiosity in romantic adventure had foretold the change in his creative direction.

From 1939 to 1940, he published several anti-war stories and essays. Unlike many militant anti-war stories in the same period that have thick description of blood and tears, explosions and killings, his writings are emotional stories focused on vulnerable humanity. In 1942, the writer moved to Xi'an, and published his first short-story collection *Luxiya zhi lian* (Love of Lucia). The titled piece, with the subtitle "a story happened in a midnight in Berlin 1932," also narrates a moving scene: When the hero, a Korean vagrant who has just returned from Russia comes to a cafeteria where many Russian refugees oftentimes meet, the latter surround him making inquiries on trivial matters about their mother country. Their nostalgia of the homeland melts political difference, facilitating peoples of different political persuasions to commute under the strong passion of belonging to a same cultural consanguinity. Yet the excessive seditious and agitative elements aimed to arouse the reader's sensational feelings and fervor might impair its aesthetic unity.

In 1944, Wumingshi published two extremely popular novels consecutively, *Beiji Fengqinghua* (Romance in the Arctic Region), and *Tali de Nuren* (Woman in the Pagoda). They immediately became best-sellers, and the writer became a celebrity. But the writer later regarded them as “apprentice works” manipulating hackneyed subjects and banal skills to please the readers. After he returned to Chongqing in the end of 1944, his more serious literary efforts were devoted to the writing of a multi-volume *Wuming shu* (Book without a name), the project of which started in 1946 and spanned 13 years. Before 1949, three volumes of the novel were completed and published.

Xu Xu (real name Xu Boyu) was born in 1908 in a rural household of Cixi, Zhejiang province, which had fallen into poverty in his father’s generation. His parent separated and when he was five, he was sent to a missionary school as a boarder. The life of solitude contributed to his longing for parental love. After graduating from the philosophy department of Peking University in 1931, for two years he continued to study in the psychological department out of personal interest. Around this time he began his literary endeavors. After that he went to Shanghai to assume the editorship of liberalist-oriented magazines such as *Lun Yu* (Analects), *Renjianshi* (The Human World), etc., which were led by Lin Yutan (1895-1976), the famed promoter and leader of “humorous literature.” In 1936 he went to Paris to study philosophy, but soon returned to Shanghai when the War broke out one year later. He went to Chongqing in 1942 and worked in a bank, while simultaneously holding academic positions in some universities. Two years later, he went to the States as a special

correspondent for *Saodang Bao*. Returning to China in 1946, he moved to Hong Kong after 1950.

Like Wumingshi, and many intellectuals in his time, Xu Xu had undergone a left-leaning period. He read many Marxist canons in his college years. Planning to organize a “Left Psychologists Association” in Shanghai, he had contacted the “General Association of Chinese Leftist Culture” for guidance in 1934. Therefore, his earlier writings bear the imprints of the leftist thoughts. They express compassionate feelings towards the repressed and the dispossessed. Yet elements of class struggle aside, his works also show sympathy towards degenerate people, displaying his ingrained belief in “universal humanity.” His overseas studies in France consolidated his turn to liberalism. Like Wumingshi, the reading of the trial record of Trotsky facilitated his disillusion with the merciless power struggles within the revolutionaries, and thus the communist doctrine. Meanwhile, the advanced capitalist society of France with its “free way of life” greatly attracted him (which was refracted later in the rich imaginary description and aestheticism in his work). From then on, he regarded himself as an individualist, and abjured revolution and mass movement.

In addition to producing tales about the strange and the fantastic, he also created some sober pieces on contemporary social life that usually would be regarded as “serious” and “high” literature. However, here I will only study his stories of the first category. Like Wumingshi, the first-person narrator in these stories could often be roughly identified as the author himself.

Taking the two writers as a whole, the dominant principle of “cultural legitimacy” held by them is predicated upon their belief in individualism and liberalism. Their “romantic” writings, which make inquiry on the “ultimate meaning” of life with a hue of aestheticism, are a response (in the sense of being a symbolic reaction) to the political and cultural crisis of the era, where there was simply little condition and space for the existence of such illusionary reveries. But the “universal” and the “common” can only be understood through the analysis of the concrete and the particular, namely the ideologemes within the texts.

The Maturation of “Middle-Class Romance” and Its Narrative Strategy

The early two novels that contributed to Wumingshi’s fame has the same narrative framework, in which a first-person narrator (the same one) comes to Mt. Hua, a Taoist sacred mountain and a famed tourist resort in Shanxi province, for convalescence from his meningitis. In the first novel, he meets a strange visitor, who upon his unswerving, earnest request recounts his love story; formally a sequel, the second story has a minor variation, where the maverick is a Taoist, who gives the narrator a manuscript recording his experience. This kind of legendary opening, usually couched in a first-person narration, was an over-used pattern in Chinese popular novels ever since the late Qing.

The first novel, *Romance in the Arctic Region*, was serialized in the newspaper *Huabei xinwen* (North China News, published in Xi'an), from November 1943 to January 1944. The love story itself appears hackneyed, which is reminiscent of the much-maligned, over-sentimentalized style and language of the traditional Mandarin and Butterflies school. A Korean captain is in exile in Siberia, where he temporarily stages to avoid the persecution of

Japanese troops after the failure of the Anti-Japanese resistance by the local Chinese military force which he joins. He has an affair with a Polish woman. Tragedy is inevitable for this brand of sensational romance: as he would soon be dispatched back to China, the passionate woman commits suicide.

But why did a rarely fresh platitude attract the readers' minds and strike their hearts? There is little doubt that the happenings of this sort of affair was a commonplace at the time, due to the much broadened social life as a result of wartime diaspora; but the teasing out of its essential ideologeme is the key procedure to reveal its mythical enchantment. First, the man is a new style of hero in the romantic stories of the time. He is, at least initially, playful and cynical, rather a man with unswerving faith in love. Early on, the girl mistakes him for her boyfriend in the cold snow field, and he takes this as an opportunity to have a taste of her beauty without sense of shame. But for a "romance" to be appealing, this image of playboy has to be replaced the sooner the better, so we witness his conflicting mind: On one hand, he seemingly cautions himself of the unpropitious outcome of this doomed game; on other, he is not willing to give up the relation and yields himself to be a "slave of passion." What ultimately props up his will to continue the dangerous play, however, is his desire to acquire psychosomatic pleasure, no matter how short-term it would be, and with little psychological burden of responsibility.

If we can acknowledge that this middle-class attitude on love affair is not unusual in the modern world, it was still at odds with the contemporary Chinese ethical-moral conventions. There should be a rhetorical explanation to be offered for this "bourgeois

hedonism,” and here it is the wartime exigency that plays the function: “The future prospect of the whole nation is invisible, where is the perennial happiness for the individual? But this would not hinder my pursuit of ephemeral spark of happiness.” In view of this predetermined rationale that aims to preclude and gloss over any sense of guiltiness, his heart-broken pain after the death of his lover, while being a natural response, has to be seen as a pre-arranged narrative setup. If some of Eileen Chang’s stories have begun to touch upon this kind of relation – this middle class romance, they had not reached the degree of maturation, because the protagonists in her stories are still in the half way to this new social identity – this self-willed middle class subjectivity that meant to satisfy its desires with much less sense of imposed social and familial burden – and thus their psychosomatic conditions semi-traditional.

In these two novels, the apparent conflict between “love” and “revolution” is very different from the pattern of “revolution plus love” that was popular since the late 1920s. Here, it is not for any revolutionary responsibility that love is sacrificed; rather, the woman’s death, or at least her disappearance, thus her symbolic death, is pre-determined from the very beginning to complete the narrative cycle: she is only a training ground and the medium of sacrifice (as a necessary practice of ritual) for the will-power of the man. She needs to be ousted from the man after she is consumed and her role is over. But to undo the anxiety resulted from moral qualms, the man now has to be emasculate (symbolically castrated), to show his pains over the loss of his lover, in order to compensate for his own wrongdoing,

which then work as a prop to skirt social-moral censorship. Meanwhile, for the melodrama to continue, the woman is necessary to be always infatuated with love.

This is so partially because, even without the plot of dispatch as the excuse, the woman would never have an opportunity to live with the man perennially and happily, out of their incompatible identities: She is a social outcast, symbolically subaltern. Here, the girl is a Polish émigré, a politically untouchable and the abject. Her father died as a result of the Revolution; for “political reasons,” the narrator informs us, that she and her mother are detained there. Therefore, this apparent model of genuine love is merely a facade to cover up the forbidden gap and the class divide that is not crossable (In this case, this “class divide” is less about the empirical class structure than about the symbolic division between the superior and the inferior). Furthermore, revolution here becomes the culprit responsible for the romantic tragedy, but this ostensible conflict between love and revolution bypasses the poignant social contradiction of the middle class ethical-moral hypocrisy: Woman, always woman, are the real victim of both the patriarchal gender relation and the symbolic class division. The class division is not caused by revolution itself – the latter theoretically, if not always in real political praxis, repudiates any class hierarchy – but by conventional moral taboo. In the story, it is merely the real life burden – the girl has to stay there to take care of her mother, and the man has to leave – that is offered as the “inexorable contradiction”. On the surface, the text shows “love,” (a “universal emotion and natural humanity”) as the paramount power-force prevailing over the difference among classes, nations, and political

persuasions, yet this apparent cosmopolitanism, if not internationalism, shown in a hackneyed romantic pattern, is thwarted by an invisible yet inalienable obstacle.

However, the (implied) author is honest enough to confess the hypocrisy of the middle class world; if not very clear here, then in the end of his second novel. There, he rhetorically asks: In this first novel the woman is dead, and Lin (the man) disappears; “should the former was not dead, and the latter did not leave, what would happen to them? The answer is ‘a Woman in Pagoda’. In other words, if their story develops further, the outcome must be like that of ‘Woman in Pagoda.’”¹⁹⁰

In many aspects, this second novel is reminiscent of the pattern of the first one, though the protagonists are Chinese now, and the male protagonist here intends to transfer his beloved girl to another man. The model to unearth the “buried romance” in it is the same as the first one. Meeting a Taoist in Mt. Hua, the narrator is astonished over his queer behaviors and pursues his secretes, finally the Taoist is “moved” by “my” earnestness to entrust his monograph to “me,” for he knows that “I” am a writer. The following is again the same pattern: a first-person narrative from the perspective of the male protagonist, who narrates his “tragic experience” of a lamentable love with a girl. The girl now, as I just suggest, is symbolically dead; and the man is always in deep grief. If an “aborted” love by the intervention of the Japanese imperialism (which, as said, nevertheless is merely a narrative setup) is what contributed to the sympathetic reception of the first story in the minds of readers; then, what new elements in this novel that led to its popular success?

¹⁹⁰ Wumingshi, *Tali de Nuren* (Woman in the Pagoda), (Hong Kong: Xinwen tiandishe, 1976), 176.

The story now is more saliently in the track of “Mandarin and Butterfly Fiction,” reminiscent of the traditional formulaic pattern of “Love between Talent and Beauty (*caizhi jia ren*).” The Taoist, with his secular name Luo Shengti, was an entrepreneur, a doctor, and simultaneously a musician (in particular, a violinist playing musical masterpieces from the West)! A typical middle-class *nouveau riche*, he is engaging in passionate love with a female student after playing a long-term game of love with the latter (a necessary formulaic element of the middle class romance), who also has an enviable background, delicate manner, and similar mindset as his. In short, they are a superb match in terms of their class distinction and tastes. Yet since he has an old-styled wife and children owing to the traditional practice of pre-arranged marriage, he has to sacrifice his love by recommending a handsome captain to his lover. Mistaking the move as a gesture to repudiate her, the girl accepts the arrangement, intending it to revenge Luo’s betrayal. This leads to the unexpected development and the miserable ending.

On the surface, this “tragedy” is merely a result out of the conflict between old and new, or tradition versus modernity. In other words, the lack of social rationalization brings about the tragedy. Indeed, at the first time that Luo plays violin in the school where the girl attends, he deliberately dresses himself with an old-styled robe, the plot of which implies that he has some self-imposed, old concepts if not idiosyncrasies. But if this is all that is conveyed by the text, had not this kind of story been rendered numerous times ever since the late Qing period? The fact that the formulaic plots of the two novels – the two handsome men both gradually yet decisively conquer a pretty girl’s heart, to the effect that the girls both lose their

pride falling desperately into their arms – are the set pattern of the middle class melodrama has reminded us that this is not simply an old story being retold in new way. There must be new elements that made them stand out. To be sure, that the tragic tone of the two stories invited sympathetic reception in the tumultuous time, when a great portion of the nation experienced diasporic life, is easy to understand. The psychological complex of feeling always being late to achieve happiness, that their “golden age” of ten years are irrevocably lost, that both the desired and the desiring have passed their prime years, surely also has also its social-phenomenological correlation. But more textual analysis is warranted to solve the enigma.

First, we need to note that Luo’s hesitation is out of his self-consciousness to protect his social status (numerously he reminds himself, “Even if I live together with Wei, what would the society see it? Do I still want to accomplish something in the society?”). Nevertheless, this essential stake is glossed over by a magnificent rhetoric, “How do I have rights to accept Wei’s sacrifice? Why couldn’t I sacrifice myself for (my) family, for the society, for the tradition, and for the future of Wei?” (106) But shortly later, he easily turns down all these excuses when he finds the man he recommends does not fit in with his superficial appearance, and believes that the society would without much difficulty accept their relationship once he discloses publicly their affair. What this dramatic change reveals is that, this is not a traditional story about the oppression of conventional moral custom; rather, the society is now enlightened enough to take in the new practice. It is only his courage that is a little lagging behind the time out of his ingrained self-consciousness. But the other

consciousness of this class – ever pursuing the happiness without the hindrance of conventional concept – is also developed enough now to surge up and prevail over the former one – anyway, he has enough social capital to protect himself even if he takes the bold action.¹⁹¹ (The affluent life of this new rich is vividly portrayed by the author. 21-22) His failure to achieve this “happy consciousness” has its particular reason: what he pursues is not pure emotion, but a passion based on the beauty of women.

This disposition of indulgence in physical, carnal pleasure appears ostensibly as a belief in beauty, or a kind of aestheticism, which is taken as a life philosophy. So, for the sake of rhetoric of “pure pleasure,” even though the text is filled with descriptions of the physical attraction of woman (the girl) with enticing sexual overtones and implications which are reminiscent of both the style of the neo-perceptionalists and the sensual, sexual descriptions in the works of the “triangle affair expert” Zhang Ziping,¹⁹² it decisively evades any possible charge of this sort, and aims to show it as “pure art,” thus we also see some seemingly classical-style portrait of the beauty of a woman’s body (36). What needs to be noted here is that the descriptions should not be seen as merely provided for literary effects, although they do contribute to the sensational, popular success of the story (thus its “middle-brow” nature).

¹⁹¹ For the description of this consciousness, see p.158. “For our happiness, I can sacrifice everything: my honor, social status, personality, and any others. I only want one thing: happiness” (158). The “four principles” that Luo finally generalizes out of his life experience also substantiate this point: in his views, man should cherish the opportunity of acquiring happiness; happiness is ephemeral, a man should not sacrifice much for others as this will spoil the happiness of the latter; meanwhile, he aptly sees his “self-consciousness” as the main cause for the tragedy, yet he takes it not as his self-interested class consciousness, but as his “self-respect” (174).

¹⁹² For instance, the description of Wei’s beauty (25-26); the effects of his violin performance are like “caressing a girl’s fragrant body, a girl’s fragrant bust” (32); and the psychosomatic feelings when he embraces her (60).

Aside from the fact that the protagonist disclaims his interests in carnal pleasure, and proclaims that his love is “the purest sympathy, the cleanest fantasy, with some elements of religious import” (55), he also tries his best to appear “innocent, natural, and sincere” (56). However, once the romance is aborted, he finds carnal fulfillment by visiting prostitutes; and once he finds Wei has been too old to meet his dreams for beauty (in her eyes, now she is “the symbol of the end of the universe, too horrified,” 164), he immediately leaves her without a second thought. But this egocentric indulgence in aestheticism, a typical life philosophy of the middle class, which now gradually emerges in the society, is in conflict with marriage as a social institution. This conflict between “aesthetic hedonism” and social rationality – both being the “bourgeois” dispositions, which then become irresolvable, immanent contradiction – is the ultimate cause of the tragedy, the tragedy being less the aborted romance between the youths than the final repudiation of love as selfless emotion: For hedonistic concerns, Luo engages in love without consideration of his social responsibility – the latter a form of the social rationality; and for the same aestheticism, he leaves Wei because she has been too old to arouse his interests – the action itself is also out of his “rationality.” Ultimately, then, what prevails in the last is his “self-consciousness,” the bourgeois “self-respect,” a class consciousness that aims to pursue individual happiness relentlessly without any hindrance in mind, no matter whether the hindrance being the social custom or the interests of the other. This reading behind the facade of sentimentalism is contrary to what we understand superficially from the text.

To solve this conflict (or dilemma) between aestheticism and rationality, which is predicated on a social contradiction, the author has tried to resort to some “universal” ideas, in particular love, to bridge the gap and gloss over the fissure. That Luo apparently converts to religion is one kind of this effort. But there is another one. We need to note that what has been told by Luo’s writing is not the whole story – the framework that the story is being told informs us more. The narrator in the very beginning believes that “everyone is selfish; this is the truth of the universe. The difference is only that, some people understand that they are selfish, the others even do not understand the fact.” “I admit that I’m selfish, I understand that I’m selfish. To avoid damage to others out of my selfishness, I can only seek for solitude” (1). This idea is apparently identical with Luo’s, thus the narrator meets the latter in Mt. Hua, who has been there for the same philosophy though for different reasons (it is also due to this same life attitude that Luo sees the narrator as his peer and had entrusted his manuscript). But what is paradoxical is that, with the rendition of Luo’s tragic story, the text ostensibly eulogizes a sublime spirit of self-sacrifice; which, ironically, is also attributed to be the culprit of the tragedy. But this is merely a superficial smokescreen that protects the inner cause of tragedy.

The acknowledgement of ingrained selfishness of the human being in the very beginning has laid out the internal contour of this new middle class world, which is confirmed again in the end by the narrator with another story that explains the title of the novel. This story also links the two novels – which the narrator has interpreted as of consecutive nature – together. “Why the story is called ‘Woman in the Pagoda,’ whereas

there is none in the text that mentions a pagoda? My answer is: Although on the surface there's no mentioning of it, actually there are many places where I have referred to it," the narrator says (176). Then he tells us the following short story allegedly written by his friend. A woman was incarcerated in a stone pagoda by his lover who is an aristocrat and who now does not love her any more. She still remembers their love of the past decades, and does everything she could do to commemorate her memory. When she is too old, she is informed one day that her lover is dead; heartbroken, she dies immediately. Nevertheless, the true fact is: he is not dead, but is constructing another pagoda for another woman. However, the narrator suggests modifying the ending a little bit by making the "girl" resurrect herself and smilingly enter the numerous pagodas the man constructs for her.

This serious exposure of the hypocrisy of the fundamentally patriarchal, middle class mentality – what needs to be stressed is that this mentality or consciousness bears a particular Chinese characteristics; because with the sway of Chinese traditional gender concept in society, woman does not hold an equal social status with man– as represented by the apparent passionate yet merciless male lovers in the two novels who are the real protagonists, is neglected by almost all critics. Although the narrator here goes a step further to pinpoint the builder of the "pagoda" to be "some power-force that is not knowledgeable" (180), his direct target is surely the freakish, capricious man. This is substantiated by the uncovering of the whole illusionary framework: it is nothing but a dream – the (implied) author-narrator does not go to St. Mountain the second time for recuperation. This set-up is typical of traditional Chinese narrative convention, which has a Buddhist connotation that implies everything in

real life is nothing but illusionary (this also adds to its popular, “middle-brow” flavor). But what is important here is that what “awakens” the first-person narrator is Luo’s hysteric reproach, berating “me” for publishing his story which exposes his mercilessness.

This analysis then turns the two apparent moving love stories upside down, revealing them as nothing but a critique of patriarchal hypocrisy and middle class mentality – in particular, woman become the testing ground for man’s “self-consciousness” of class-bound “aesthetic” hedonism. But this is still not the whole picture. What immediately follow the acknowledgement of the middle class selfishness in the beginning of this text, curiously, are some seemingly irrelevant anecdotes; which, however, after analysis will be the core of the essential theme. A priest from Norway has published an English book entitled “The Philosophy of Mozi and His Concept of Religion” in China’s Commercial Press, the top one company publishing academic and teaching materials which receives high acclaim in Chinese academy. This, together with his excellent language skill in Chinese, indicates that he is an authority of Chinese philosophy. The narrator believes in one of his “bold and fresh ideas,” which holds that “the God has only symbolic value, the spiritual significance; it has no scientific import, and he doesn’t need this, either” (2). But the narrator nevertheless sighs for his agony over the loss (the symbolic death) of the God. What this episode conveys is that, the outcome of secularization, or the Weberian rationalization with the severance of art and religion from politics, as the necessary procedure to develop modernity, has resulted in a loss of the spiritual integrity. The disintegration of the modern world has made the problem more poignantly stand out. With the outbreak of the First World War One, the serious problems of

the modern world clearly showed themselves. This social-historical context is the subtext of the text. However, without probing the social-economic contradiction, the intellectuals tend to attribute the problem to be a cultural one – with the death of God, the loss of faith in any ethical-moral standard and system.

Besides the priest, the other person who talks to the narrator often was a professor of philosophy. He now runs a mill, and his tenet is that the face of donkey is cuter than a man's face, as it is more faithful. The breakdown of the Western ethical-moral world, which had been regarded as the most advanced by the Chinese, led to a moral anarchism shown in the third person whom the narrator briefly introduces following the philosopher and the priest: a playful girl who does not believe in love and trust man.

Therefore, taken together, the two texts both expose a paradox that is seemingly insolvable: apparently, love is the paramount power-force that holds sway over the people and conquers any barriers to the union of humanity regardless of race, religion, class, and political belief, yet this love itself is greatly impaired by ingrained patriarchal value and middle-class consciousness. Cosmopolitanism is in vain or is greatly restrained, religion is also useless to unite the disintegrated human psyche: although Luo is a Taoist bearing a Buddhist name of “awakening to the void” (*juekong*), he still indulges in his memory while playing violin! This dilemma, as a predicament of the modern society, however, is ostensibly solved by the author in his next work: a magnificent novel-circle.

Book without a Name: A Bildungsroman or a “Philosophical Fiction”?

Book Without a Name was purported to explore, through the life adventures of the hero Ying Di (which can be read as abbreviation of “Yingzheng zhendi,” to prove the truth), the meaning of life and the problematic of cultural difference between the East and the West. The first three volumes, *Yeshou*, *Yeshou*, *Yeshou* (Beasts), *Hai Yan* (The Siren of the Sea), and *Jinse Sheye* (Golden Nights of the Snake), were published in Shanghai from 1946 to 1949 (volume three was only partially finished when Shanghai was liberated). Wumingshi calls this novel-series a kind of “*Jianghe Xiaoshuo*” (roman-fleuve). Under its realistic plots, this novel-circle is apparently “a summa in fictional guise” of Wumingshi’s “understanding and appreciation of the earth, sun, and moon, of human history, and art, and of religion, philosophy, and all varieties of human love,”¹⁹³ but I will pinpoint the specific nature of this rumination in the context (as the subtext) of the historical dynamic and momentum.

Violent Revolution and Its Discontent

The first volume narrates the hero’s passionate engagement with revolution. Brought up in a well-to-do family, like many idealistic youths at the time, he quits high school in Nanjing just before graduation and goes to Beijing to pursue knowledge and truth. He becomes a leftist after engaging in self-study and experiencing many menial jobs. When he returns to the hometown five years later, he has become an underground communist member. Soon he leaves home again to join the Northern Expedition Army and sets off for the First National Revolution against warlords. But the right-wing KMT’s purge of the CCP and the

¹⁹³ C.T.Hsia, “Forward”, in Pu Ning, *Red in Touch and Claw: Twenty-six Years in Communist Chinese Prisons* (New York: Grove Press, 1994), xvii.

subsequent massacre and white-terror strikes a gigantic blow to his mind, leading him to suspect the meaning of revolution. He is arrested by the political enemy nevertheless. Although he refuses to betray his comrades, his release one year later out of his father's negotiation with the authority makes him dubious in the eyes of his comrades. He could not bear their coldness, and leaves the revolutionary rank. At the end of the novel, at the invitation of a friend, he goes to Singapore to help run an overseas Chinese newspaper. If Yin Di's revolutionary experience is typical among the idealistic youths of the time, his gradually ascending suspicion and final resignation of the revolutionary cause is rarely seen in the literature of the time. This entails a more detailed textual analysis with the assistance of the historical subtext.

By close scrutiny, the seeds of the "betrayal" have long been planted into the mind of this aristocratic youth. His "idea of reform," according to him, is "very simple, in other words, my belief is very simple," "In the screen of this epoch, every color is dark, only one color is spectacular, it is called 'bloodiness.'"¹⁹⁴ This naive belief in violence is less based on any solid revolutionary class theory than on some sort of blind anarchism; its origin is derived from other sources – in particular, from his youthful rebellious spirit which has a class nature. He confesses to his father that his decision to quit school and to leave his family is out of a sort of "blind impulse," out of his fatigue with the ordinary discipline of the conventional life, especially the strict and repressive school life. For the "awakened soul" of Yin Di, he sees all the outside darkness and dirtiness; he thus, like his erstwhile father, decides to reform it. The

¹⁹⁴ Wumingshi, *Beast, Beast, Beast* (Taipei: Liming wenhua shiye, 1995), 36.

buddy of an emergent self-consciousness of this new aristocratic class requests its own development and growth, just like his obscured pursuit for fresh atmosphere out of the constrained, oppressive social circumstance and a naturally-born sense of justice asking for social equality demands its own fulfillment.

But just like his rebellion of the family is merely springing forth from a youthful impulse of an aristocrat, his fight with the dark society is also more for the individual urge of this oppressed, elite intellectual class than for the interests of the suffering masses. Later on he confesses that from the very beginning, he is an individualist with an aristocratic consciousness, a person with the Nietzschean concept of “superman.”¹⁹⁵ Nevertheless, if his belief is so easily set up, it is also easily shaken and torn apart. This happens when he sees the numerous deaths and overwhelming bloodiness in the anti-revolutionary massacre, and after he feels greatly wronged when he is tested by his comrades. He does not know why the counterrevolutionary split happens and attributes the cruel massacre to the bloody revolution itself, feeling complete disillusionment.

This picture is more or less faithful to the historical reality and had been depicted by the Communist writers themselves, such as Mao Dun’s “Trilogy of Hesitation.” Yet what makes the author’s portrayal depart from the latter is not his seemingly careful anatomy of the psychology of this group, but his description of the process of resignation.

Even during the high-tide of revolutionary zeal, the seeds of distrust and discontent have been implanted. The oftentimes caricatured portrayal of the zealous radicals serves as a

¹⁹⁵ Wumingshi, *Golden Nights of the Snake* (Taipei: Xinwen tiandi, 1977), 123.

counter-point to the always “reasonable,” cold attitude of the hero. Although Yin Di acknowledges that his colleagues always do an excellent job in revolution, their “pragmatism” and “opportunism” is directly in contrast with the protagonist’s idealism and political correctness. Under this conscious contrast, even Yin Di’s obvious venturesome plan of organizing gigantic worker strikes is shown as better than his colleagues’ inexorable terroristic strategy. If this has thrown the hidden line for the later plot development, then after the Purge, the refutation of the Revolution *per se* becomes more clearly presented through the narrative voice: to examine “what on earth the authentic countenance of this so-called ‘revolutionary war’ is? What on earth of this so-called “sacred bloodiness’ is!” (233)

While most times a-historically attributing the failure of revolution to the bloody revolution itself (“history requests peace, blood demands craziness; history asks for life, blood orders death,” 247), the narrative voice also sometimes shows its indignation over the betrayal of revolution: “History can be betrayed by careerists, but will not serve as his prostitute for a long time. Revolution can be betrayed by kidnappers, but the truth would not be betrayed! The justice would not be betrayed!” (246). This ambivalence itself needs to be analyzed with the paradoxical mentality of some intellectuals. Incapable of seeing the future of the mass revolution, thus tired of and appalled at violence, though still repulsive of the “counter-revolutionary” policies of the ruling regime, some of the intellectuals then intended to seek an alternative way to the national salvation, which would be more “natural,” peaceful,

and in no need of violence.¹⁹⁶ Because of this thinking, even the resort to history itself appears a hollow rhetoric, because there is a realm that is transcendent of history, that is, nature. This message is especially conveyed by the imagery of the peaceful and beautiful ocean, which repeatedly shows up. This then sets the tone and the thematic focus for the second volume, which is about a pursuit of peaceful love.

Romantic Love and Its Ennui

The Siren of the Sea is about a romance and its unexpected disillusion. Yin Di's overseas adventure in journalism is aborted due to the intervention of the domestic authority who keeps an eye on him, and he returns back to China. He meets in the returning steamship an elegant yet phlegmatic girl. They spend seven nights in the ship and have mutual feelings after a few exchanges. At the destination the girl disappears without notice, only to appear surprisingly in Hangzhou when Yin Di goes to visit his aunt, and he now knows that she is his cousin, Qu Ying, who he befriended intimately in his childhood. After four months of pursuit, he wins her heart and they consummate their love. Experiencing extreme happiness, Yin Di falls into fatigue. Having an agonistic feeling and an existential anxiety, he leaves for the North-East China to join the Anti-Japanese voluntary army in the wake of the "September Eighteen Incident."

When the volume opens, Yin Di is searching for peaceful "beauty and dream" after being tired of politics. Allegedly the "absoluteness" that he pursues in vain in the past years

¹⁹⁶ "In one epoch, oftentimes it only allows the existence of two forces. If a third one exists, either it is too small to invite attention, or is forced to side with one of the two forces, or is hung to death by the coalition of the two." *Ibid.*, 477-478.

in political struggle is now effortlessly acquired “in an instant” (4). Like Qu Ying, he treats the ocean as a certain set of metaphysics, and he believes nature is “wiser” than the philosophy of Kant and Hegel (28). But just like Qu Ying has aptly commented, “to walk under the moon light, one is easily to have a wrong impression that believes himself as not living in the secular world” (29), this dream to bring the peace and beauty of the nature to the world via transforming the minds of the populace is an idealistic reverie. (Yin Di admits that what he pursues is merely “something that is super-real. The further it distances itself from the reality, the better. Now I only love a little illusion, a certain relaxation” (47)). He now puts his hopes on the “metaphysical” or “idealistic” level: “Ugliness and foulness not only live themselves on the system, but also live in human mind. To change the system, f it has to change the (mind of) people first” (79 Apparently this is a mentality that was promoted since the late Qing period which tried to reform the “backward mentality” of the nation, what is different is that what Yin Di intends to preach to people now is not any progressive political idea, but “poem” and “beauty”: “If everyone can admire and believe in it, the ugliness will not come out” (79).

This search for the “absoluteness,” for the “eternality,” has its own *raison d’être*. Ever since the disintegration of the traditional world of life with the enforcement of modernity, the disenchantment of traditional culture first and foremost means the dispersal of the traditional Chinese worldview of *tianli* (Heaven’s mandate, or principle of nature). With the introduction and indoctrination of *gongli* (universal principle or axiom), the Western bourgeois (as a new World Class) world view of struggle, evolution (a linear, teleological historicism often in the

form of social Darwinism) has become the new world picture. Yet the great disaster of WWI, with its entire inhuman casualty and the destruction of human culture, made this picture again blurry and the value system dubious. A search for a new ontological foundation for humanity was regarded as a necessity. And, since for the liberalist Chinese intellectuals, Marxist internationalism is premised on a theory of class struggle as the propelling force of history that they could not wholeheartedly embrace, their revamped “cosmopolitanism,” which now was against “wholesale westernization” and encouraged by the war-time cultural nationalistic sentiment, could not but found one channel out: the allegedly Caesaristic, materialistic Western culture needs to be synthesized with the peaceful Eastern (Chinese and Indian, but usually implicitly referring to Chinese only), spiritually oriented culture.

This search for a new ontological “beingness in the world” was a development of the Chinese New Culture movement. But it had traveled along a path that departed the material ground of contemporary history and became a metaphysical deliberation. For Wumingshi, following the suit of the wartime intellectual trend of cultural nationalism, this effort was not “to reconstitute the mutual relevance between the form and the content of a society and its culture by means of breaking the formal reification of ‘tradition’ so as to have a re-encounter with the changing daily reality of the modern,”¹⁹⁷ but it departed from the social reality and aimed to fundamentally change the minds of humanity to be peace-loving, in order to bring harmony to the world. As its goal and its means are the same, this culturalist, “philosophical”

¹⁹⁷ Zhang Xudong, “The Politics of Aestheticization: Zhuo Zuoren and the Crisis of Chinese New Culture (1927-1937),” Ph.D. dissertation, Duke Univ. 1995, 17-18.

contemplation becomes a work of “modern literati fiction.” However, the emergence of this mentality that led to this genre of writing is also not merely a fantasy of the “modern literati,” but this intellectual habitus or disposition has its social-historical over-determination: the New Culture movement of the previous periods, in its urge to “catch up with the (Western) world,” had barely considered the problematic of the Chinese life-world as a self-sustained cultural world itself that has its own particular cultural tradition. This was compounded by the fact that the tradition was wholly disenchanted with the holistic change of mode of production and the ensuing sea-change of relations of production, and this tradition was hard to revive without a holistic overhaul under the perspective of the modern.

Yin Di the protagonist serves as a tool for the expression of this intellectual thought. But, contrary to what we might expect, the narrator does not tell how the hero propagates the sermon and preaches the gospels of love and beauty to the people, but instead shows how he has his individual happiness in his secluded life in the famed resort of West Lake of Hangzhou. Perhaps this serves as an example of how happy a person could be if one chooses to leave social revolution. To be sure, however, not everyone can afford the privilege that he enjoys: to prepare for such a life, his mother has pointed out that he intends to use his father’s fortune; whereas while Yin Di protests a bit by arguing that he can earn some money by writing for newspaper columns and by acquiring a nominal job (without working) by nepotism, he acknowledges that to have the way of life he desires, he has to “plunder money” from his father (105). The supposed hostess, Yin Di’s aunt, is also a rich widow whose stock share inherited from her late husband, a tycoon, is magnificent.

This hedonistic thinking is premised on a nihilistic mentality. To live without any desire, or with the minimum desire, is regarded as the core of acquiring happiness. This philosophy in its turn contributes its share to the mentality of hedonism. “To pursue a meaning in life? Then it is only through happiness, especially through the happiness derived from beauty” (186). He admits this is a fantasy, yet he believes that “fantasy is as inexorable as reality. ...Phantasmagoria is also a sort of reality...the reality is also a sort of fantasy” (187). Moreover, this mentality is premised on a discourse of universal humanity regardless of class distinction: it is believed that anyone who has sensory organs can enjoy the beauty of nature (189).

Qu Ying, the girl that Yin Di meets in the steamboat, now appears on the stage. Traveling around the country and even to some overseas nations, she shows a robust spirit full of curiosity. Yet her listless lifestyle is for merely her self-interest and is largely dependant on the money supply that her middle-class family offers her all the time, though she allegedly has worked several jobs (just like earlier Yin Di). The two are indeed an excellent match, given their highly coherent individualistic tendency, their hedonistic fantasy, their elite consciousness, and their comparable family backgrounds.

But although Qu Ying shares his philosophy (“politics hurts one’s soul” (367)), she pays a great price for her blind love. Having fully enjoyed and consumed her, Yin Di still feels that his sensual indulgence is not enough, and he leaves her for further adventure; consequently, Qu Ying falls into hysteria.

So far, this version of narrative of “revolution and love” is a far cry from the “revolution plus love” formula popular in the last two decades. But this disenchantment of revolution and love is merely a symptom of a specific intellectual stratum in this particular era. It narrates the experience of a leftist-turned-liberalist intellectual, who is disillusioned with the prospectus of revolution and cynical with the hopeless social reality.¹⁹⁸ With his kind of “spiritual anarchism,” he is doomed to descend into a more thoroughly moralistic nihilism.

Morbid Metropolitanism and its Disenchantment

The third volume *Golden Nights of the Snake* omits Yin Di’s one-year failed military experience in Manchuria. When the curtain is unfolded, he has joined a smuggling gang peopled by his former comrades. He leads a debauched life in this new circle: they gamble, visit prostitutes, take drugs, etc. He also takes a mistress – the former government agent who earlier had tried to seduce and convert him in the prison. He is furthermore enamored of a “dance party queen” named Sha Kalo. Indulging in such a fin-de-siecle sensuous and corrupted life, Yin Di finds his bed of flowers. Apparently, decadence and desire are the theme of this volume. This unusual plot development should not be simply understood via the realistic framework, but needs to be taken in an interpretive scheme in which it is read as a rendition of a certain conception, because the dissipated form of life harbors a profound disenchantment with metropolitanism.

¹⁹⁸ See the description of the epochal era in a heavily cynical tone on pp.702-703. Starting from a liberal humanistic perspective, this cynicism falls into a desperate craziness without proper political analysis, in particular the perspective of class analysis.

This disenchantment is first and foremost brought about by the hopeless social-political circumstance of the era. From the very beginning of the volume, through a discussion held in an artistic salon, the epochal feature is being laid out: a picture portraying a fin-de-siècle carnival beside a volcanic eruption, an ostensible illustration of Pompey's historical destruction is graphically presented, which is suggested to be named neither as "doomsday," nor "The Destruction of Pompey," but as "Our Era" (3). This is because, as the artist explains himself, what he portrays is a China that faces the analogous last moment of Pompey, a world that is repeating the destiny of the ancient city, when the upper-class gentlemen and ladies are still immersed in shameless indulgence (4-6). "Our era: Corruption and death," he concludes (8).

If in the earlier neo-perceptionalists, the bourgeois salon and party appear exotic and appealing for they provide the occasion for "high-brow" intellectual exchange;¹⁹⁹ then here, they play an essential role in Yin Di's dissolute life, where he meets friends, prostitutes, and psychotics who are wrecked by the war experience. Here, Yin Di also happens to see the woman who has induced him to capitulation. The description of their association and her life experience reminds us Mao Dun's novel *Corruption*, written in 1942, which is, in a diary form, about a degenerate female agent of the corrupted regime. But if the theme of the latter is quite prominent – a critique of the dark, "reactionary" authority, here the role of a former femme fatale is ambivalent. Since Yin Di now has repudiated his revolutionary ideas, he finds her much-used and abused body attractive.

¹⁹⁹ For the description of this kind of salon, see Leo Lee, *Shanghai Modern*.

But his enchantment with the mysterious Sha Kaluo is more profound. “She is the doomsday of the upper-class in this metropolitan city. Where she goes, there is an end there ... This unusual woman then becomes the core of the pathetic culture of this metropolis” (18). Watching this demon-like yet plump and attractive female figure, a strong desire arises in Yin Di’s mind, and he shamelessly pursues her. Curiously, Yin Di’s decadence is seen as a training ground leading to eternity. To be sure, the narration of his perverted life recalls the doctrine of Western demonism, a popular trend of modernism of the nineteenth century, according to which “a demon is a fallen angel who, of his own free will, chose Satan’s side during the angelic revolt,” and “one third of all angelic creatures are demons.” Meanwhile, “demonism is characteristic of evil rule.”²⁰⁰ But while Yin Di’s experience of demonism is correlated to his “great tribulation” in this period, this narration has more to do with a Buddhist conception, which holds that human desire, or his self-consciousness, is the ultimate evil responsible to all the evildoings waiting for the ultimate nirvana or enlightenment.

Nevertheless, this ostensibly transcendentalist idea expressed by the story’s narrative has its realistic premise which is yet founded on an un-dialectic rationale: he “repudiates the time, just like a fighter that throws away his gauntlet.” Though he believes that he is “now swimming in the river of eternity,” when he betrays the mission of the time, he is only thrown to the dark world, leading an eternal life of darkness (45). Unable to subscribe to any political doctrine, the rapidly-changed political map makes Yin Di feel that “the truth of politics is

²⁰⁰ See “doctrine of demonism,” <http://www.versebyverse.org/doctrine/demonism.html> (Accessed Dec. 29, 2009).

merely an ephemeral truth” (120). Therefore, “the genuineness of a demon is more authentic than the hypocrisy of an angel” (118). He submits to the demonist belief that “a sinless soul does not enjoy the authentic freedom; a man without experience in crime is not a real superman” (122). All these beliefs, however, are paradoxically revealed by the narrator as pretexts that “cover up the individualistic nudity hid deeply in his mind” (123). Yet, still, the protagonist takes this degenerate life as more genuine than the sublime spirit that he has devoted to the revolution. To him, now demonism is more profound and eternal than divinity. But this self-defense based on a discourse of natural humanity is in conflict with his self-reflections when they visit upon him, during which he feels regretful over his betrayal; he realizes that his “own self” is sinking and corrupted. It is in this loss of hope in reality that the novel brings out a feeling of resentment over Caesarism and the disenchantment over metropolitanism. The city is a den of evil. The disenchantment of metropolitanism is fully displayed in Yin Di’s relationship with Sha Kaluo that is unfolded fully from then on.

Yin Di’s will to pawn his soul to the demon, on the surface, is comparable to that of Frost’s action, as the narrator sometimes informs us (344). Yet Frost’s experience is a sort of adventure in the world of modernity to seek the full realization of one’s potential, while Yin Di’s degeneration is out of the social-political predicament. If Frost fully appreciates the enchantment of the modernity shown in the metropolitan culture (including its materialistic, mercenary culture), then Yin Di’s adventure is an experience of a social outcast that aims to unleash his resentment against the society; it is the onslaught of evil on the semi-colonial, semi-traditional China that to him is bereft of any hope and salvation. The metropolitanism of

the modern world that is praised by Frost is now cursed by Yin Di – he is now not a Frost-like constructor of modernity, but a builder of hell and the grave-digger of the perverted upper-class, as he himself acknowledges.

In this perspective, Sha Kaluo is “the core of the pathetic culture of this city.” She admits that “a woman like me symbolizes an era, a season, and the plague. Before the era dies out, I will not die. Before an era fully corrupts, I will not rot away” (396-397). When she finally confesses her experience to Yin Di, it shows that her life corresponds with every major historical catastrophe in modern Chinese history (464). As she is the symbol of desperation itself, Yin Di’s pursuit and consummation of his desire means to be an allegorical rendition of the last bound into the heart of darkness. Therefore, the legendary experience of this couple (they happen to meet one time in the cliff of a mountain), which apparently contributes to the popular tastes and the middle-brow nature of this volume, is ultimately a literary rendition of a concept of a specific stratum of the “modern literati.”

This degenerate world, as well as its residents, is sinking, but it is also urgently looking for its own salvation. This central thematic concern is realized in the following volumes, which were completed after 1949. After many more tribulations – Yin Di has converted sequentially to Catholicism and Buddhism, but has grown disillusioned with both of them – eventually he feels that he gets nirvana. The conclusion that he derives is that because the people, especially the rulers, fall short of a universal wisdom, they make mistakes or commit crimes. Thus, it is necessary to create a universal culture synthesizing essences of the East and the West based on a “Philosophy of the Universe,” which not only will resolve all sorts

of social unrests in the world, but will also bring a perennial peace to the humanity. This fantastic reverie reaches its epitome in the last volume. With the end of the Sino-Japanese War, Yin Di returns to Qu Ying, and lives with her and their newly born son happily on an idyllic farm. Having completed his philosophical quest, he is inventing a new culture for contemporary China. The utopian connotation is displayed ultimately in his political project of establishing a “Global Farm.” This fascination with a new human existence and a perfect interpersonal relation is reminiscent of the late Qing literati’s similar effort at envisioning a utopian future for China, which was entrenched in a gigantic crisis, thus accomplishing its ultimate mission of composing a fiction of conception.

Aborted Romance and Illusionary Cosmopolitanism

Like Wumingshi, Xu Xu’s stories also often focus on such thematic concerns as cosmopolitanism and “universal humanity,” and are also often couched in aborted romances, filled with shadow and tension.

During his study in Paris, he wrote his first masterpiece, the novelette *Gui lian* (Love with a Ghost girl). The story was well received and went through nineteen printings in seven years. The first-person male narrator, with an ambiguous identity but who can almost be identified with the author-like figure in many of his stories, happens to meet the heroine in the street one night. She addresses the latter as “man,” which triggers the narrator’s curiosity, but she soon reveals herself as a “ghost.” Being enchanted with her mysterious beauty, the narrator struggles between his sense of modern “rationality” and the credulity of this unbelievable captivation. Nevertheless, she insists that love is futile between a man and a

ghost. Finally he gets her story, though he still could not get into her heart. It turns out that she was once an underground revolutionary. Having assassinated more than a dozen political enemies, she was imprisoned and had lost his lover. When the revolution is betrayed, she declines the daylight world. Though the narrator wishes for a normal union with her, she leaves him without notice. The phantasmagoric plots as well as the fantastic atmosphere envelop the story in a surrealistic ambience.

Ostensibly a realistic work about an aborted romance between the narrator – an alter ego of the author – and an erstwhile revolutionary, the story is best read as an allegory: from the very beginning, this chance encounter is, if not a daydream, then a night-dream that barely can be seen as realistic. But more incredible is the “love” between the two. In all capacity, both the female revolutionary’s legendary career and her mercurial character appear mystical to the narrator. He admires her courage, and is attracted to her revolutionary ideal, to be sure; yet unearthly as she is, she is always an alien to him, refusing his intellectual understanding. She is “unreasonable”; whereas reason, or modern rationality, is what is cherished by the sober intellectual. With a seemingly sacred aura, she is nevertheless a “ghost” that cannot appear in daylight world. She is hard to approach and less credible. Though she still sends flowers to the narrator when he is ill, he never sees her any more – the spiritual relations still continues, he is still sympathetic to revolution and his erstwhile leftist ideal, yet there is no possibility for him to return to the historical site, to join with the ghost-like, mysterious, attractive yet dangerous alien, although he is “blessed” by the latter. The aborted romance is a fable of a failed integration. Despite having occurred ten years in

the past, this episode is narrated in the present time-space, which reveals that this story is a memoir about a phantom, or a romantic reverie. To be more specific, the story, in its renewed, modern version of “the traditional Chinese tale of mortal man enthralled by predatory female ghost,”²⁰¹ symbolically narrates in a historical fable the author’s severance with his erstwhile leftist passion with the revolutionary ideal.

What makes the “romance” possible from the very beginning, however, is that this “revolutionary” has died to the world – She insists that she is a ghost. Dressed in a Buddhist nun, she wishes to escape from reality. In other words, she does not hold her erstwhile passion any more, and loses her faith in the cause. This makes her more compatible with the narrator. Still, she is a mysterious alien. Apparently she refuses the narrator’s proposal because she regards love an absurdity in the human world, but it is not difficult for us to recognize that it is because she harbors deeply, genuine emotion towards her late lover, a martyr, that she could not accept any other man any more. Revolution is subtly conveyed as uncanny, but since she has rejected the political cause, it is barely reasonable that she still refuses to enter the secular world – if it is because her heart has been dead, it is paradoxical that she still cares for, if not falls in love with, the narrator. The latter’s crossing of the boundary between the real and the unreal to deliver his intended message, in this light, has many fissures waiting for patch-up.

²⁰¹ David Polland, entry of *Guilian* (Love with a Ghist), in Milena Doleželová-Velingerová, *Selective Guide to Chinese Literature 1900-1949*, vol.1 The Novel. (New York : E.J. Brill, 1988), 188.

“Alabo hai de nvshen” (Goddess of the Arabian Sea) is another story that the writer produced when he studied in Paris. The first-person narrator meets a woman in a steamship when he travels to Europe. Her unusual mannerisms and unbelievable youthfulness indicates she is a surrealistic character. She informs him that she is a nomadic sorceress traveling around the world. Her cosmopolitanism is shown in her erudition of world cultures and her capability to speak fluent Chinese. But what is significant in their discussions of all supernatural tales is the story about the legendary Goddess of the Arabian Sea, who was a beautiful Arabic girl. She is looking for the truth from various sacred doctrines, such as Confucianism, Christianity, Buddhism, and Islamism, yet can not decide which one she should adopt as her religious faith. She avails nothing after many overseas trips looking for the ultimate enlightenment, so she drowns herself. The sorceress’ question for the narrator is: what he would reply if the Goddess seeks from him the answer to her query about the truth. What he replies indicate that he takes love to be the highest truth: as he says, “religious commandments are nothing but the sublimation of sexual desire...while love is the God for the youth.” Unquestionably, for him, the “universal humanity” of love prevails over any religious teachings.

In another evening, she tells the man a modified story, in which the story she has told changes to be her personal encounter with the Goddess some twenty years earlier. This makes her words less credible to him. In the second day, he meets a girl with a black veil over her face. He suspects her to be the Goddess, and tells her that for the Chinese, there are three phrases of religious belief. “When he is a child, his parents are his religion; in his youth, lover;

and in his old age, his scions.” He explains his words: “religion is love, is a belief, and is (the will to) sacrifice;” for the Chinese, secular concerns are their religion. However, this self-supported, secular belief is challenged by the following happenings.

He gives her his ring as a gift because she likes it. The next day he finds that she wears a gigantic silver ring with some pictorial inscription on it. Upon his request, she informs him that there was a custom that was practiced in a certain place, where lovers of different religious beliefs, for the sake of living together forever without the intervention of religious taboo, would kill themselves. She gives him the ring, and accepts his request to let her mask be unveiled. The blessed moment of this symbolic exchange of token of love is sabotaged by his careless tossing of the girl’s veil into the sea, which leads to the final episode, when the sorceress appears, and he is informed that the girl is her daughter. As the latter’s heart has been taken by a man (the mask symbolizes the chastity of an Arabic woman), she could not take her mother’s occupation anymore but has to be married to him. Yet like Luo in *Woman in Pagoda*, only at this moment the narrator “remembers” that he has a wife and three children. He has to throw himself into the sea; the girl follows. Immediately, all of these events are revealed to be a “romantic” dream.

Again, apparently “love” surmounts all the divides between religions, races, morality, and even any ultimate concerns – if we remember that the secular persona of the “Goddess” has committed suicide because she could not find the ultimate belief, then now she does it a second time just for love. In this way, she gets what she desires – eternity, because love in this moment is seen as leading to eternity (she says to “me” when she jumps to the sea: “my

lover, this is our life in the secular world”). Love, even when it is merely a moment, prevails over any secular concern, and defeats mortality.

Yet from another perspective, we can also see love simultaneously loses in its battle with religious taboo, and with secular morality: the narrator can excuse his emotional impulse by arguing that his heart has a correspondence with the girl, yet he implicitly refuses her mother’s request to marry the girl for the ethical-moral convention of his mother country; meanwhile, they have to die in order to get love. Cosmopolitanism – love as a medium to tie in together people around the world regardless of their religions – is a dream that is in no way to be realized in the real world. Indeed, as the narrator admits his life philosophy to the sorceress, “other people seek true dream in life, whereas I’m looking for a real life in my dream.” We can rephrase this sentence a little bit to make its import clearer: there are some who seek to realize the utopian project in the secular world, whereas I construct a utopian world in my daydream. “Abandoning the present” is seen as the inevitable road leading to the utopian “seeking for the eternity.” But whereas he sees this as “a possibility that at least offers the freedom [to choose by oneself],” by taking the false for the real, this fantasy merely becomes a modern literati fiction.

This tendency is more explicit in a later story *Huangmiu de yingfa haixia* (Absurd Dover Channel). Under the same framework of the narrator’s daydream, it recounts his experience in a utopian world, a place reminiscent of the Peach Blossom Shangri-la (*Taohuayuan*) offered by the ancient Chinese poet Tao Yuanming (367-427), but the social-political structure of the society and the spiritual world of the populace bear more

imprints of the political Utopia described by Thomas More (1478-1535), the famed pioneer of “Utopian socialism.” Being “kidnapped” by pirates in a steamship, “I” am invited by the pirates’ leader, a captain who loves Chinese culture, to live in a paradise that has no hierarchy of classes, no discrimination of races, no commodities and currencies, and goods allotted by needs. This implicit, yet also more-than-clear reflection and critique of modern civilization, is aided by the repetition of a complaint articulated by the passengers and the narrator himself at the beginning and the end of the text respectively: while the distance of the strait that divides the two states is short, there is no possibility to build a bridge or undersea tunnel to facilitate communication. This is a man-made obstacle that separates the people, making cosmopolitanism merely a daydream. The critique of capitalism, and in particular imperialism, which hampers the realization of this “great union” (*datong*), is conveyed by the narrator’s reference to the forefathers of the British as the originators of the pirate, and the denunciation by the leader of this socialist fantasyland, who accuses the imperialists of plundering their colonized areas.

Free-willed reveries aside, here the author shows a strong tendency of anarchism, a cultural-political radicalism that repudiates any collective unit; instead, in the fantastic dreamworld there is no class, no bureaucracy, because “everyone is governing himself and the others.” There are simply no fights out of differing interests; the leader is merely the servant of the people and he has no authority; there is no college there because everyone is simultaneously engaged in work and study. To be sure, the author probably intends the piece

to be a mirror reflecting back the contemporary dirty reality.²⁰² And this critique was supported by the intellectual trend of the time interrogating the validity of modernity for the realization of happiness, or the debatable value of modernization (there is no mobile bicycle in the “state”). Yet the author has no way to evade the social-historical institution that casts a shadow over the dream, which is in particular shown in the formulaic entanglement of various forms of “love triangles.” He stresses that marriage as an institution is well observed there, for which he nevertheless faces a dilemma: falling in love with a girl – the sister of the captain that he befriends – he has his wife and children in his homeland; meanwhile, a local youth is also enamored of the beauty and envious of the love that his sweetheart bestows upon the narrator. This predicament also beleaguers the captain and the Chinese girl that he loves, who has been detained there for three years and who has her own fiancé back home. The solution for all these entanglements is debatable: because there is a local carnival festival in which the order of women is irrefutable, everyone implicated finally seemingly gets his/her desired outcome: the Chinese girl proclaims the leader as her lover, the leader’s sister accepts the advances of the local youth, and the narrator gets another girl whom he socializes in those days, which he does not expect and might not be very pleased. This picture is made possible by the change of mind of the Chinese girl (which is unexplained) towards the proposal of the leader; to further the settlement of the difficulties, the two set the arrangements for all the others. But we might ask: is the girl who is going to be married to the local man really happy,

²⁰² Apart from a critique of Western and Japanese imperialism and Soviet-styled Communism, China is not absent from this picture, as the narrator numerously attacks the ugly world of the contemporary Chinese society.

given her passion for the narrator? Will the “marriage” between “I” and the other girl be happy, given that “I” never has romantic feelings to her? How should the girl being engaged to the leader deal with her fiancé at home, and “I” with “my wife and children in my home country”? Cosmopolitanism (or rather, here a form of internationalism) is impossible here, not merely because of the separation of states, not even by the imperialist’s colonial advance, but due to something invisible. As a “story of conception,” it has entertainment value (thus entitling it to be a “middle-brow” literature, namely a work for the distraction of middle class readers), whereas its social concern and critical message is undercut by its “unrealistic” reveries and cheap-and-easy ending. It is easy to see that while social democracy and internationalism are idealized in the text, it only betrays the shortage of both in reality, but it may be painful for the readers to acknowledge that the utopian picture offered there has much more entertainment value than any realistic significance.

Shadow and Tension in a “Universal Humanity”

As said, the cosmopolitanism expressed here is premised on the belief in a universal humanity regardless of social-historical limitation. Yet the series of “romance stories” that the writer created thereafter, while still preaching this “religion of love,” again show the fissures therein.

Secluded in Shanghai, Xu Xu continued to write fiction, which established his artistic parameters and brought about such stories as *Jipusai de youhuo* (Gypsy Enticement), *Jingshen binghuan zhe de beige* (Elegy of Psychotics), and the one we just discussed. On the surface, the first story eulogizes a free-willed life unconstrained by social customs; the

second exemplifies a selfless love and self-sacrifice. A careful textual analysis will reveal multiple tensions underneath the euphonious tone and numerous gaps within the narrative texture, to the extent that they deconstruct the superficial message, showing desolate ruins out of the relentless demolishing force of the inequality of class hierarchy.

Ostensibly, “Gypsy Enticement” presents a romance between a first-person narrator, a Chinese intellectual who is returning from Paris to China, and a French model, who is a socializing celebrity. A romance between a couple with vastly differing identities apparently displays a cosmopolitan flavor:

With the help of a Gypsy vagrant Lola, “I” meet a beauty named Pauline (Panlei as her Chinese pronunciation) who works in a fashion boutique, and I take her to be an innocent fairy. Yet she tells me that she only leads a misshapen, chaotic, and contradictory life everyday, because she has to support her family. I spend a large sum of money to please her, taking it to be a spiritual love, which invites mockery from Lola, who scoffs at it as a “middle class bookish romance” and informs me that Pauline can be easily prostituted if I pay money. Infuriated, I reluctantly agree to test Pauline for what Lola says, and is appalled to find that it is true. Out of indignation and disappointment, I scold Pauline mercilessly. But shortly later, I have to accept Lola’s advice to sell myself to a rich-bitch because I’m penniless, only to find the guest is Pauline. Having reconciled with her, I bring Pauline back to my home country for marriage, irrespective of Lola’s warning that she is a “bourgeois” woman who is used to an extravagant life and would not be used to a simple life. Again, Lola’s premonition comes true, and I have to take her back to France. Pauline works in her previous profession, having much

commodity value for the products she helps to promote. But I feel weary, and follow Lola traveling to the States and to South America. After several months, being afraid that I'm falling in love with a Gypsy girl, Pauline resigns her job and follows me. We follow the Gypsies, who travel everywhere as they please. Taking mendicancy and legerdemain as a profession, from now on we live a happy life!

The adventure itself is a middle class romantic fantasy. From the precondition for the acquaintance (even though the narrator is a middle-class intellectual, Lola tells him that only he is dressed in handsome coat could there be the possibility for him to attract the woman) to the process of acquiring her heart ("I" spend lost of money, even by borrowing debts, to win her favor), all of which indicate that this "romance" itself has its particular class nature. Pauline can lead a decent life by her legitimate profession, but she works as a prostitute for more luxurious life.²⁰³ Lola has aptly remarked on the true nature of this romance: "In all honesty, what is your love towards her? It is nothing but her pretty outlook as well as her pleasant manner" (153).

Exotic orientalism is everywhere, which is taken to be a form of cosmopolitanism. "To be natural, always in exile, and free – this is the soul of our nation," Lola, the Gypsy girl says. "I" admire this "spirit," and recommend this to the readers. What is easily neglected, however, is the price this "romantic" life pays: Lola has to engage in a career that "professionally" hoodwinks money from the rich (and ironically "I" even recommend this as

²⁰³ Lola aptly comments on her life, "she is a genuine bourgeois woman in a capitalist society...Life to her is fire; she is used to a romantic, sumptuous life-style, in need of meaningless party; fresh stimulations give her excitement." Xu Xu, *Jibusai de youhuo* (Gypsy Enticement), (Hefei: Anhui wenyi, 1996), 151.

one asset of the ethnic group for emulation), and her repetitive insistence on getting exorbitant pay from me for any “service” she provides has also invited my antipathy. She also has complained that the children of the race have to travel everywhere to beg for food and clothes, living a miserable life. Therefore, although they see themselves as a group and help each other when needed, they are none other than the class of “lumpen-proletariat” without a salient class consciousness. They are the subaltern, the outcast, rather than a free nation that this legendary tale holds. Yet, out of the mouth of Lola the author shows the seemingly enviable free lifestyle of Gypsy’s “philosophy of love and beauty” – they engage in “free romance” anytime they please; yet for the Gypsy, this is a custom that is brought about by their destitute and insecure life. However, for the narrator, it is another middle class fantasy about “free love.” The latter of which had been promoted by the New Culture Movement, yet it was infeasible at that time.

When Lola preaches this “carefree and natural” “Gypsy soul,” the “happiness” of the group is attributed to their “free will” that obeys the order of the supernatural, while they fight nothing for the betterment of their life. The narrator expresses his admiration of this philosophy, “I love the attitude of your race: your generosity, innocence; you are not engaged in overdue study, not immersed in the interests of social affairs, having no curiosity over anything, not making deliberate efforts, not determined to devote to anything, not pursuing knowledge perfunctorily, not fighting for success, having no ideal and desire ... You are only believing in the blue sky and the bright moon, living peacefully and leisurely underneath” (166). This exoticization of the oppressed race is not merely out of the influence of a

Buddhist philosophy, not even from the ideal of Christianity, but it is for the spiritual needs of the Chinese intellectuals seeking for a utopian life outside the harsh reality. It is believed that if an individual has no power to change the world, he can at least follow the “nature,” the order of the God, to acquire happiness. “I prefer to seek a true life in daydream,” the narrator says.

“Elegy of a Psychotic” is about a healing process for the “convalescence” of a “psychotic.” “I” am a Chinese student studying psychology in Paris, and is hired to be an assistant of a psychiatrist for the treatment of a Madam named Betty (Baidi), who lives a debauched life ever since she was forced by her father to marry his business partner (which she declines). To prepare for this mission, I’m asked to receive some special training, such as boxing, shooting, horse riding, etc, which is reminiscent of the special training that some employed agents have received from their employers for tough missions – and indeed, some of the trainings play their role when “I” deal with the subaltern world where Betty is socializing. After observation, “I” believe the cause for her abnormal behavior and psychological disarray is her distrust of any person around her, who in her mind only uses her whereas harbors no love for her. To remove this mentality, “I” set up a scheme, firstly by persuading her that her maid Helen (Hailan) and “I” are truly caring for her; then by pretending that I’m in love with Helen in order to arouse her envy and passion. Betty is almost “cured,” yet unexpectedly Helen and “I” are really falling in love with each other in the process. The maid commits suicide to fulfill the will of her master. Moved by this

“self-sacrificing” behavior, Betty devotes herself to the God by becoming a nun and “I” decide to work in the psychotic hospital for my remaining life.

The latter half of the story is seemingly a moving, if somewhat sentimental and stereotyped, melodrama. Nevertheless, when the “romance” is undergoing a rigorous social-psychoanalytic procedure, everything apparent that has been narrated would be turned upside down. To begin with, “I” am merely a hired employee, so Betty has accused me incisively when Helen commits suicide that “I” “devote life, time, love and passion to be a slave of several thousand Francs.” Although “I” try to explain away this apt charge by arguing that “I am only a slave of my job. I love my job, and I’m willing to devote everything for my job.” We should remember that “I” have tried to quit my job quite several times, but is rejected by the employers with the threat that “I” have signed a contract so “I” should be “willing” to do everything that is requested. And this requirement obviously compromises “my” integrity. As Betty continues her perceptive interrogation, “you dare to use your debase scheme to beguile two vulnerable girls” by using innocent Helen to manipulate her emotion. “I” try hard to gloss over the ulterior motive of my intension to accomplish my assigned mission; in particular, “I” use the rhetoric of love. In counteracting her accusation that “your job is being hired (by my parents) to cheat me,” “I” protest: “But I know their intension is love.” Obviously, this is a (at least partially) false excuse, for we have known that Betty had been forced by her parents to marry a business partner for business interests.

The following self-conflicting excuse furthermore betrays my innate scheme and my guilty conscience. Betty cynically yet perceptively points out my hypocrisy, “Your ‘love’ is

your job.” “‘No,’ I protest, I can swear that only during my work that love emerged in my heart.” “What is your job anyway apart from ‘love’?” Betty ingeniously fights back. Besides, granted what “I” said is true, this “love” is in conflict with the professional ethics, so “I” haste to gloss it over, but in this way “I” have refuted what “I” just said, “Supposed my job is merely love, and this ‘love’ is real, what is the disgrace anyhow?” This “supposition,” however, is a completely fake hypothesis. Earlier, “I” have confessed that I do not love Betty at all; but to achieve the goal (of letting Betty become a “normal,” “decent,” middle class aristocrat woman), “I” have pretended to love Betty, arousing her passion by manipulating Helen. Betty eventually sees through the schemes, and reproaches convincingly my scurvy motive and behavior. “I” has no way to refute her accusation, but try to evade her incisive interrogation with the rhetoric of love.

This does not mean Betty has no her own problem. Although she earnestly looks for a genuine love that her highly oppressive family declines to her, she also tries to selfishly manipulate and monopolize “my” love; when she sees the manifestation of “love” between Helen and “me,” she indeed falls into the pitfall that “I” set up for her. Having been aroused of her sense of envy, and with the death of her maid – thus the removal of her rival in love, she returns to be a “normal” woman. That she finally decides to join a convent is due to her realization that she has vicariously deprived the love of her maid, and forced her to commit suicide (Helen has no way to compete with her master for love). But the cardinal culprit of the tragedy is “me,” nevertheless. Alienated by the capitalist money economy, “I” sacrifice my integrity and use foul means. That “I” eventually decide to work in the psychological

hospital, in this light, is a sign of atonement; but judged with what “I” has done, this action appears dubious, if not ridiculous.

Like the last story, this tale tries to displace the difference between classes, and the concomitant problems it brings about (the inhuman work ethics, the inequality between the master and the maid, and the mercenary nature of money economy) with a discourse of natural humanity. But this story of apparent euphoria of love displaces and covers up a merciless, cruel tragedy perpetuated not merely by individuals, but by the whole social-economic system in general. The author has tried to smooth over the edges with a beautiful veil of rhetoric, yet the tensions and fissures exist in all those wordy exchanges betray the ulterior secrete.

In *The Jewish Comet* (Youtairen de huixing), again the discourse of universal humanity is superficially eulogized, now with the facade of patriotism, while in actuality it exposes the cruelty of the war that wreaks havoc on the human’s mind. The first-person narrator Xu is on a ship journey to Italy with a Jewish girl Katherine, nominally his wife. Then in a long flashback we are informed that he is introduced by his friend, a Norwegian Jew named Sherkels, to this girl because she needs a sham marriage to claim an inheritance home, and he agrees to do so for curiosity and for the discounted steamer ticket. On board, while they gradually fall in love with each other, Katherine is socializing frequently with an Italian sailor, which causes the narrator’s discomfort. When they arrive in Naples, he is informed by Katherine that they have to wait for five days for a lawyer, yet she is out everyday, seemingly for hedonistic activities. Even though she has asked him to consummate their love, he

discovers that she intimately hangs out with the Italian sailor. But ultimately she reveals the mysteries to him: Katherine's mother is fighting the fascists now in the Spanish civil war (to which historically many international socialists voluntarily joined). She is offering her hand by sabotaging the weapon supplies that Italian fascists provide to Franco. What makes us feel less comfortable, however, is that while she needs Xu's assistance to enter the country, she has schemed to trap him because the task this time risks a person's life. The real victim for this mission, however, turns out to be the Italian sailor, who loves Katherine and is hoodwinked to help her. He becomes the scapegoat for Xu, in other words. But Xu and Katherine consummate their love after they arrive in France. Shortly later, Katherine departs for Germany again and sacrifices her life in another anti-war mission.

For love, Katherine can spare Xu's life; yet also she inhumanly manipulates the love of the Italian sailor. Xu's friend Shekels has joined to the scheme which almost claims his life. Love and friendship are unreliable during the wartime. In the story, for the efforts of (anti-)war, any foul means are appropriated without hesitation by the heroes/heroines. In short, the war profoundly changes the "natural humanity" of the mankind. Although the story extols Katherine's "love and beauty, her spirit and her body," the cruel aspects of the war are subtly conveyed.

This nuanced indictment becomes clearer in the writer's major novel, his most celebrated *Feng Xiaoxiao* (The blowing wind), which was a big stir at the time. With the subject of resistance, it merges elements of love stories and spy fiction, and is engrossed in a thrilling atmosphere. Again the story is in a first-person narrative, which accounts the

experience of a “modern scholar” (who studies philosophy) in the spy world. Like the author’s other stories, its popular reception and enticing subject matter endows it a “middle-brow” quality; but what is often neglected is that it is also a “fiction of conception” or a “modern literati novel.” Interestingly, this novel share many features of Wumingshi’s *Book without a Name*, as its essential stake lies in a narration of an intellectual’s “spiritual quest,” though now it tells a more intriguing story with absorbing plots.

The story takes place in Shanghai, the place of which served as a locale for many espionage events both in fiction and in reality at the time. In chance “I” rescues a wounded American military doctor named Steven and we become friends. Through him “I” meet Bai Ping, a beautiful nightclub hostess, and Mei Yingzi, a dazzling lass. After the outbreak of the Pacific War, Steven is captured by the Japanese and dies in the concentration camp. “I” am informed by Mei that they both are agents working for the Americans, and “I” become Mei’s assistant. Mei mistakes Bai Ping as a Japanese spy for her close association with the Japanese; yet Bai actually is an agent for the KMT government. “I” am assigned to steal letters from Bai, but the action is discovered and I’m badly wounded. Even though the miscommunication is clarified shortly later, the arrival of a Japanese female spy and her treacherous scheme costs Bai Ping’s life. Mei revenges Bai by poisoning the enemy. When the story comes to its end, Mei resumes her duty in Shanghai (her identity is still uncovered), and “I” leave for the interior engaged in “philosophical contemplation.” Throughout most of the narrative space, there is also a minor role, an American girl named Helen.

If the novel is read as a spy story, there are many technical problems. But this sort of discussion bypasses the real nature of the novel. As a “story of conception,” like the author’s other stories of this kind, again here political issue is treated from the perspective of cultural difference (although because little political context is introduced, it is less distinct here). Mei was raised in Japan; she has an American mother and a Chinese father, and is implicitly trained by the American military weapon. Her unusual, inexorable personality that spares no mercy on any innocent people with stakes in her political machination might have something to do with this “hybrid” nature. She constitutes a sharp contrast to Helen, whose character more resembles the classical, allegedly peaceful Greek ideal; and she is also a contrast to Bai Ping, who, holding many traditional Chinese feminine features, is the embodiment of “a general harmony” or a “glittering conglomeration of all the graces of Nature.”²⁰⁴ For this, the narrator has preferred to have her as his social mate (in fact he has stayed in one room with her for a sort of “spiritual love”). To be sure, here the author has no way to evade political issues. But politics, even the cause of national resistance, appears in the novel as nothing but conspiracy that is repulsive. “My” idealism of the universal humanity, in particular shown in beautiful girls, is sabotaged by these female spies with political missions. “I” feel repulsive over Mei’s merciless manipulation of Helen as a pawn for fulfilling her duty. In this regard, Bai Ping appears more human, as although she suspects “I” am a Japanese spy, she does not kill me and allows me to be taken to hospital. The Japanese spy is simply evil that is hard to

²⁰⁴ Wu Yiqin, “Xu Xu you Zhongwai wenhua Yuan Yuan” (Xu Xu in relation to Chinese and foreign cultural traditions). *Zhongguo Xiandai Wenxue Yanjiu Congkan* (Studies on modern Chinese literature) 1993, no.3: 146-61. 151-152.

be understood. Only Helen, a girl with no political consciousness, appears to me as the most ideal and becomes my true lover. “My” unhappiness with the utilization of innocent people as the political instrument is beyond doubt, but the problem is that the narrative takes the specific action, which itself is a form of class politics, to be the politics *per se*.

On other hand, here cosmopolitanism is broken apart under the war circumstance. All these destructions of the intellectual’s ideal are a result of dirty politics. The “inhuman” side of the profession of espionage serves to be a metaphor for the politics *per se*. Yet this apathy and repulsiveness towards politics can only be examined with the particular social-historical moment and the vulnerable identity that “I” assume in mind. The male narrator’s participation into the patriotic resistance is only of a temporary nature, less for the sake of patriotism itself than for doing away his sense of existentialistic angst and cultural-political anxiety (the loss of belief in the meaning of life). It functions as a medium for the narrator to look for an “ultimate,” “transcendental” life philosophy, for an identity that he is missing. Once he seemingly finds the latter out of a short-term adventure, he quits the dirty political world and packs off to the interior, returning to his life of “metaphysical thinking.” The political world of resistance is still an alien to him. He always “refuses to become entangled with reality;” he seemingly “can still transcend reality by embracing something deeper than patriotism – the quest for the meaning of life.”²⁰⁵ Yet without the patriotic activities that he temporarily joins, how can he settle his anxiety over his (national, and cultural-political)

²⁰⁵ Jianmei Liu, “Gender Geopolitics: Social Space and Volatile Bodies, 1937-1945,” *Journal of Modern Literature in Chinese* 2.1 (July 1998), 68.

identity? After he ostensibly has established his identity and goes away, where does he embrace “the meaning of life”?

But just as a feminist critic has pointed out, although here to him the professional female spies “do not seem to have the same ability to be introspective about their situations,” and they are “always erotic bodies with no access to this purified world,”²⁰⁶ it seems that these female professionals who devoted to patriotic missions have more solid subjectivity than this somewhat arrogant, and somewhat bookish man, who often appears clumsy and wavering in actions. His philosophy of celibacy – he bloats that “the love of a celibate belongs to the spirit ... it is abstract and empty; it is perpetually giving instead of receiving; it belongs to all men and to history,”²⁰⁷ – appears hollow if not ludicrous and laughable. But I suggest that this philosophy of celibacy itself serves as a metaphor for an individualistic, fruitless life-attitude of a certain class stratum when it is hopelessly sandwiched between various political forces and propelled by the historical wind towards the future. But this philosopher Xu – a symbol and sign of a certain intellectual class stratum – is not the Benjaminian “angel of history,” as his life is saved and spared by those female political workers, who seemingly do not own his intellectual power. The distance that he tries to keep from the political world is illusory. This is not merely because he could not help but being embroiled in the political world by his secular concerns, but it is also because apparently only from the politics that his “existentialistic angst” can be eliminated.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 68.

²⁰⁷ Xu Xu, *Feng Xiaoxiao* (The blowing wind), 1990: 6.488. Quoted from Jianmei Liu, “Gender Geopolitics: Social Space and Volatile Bodies, 1937-1945,” 68.

Nevertheless, as said, these seemingly “conflicts between nation and personal life, humanism and cruelty”²⁰⁸ are phenomena seen and articulated by a particular intellectual group in modern Chinese history. The “spiritual quest” that is shared by Yin Di and the numerous first persons “I,” the alter ego of Wumingshi and Xu Xu respectively, finally becomes merely the subject matter of a middle-brow literature. This partially attest to the unfruitfulness of this seemingly serious enterprise, because the route taken by them – to evade collective politics and single-mindedly engage in individualistic fantasy – is a direction that could hardly lead to a collective enlightenment – either the latter is the “old” one or a “new” other. On other hand, the “personal enlightenment” of an individualistic nature, which was taken by the writers as a way to individual (and even sometimes national) salvation, is also politically dubious, if not aesthetically rewardless.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 68.

Chapter Four
“Subjectivity” and Class Consciousness
Intellectual’s Predicament and Lu Ling’s “Neo-Leftist Stories”

In studying Lu Ling’s stories, this chapter does not follow the chronological order of his literary output, but treats them as a whole based on their thematic similarity or correlation, with the exploration of his major novel *Children of the Rich* and novelette *Hungry Guo Su’er* as the focus. This method is justified not only by the innate coherence of Lu Ling’s fictional works in this period, but also by the fact that in this decade, the writer did not experience any drastically intellectual shift. Only by reading these stories as essentially a totality, can we fully appreciate the themes and the aesthetic features emerged out of the writer’s central concern.

In this discussion, we will first see the deconstruction of a traditional family and the ensuing emergence of bodily desires under his pen, which shows a subjectivity that is in loss and finding its various substitution; then the ostensible “Bildungsroman” of the second-generation intellectuals, in which a process of anxious pursuit for a new subjectivity is unfolded; what follows is the overall theme of the novel, a fable of the failure of the proto-bourgeois’ social (and cultural) reform that led to the unsuccessful formation of a new subjectivity. These analyses finally bear out the author’s overriding thematic subject as psychologically tortured intellectuals entrapped in a historical predicament. To facilitate our analysis, a brief survey of the writer’s life is helpful.

A Typical Trajectory of the Second-Generation Left-Wing Writers

Lu Ling's experience is common among the second-generation left-wing writers. He was born in 1923 in Nanjing. His father was opening a small cloth store, and died when he was two years old; following the financial decline, his mother remarried a low-ranked government accountant. Lu Ling was brought up in this new household. His mother's elder brother was from a wealthy gentry-class family in Suzhou, so he had paid some visits to it during his childhood; the memory and stories about this family constituted the materials for the plots of a traditional-type family falling in economic deterioration and social disintegration in the novel that we will discuss. The experience of youth seemed not happy one for the writer, which had both to do with his sensitive character and this peculiar background. He had admitted that "a sense of woe irrepressibly crushed my youth and my love," and he had "a nervous temperament and an inexplicable love-hate relationship with the world."²⁰⁹

In his puerile age, he had received some embryonic political education from his elementary school teachers. One of them he associated most had participated in the Northern Expedition and was persecuted after the right-wing KMT's party-cleansing coup. He joined the public demonstration against the Japanese invasion after the Mukden Incident of 1931, which represented his emergent consciousness of patriotism. As a teen in early 1930s, he had read some influential left-leaning works such as Lu Xun's *Calls to Arms*, Mau Dun's *Midnight*, and Ba Jin's *Family*, all of which contributed to his leftist inclinations. But he also

²⁰⁹ Xiao Feng ed., *Hu Feng, Lu Ling wenxue shujian* (Hu Feng and Lu Ling's literary correspondence). (Hefei: Anhui wenyi, 1994), 9.

loved to read Russian fiction by writers such as Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Turgenev and Pushkin, which strengthened his intellectual tendency of liberal humanism.

With the outbreak of Resistance War in 1937, he joined the exodus team fleeing to the interior area. It pushed him leave the parochial living world and to understand the broad society. He was exposed to the dark, miserable life of refugees and oppressed lower classes. These several months of experience of dislocation and displacement in the “wilderness” left ineradicable imprints in his fictional world.

After his family and he settled down in Chongqing, he entered a new middle school and continued his reading, especially works of socialist realism by Soviet writers. He had declared in his elder age that he benefited much from Maksim Gorky, the father of Socialist Realism. Also at this time, he began publishing essays and associating with Hu Feng. He visited Hu frequently and the two established a life-long friendship. He followed Hu’s advice and suggestions in writing and revising his fiction.

In the following several years, he had worked as a clerk in a Mines and Metallurgy Research Institute, where he gained deep knowledge of the experience of mine workers. This period was his most prolific era, during which he produced three collections of short stories. He published most of them in Hu Feng-sponsored journals and publishing houses. He still visited Hu Feng regularly and received the latter’s injunctions. His most important novel *Children of the Rich*, which reached eight hundred thousand characters, was completed in 1941 when he was eighteen. But this first draft was lost. The rewritten version came out in

1944 and was published four years later. His most famed novelette, *Hungry Guo Su'e*, was completed in April 1942.

Subjectivity in Loss and Emergence of Desires

As a whole, the novel can be read as a chronicle of the experiences of three generations of modern Chinese intellectuals, which also serves as a vehicle (or a microscope) to represent modern China's fundamental social changes. It is divided into two volumes. The first volume can be read as a "saga" or "family chronicle," a form popular in the May Fourth period. Though involving multidirectional plots and dozens of characters, it mainly organizes them around the activities of a key figure – Jiang Shaozu, the second son of the family. Although the first son, Jiang Weizu, appears for some times, he is only a minor role.

The Japanese air raid on Shanghai in the year 1932, the beginning of the so-called "January Twenty-Eight Incident" and the Anti-Japanese Resistance War in general, unravels the curtain of the story. In face of this new situation, people make differing choices in aligning themselves with diverse political forces and ideologies; the society is undergoing a new process of division and polarization.

Jiang Jiesan, once a distinguished official in the late Qing imperial court, is an old-fashioned patriarch who has immense wealth in Suzhou, which is acquired from extensive landholdings and rent-collections, with its extra revenue from modern capitalist mode of ventures. His and his scion Jiang Weizu's physical decline and spiritual decease symbolize the inexorable disintegration of the traditional family.

Brought up in traditional cultivation, Weizu is versed in Chinese calligraphy and poetry. But he is weak and henpecked, and “psychologically unprepared for the collapse of the traditional moral value system.”²¹⁰ Disappointed with his disloyal wife and desperate with the barely concealed fighting for inheritance among members of the extended household, all of which stand for the intractable withering of the traditional life that constitutes his beingness in the world, he leaves the family, which is nestled in the easeful Suzhou and symbolically represents traditional-styled Chinese aristocratic world with refined (and languid) life style, to roam in another Chinese world that he is not familiar with thus far – the impoverished countryside, as a beggar. Before living this different life, mentally wrecked, he has been engaged in endless sober reflections, many of which appear merely muddled-headed rationalizations. He could not understand why the traditional world that his sense of self-consciousness has attached changes to a barbarous one that he feels alienated. His fate is doomed, so is the moral-ethical, as well as the social-economic system that he feels at home.

While many behaviors and words that Weizu now displays or articulates remind us the madman in Lu Xun’s fiction “Diary of Madman,” and some other characters in the latter’s fictional world (for instance, Wei Lianmo and Lu Weifu), their fundamental differences should be examined in the specific historical and social context. The “madmen” in Lu Xun’s fiction are warriors against traditional moral conventions and systems. No matter whether they in the end surrender to the traditional force or not, they have been courageously fighting

²¹⁰ Kirk Denton, *The Problematic of Self in Modern Chinese Literature: Hu Feng and Lu Ling* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 182.

against various evil forces. Whereas Weizu is physically destroyed and psychologically collapsing once he learns that his beloved betrays him. His madness is a bitter grief towards the deconstruction of the familiar, traditional world that had provided comfortable milieu for his exquisite life style and refined taste, and constructed his beingness in the world. His ranting, while on the surface very analogous to the diatribe of Lu Xun's madmen which fulminates against the cannibalistic feudal society, only shows the cruelty, not of the traditional society, but of the "new" society in the making (with its new social relations and mode of production). His suicide is much more a desperate self-destruction when he loses his entire psychological prop, a gesture against the rising ruthless world that entrusts its hope and desire in new power and *nouveau riche*, with the ensuing new value conventions, rather than a protest against traditional system. His seemingly impiety and disobedience towards the patriarch Jiang Jieshan after he turns mad, is in the truth showing his ultimate filial devotion and sacrifice to the old world. And although he sets his house on fire before he leaves to wander in the wilderness, which ostensibly symbolizes his severance with the family, he never cuts his emotional ties with this universe with all of its correlated social and family ethics.

From this decline, we not only see the disintegration of the old subjectivity, but also various (new) desires emerging out of it. Indeed, desire plays a crucial role in the drama of the dissolution of the Jiang's family, the latter of which is simultaneously the stage for ruthless struggle for power and property in the newly emerged social space.

The first instance is Jin Suheng's adultery. Her husband Weizu's effete, feminine figure, which resembles the weak nature of Chinese culture at the time, is the opposite of her strong, robust, and shameless pursuit of her physical desires and inheritance of properties. She has a similar family background of the Jiang's. "She was born," the narrator informs us, "in a downfallen family that has changed its original appearance."²¹¹ Her father was a lawmonger, but now assumes a new identity as a new-styled lawyer and steps into numerous lawsuits pertaining to land distribution. This family is at this moment completely bereft of any honorary and moral code of the gentry's class; rather, mercenary gains are their uttermost considerations. If Jiang Jieshan and Jiang Weizu represents a prototype of the landowning gentry class that sticks to traditional moralistic worldview and norms of conduct, then the Jin's family typifies another mode of development from within this class that seems to be more adaptable to modern, rationalized social relations, accommodating the fiercely competitive society – the profession of lawyer itself stands for a new, rationalized way of social relations.

But just as her husband Weizu is the victim of the transitional society, Jin Suheng is too, although she is of the reverse of her husband who simply cannot change. Instead, she tries her best to fit in, to fight for a comfortable niche in the orderless world. It is only from this perspective can we understand that why she is not portrayed as merely a vixen, a libertine who has no sense of morality at all. Yet her sense of morality, or principle of living at the society, is to secure enough property and fortune at any price that the action may cost. In

²¹¹ Lu Ling, *Children of the Rich*, vol.1, in *Lu Ling Wenji* (Hefei: Anhui wenyi, 1995), vol.1, 122.

fighting for the property of the Jiang's family, she even accidentally kills the patriarch, Jiang Jieshan, thus committing the ultimate sin – patricide. The action signifies killing of the old authority by the newly emerged socially-conditioned desire of the new class for usurpation of the inheritance of traditional property and fortune.

She loves her husband, yet she resents his weakness and lack of machismo. Weizu's uxorious mind, his old literati style and gentlemanly mannerism, as well as his emasculate mindset which cares much less for monetary gain than for emotional passion, does not give her favorable feeling, as this character in a downtrodden clan-family, in which every member of the fast-breaking community craves for its fortune, cannot secure a predominant share for her; similarly, in this relentless society ruled by Darwinist principle, utilitarianism and hedonism, his vulnerable acracholia cannot offer maximum bliss and satisfy her bewitched enchantment by the brave new world. This virago, though harboring sentimental feelings some times, and even her adultery is partially influenced by the May Fourth romantic trends (she reads *The Sorrows of Young Werther* and exchanges it with her extramarital lover as a love token), bears strong will and merciless mind of calculation in order to survive in the barbarous new world. If there was no War, she would live well with her newly married husband – also a lawyer, to become a rich middle class woman. Her willpower and turpitude, which now and then intermixes with moral conscience, could be understood as a self-legitimation of her struggle aimed at an internal and external self-transformation of a class identity, propelled by the social-economic imperative; that is, to metamorphose from a subordinated woman living within the moral and physical constraints of a traditional

household and semi-feudal social hierarchy, to a self-willed, though not yet self-supported, proto-bourgeois woman. In other words, she is the one that has barely survived the merciless competition not only in the clan-family politics, but also in the merciless new society and its cold-blooded commodity-economic principle in general. Her boundary-crossing behavior, which triggers hate and resentment from almost all members of the Jiang family, testifies to her energy of tearing down traditional moral taboos. To the extent that her tragic experience and vicissitude of life is inextricable and bounded with the traditional family system and cosmos that she lives in, her depravity, mortification, conversion, as well as her inexorable destiny should also be read as a miniature of a painful (self-) transmogrification of traditional (gentry-class) woman in particular, and landowning class and traditional society in general.

In this critical historical juncture, in drastic contrast to Weizu's weak mind and flabby spirit, bodily desires and fantasies also emerge out of subaltern characters; for instance, Guo Su'e in Lu Ling's *Hungry Guo Su'e* and her lovers. In the story, primitive and bestial instincts of the titled heroine and her lovers violently surge up and roam everywhere. Its plotline is rather quite simple, a story about the heroine's passionate sexual desire, which "results in her being savagely beaten, branded with scalding irons, and finally raped to death."²¹² As such, allegedly her bursting energy "represents another selfhood, another level of mind," and is even regarded as "a fusion of a primitive unconscious with Mao Zedong's revolutionary masses."²¹³

²¹² Kirk Denton, *The Problematic of Self in Modern Chinese Literature*, 134.

²¹³ Ibid.

Her physical instincts such as hunger and desire are highlighted. A typical scene in the following vividly portrays the explosion of her primitive impulse,

...Guo Su'e feverishly buried her nose in the man's powerful, sweaty chest, breathing in wildly the pungent, sticky heat issuing from his armpits. Her naked legs coiled around the edge of his hairy thighs, convulsing. For a brief moment she felt the peace of a semisoporific dream; then, the next moment, she was seized by a frenzy that caused her whole body to tremble, as if she would only live for that brief time; as if her life before this had been dark slumber unaware of excitement; and as if, after, her life would be unavoidably broken and smothered.²¹⁴

Although the physical impulses shown in the numerous filthy pictures such as this are often seen as the origin of social transformation, as social transformation indeed occurs in the end because of their destructive actions; what is often neglected is that her uncontrolled eruption of physical desires does not lend her a "(feminine) subjectivity;" because, just like many of the author's characters, she shows a psychological split between conscious mind and unconscious desires.

Indeed, Guo Su'e's lewd desire and lecherous behaviors are unpleasant enough. This is not a problem of tastes pertaining to class distinctions, but the textual descriptions make these subaltern "laboring masses" hardly invoke our empathy and sympathy: Su'e "gives off insolent, sluttish, and licentious laugh" (51); she "convulses in wanton and lowly bliss" (57); and her sexual desire is tied in with her desire for money. Such kind of descriptions of her (and her paramour) is throughout the story. Even in her fighting with her oppressor, she is described as appearing to be an "evil." If not considering her miserable life and her tragic

²¹⁴ *Lu Ling Wenji*, vol.3, 10. Translated by Kirk Denton, 1998: 245, with slight modification of mine.

death, she can naturally be identified as a despicable whore (this is also true for her lover and some other male characters).

This is not to deny that Guo Su'e indeed is craving for love: her present husband is an opium addict and treats her badly, her sweetheart Zhang Zhenshan also does not have sincere love towards her and seemingly only takes her to be a channel to release his animal instinct (though he shows more concern over her living conditions). But we also need to note that Su'e refuses the proposal from Wei Haiqing, a co-miner and distant relative of her who apparently truly loves her, although earlier she had willingly considered him as a favorable choice before she met the sexually more attractive Zhang Zhenshan. Instead, just as her final cry when she is tortured – “you could not figure out the days experienced by a woman ... she cannot bear with it, she is painful” – show, it is her sexual desire rather than her desire for love that is the stake.

Undoubtedly, here the subalterns are portrayed as applying sex as weapon to fight the “dark world,” and the cause for their oppression is shown less as the class hierarchy than their physical desire. This representation articulates a discourse of universal humanity predicated upon the liberalist ideology about an ahistorical human nature. But it is not difficult for us to note that the destructive energy of these oppressed is still a spontaneous, primal reaction. This sexual dissipation itself constitutes a scandal to the oppressive society, but it does not help to subvert class hierarchy and restructure the social-economic system. Rather, in its anarchical carnival, it only contributes to the consolidation of the social order that it aimed to sabotage (and in most of the cases, the characters even do not hold this objective in minds). This

anarchical rebellion, meanwhile, is subjected to appropriation by any political forces which might have antagonistic political goals.

Guo Su'e's relentless determination to claim her desire constitutes a sharp contrast to the effete Weizu, who never has acquired such willpower to claim his love. It is only when we correlate with and compare these two vastly divergent characters, can we understand that the barely realistic (in terms of its psychological delineation and even physical description) story of Guo Su'e (and her so-called "spiritual hunger") is less an authentic representation of the subaltern's life than a projection of the enfeebled intellectuals' anxiety and desire as a vicarious substitution. The author invests in these figures his desire not only for liberation from tradition (which demands suppression of desire) and class oppression, but also for releasing the effete intellectual's anxiety of emasculation in a society where they were greatly marginalized.²¹⁵

Thus we also see bodily desire erupts in Jiang Shaozu, the second son of the family. He is among the followers of the first May-Fourth generation intellectuals that have helped to bring down the traditional social order. He revolts against patriarchal rule by leaving the family at the age of 16 and living separately, though not independently – he receives assistance from his sisters, so he is capable of going to Japan to study, and he gets married there with one of his classmates. His youthful passion, a "violent, free, and outstanding individualist heroism" (5), with an anarchical belief in "resisting the life perennially, keeping

²¹⁵ This is not merely an intellectual surmise; various scholars have arrived at analogous arguments from the phenomena; for instance, Kirk Denton aptly remarks that in this "symbol of the 'primitive power of the people,'" Guo Sh'e "serves ultimately as an antidote to intellectuals' sense of historical impotence." *Ibid.*, 251.

your mind clear perennially, boldly violating the laws of this world, to be a free people following your own mind” (55), furthermore, shows itself in his affair with Wang Guiying, a May-Fourth type of “new woman” who grows out of the influence of the New Culture movement (“like many girls, she learned this era from fiction and drama,” 51) and has romantic dreams of women’s liberation.

If Jin Suheng’s bodily desire is closely attached to her desire for material security, then this couple’s affair is out of their intellectual boredom and moralistic nihilism.²¹⁶ Yet Shaozu is not serious with love, after flirting with her, making her pregnant, he leaves without noticing her. Wang Guiying commits infanticide when she learns that her brother feels that this scandal would ruin the reputation of their family and so refuses to support her financially; after that she gradually becomes a movie star. The passion of desire of these two “new youths” is typical of the reckless May Fourth individualism, yet is simultaneously irresponsible, amoral, and anarchical.

Romantic and erotic life in Mao Dun’s fiction, when intermixed with public and political life, vents out the characters’ either revolutionary passions or sense of disappointment in face of the imminent failure of revolution. But in the time period of Shaozu’s first round of social adventure, that is, around 1932, the revolutionary passion of the May Fourth generation has generally subsided, and this emergence of desire is merely a result of a situation in which a tension between a rapid rationalization and fierce social conflicts

²¹⁶ The author also implies that Wang Guiying lacks a political belief but only indulges in rebellious, youthful passion: when she worked in a hospital attending for those wounded in the war, she admired those doctors who owned political beliefs. *Ibid.*, 37-39.

intensified. If Jin Suheng's desire testifies to the momentum of the former (rapid rationalization), then Shaozu's desire is amenable to a symbolic reading as a symptom of the latter (intensified domestic and international conflicts).

In the follows, we learn that although his liberalist political belief is close to the social democratic party, his lack of power in that organization makes him feel that it does not understand his heroism. After he fights aimlessly over the years alone yet achieves nothing, he begins to capitalize on his earlier rebellion and turns it into political capital for his advancement in officialdom, by participating enthusiastically in political allies, joining meetings, etc., to simulate the personae of a "public intellectual." Not only does he increasingly become a rising social star, but his concept of rights of inheritance also rejuvenates, and he vies with his sisters, who had assisted financially his early adventures, over the rights of property, and comforts himself by saying to himself that this is "a new concept of property."

After being tired of fame and applauses he gets in the public domain, he becomes a senator in 1939, a part-time university professor, and more and more regresses to Chinese tradition, seeking for solitude by indulging himself in appreciation of traditional Chinese culture and the comfort of the familiar and the family. His erstwhile reformist activism withers away, his radical individualism wanes, thus the traditional modes of thought recurs in his mind. But he recognizes that he is now despised by the younger generation.

Apparently a critique of the May-Fourth-styled liberal intellectuals, the message from the retrogression of this follower of May Fourth New Culture Movement is clear: if an

individualist could not remain aggressive all the time, he would be taken and left behind by younger generation, becoming an old-fashioned (and implicitly also reactionary) figure. His failure is partially due to the dire circumstance of modern China, in which the lack of social rationalization, the pertinacity of traditional social custom and consciousness, the violent class conflicts, and the imminent and real intervention of Western imperialist powers, all contribute to the defeat of the New Culture dream of this individualistic hero, unlike his counterparts in the Western society.

Yet while “he thinks about the form and the content of government, thinks about constitution and democracy,” he does not understand the people: “he felt that Chinese people lacked knowledge and education ... but he, Jiang Shaozu, did not know whether there were pains in the lives of the people, this made him a little perplexed;” to him, “Chinese people are resentful, yet mostly they are envious of the happy lives of the upper class; while for those of the upper class, in their lives there was no existence of the people (in their eyes).”²¹⁷ This understanding, empirical enough, is fundamentally a symptom of blindness to the reality of class conflicts in the society. His ignorance of the real lives and the strength of the masses led him to a conclusion that “because China has still no strong substructure, a passionate heroism will illuminate a bright future” (83), a typical tenet of the May Fourth romantic generation, yet at the time this belief had lent its support to various fascist-oriented beliefs. As Kirk Denton perceptively points out, Shaozu “seems to be hopelessly alienated from any deep

²¹⁷ *Lu Ling Wenji*, vol.1.,

understanding of the Chinese people and their plight.”²¹⁸ He is alienated, or more particularly, self-alienated, from the society; in the eyes of the progressive younger generation, he is now a reactionary bureaucrat.

Shaozu despises both Weizu’s loss of sense and Jin Suheng’s shamelessness and her virago, yet he could not embrace any radical social-reform program any more for its futility. Situated in this historically crucial cross-road, new subjects emerge.

Subjectivity in Search of and Misidentification of “the People”

Like his brother Shaozu, Chunzu distains his traditional family; yet unlike the former, he keeps his revolutionary passion unabated, and goes into the society endeavoring to join the revolution. If Shaozu represents the first generation of radical intellectuals who, with no social force to rely upon, finally draws back from their anarchical rebellion against existing order; then Chunzu is the second generation that fights against the same state of (or worsened) situation with similar anarchical passion.

Formation of Moral Relativism

There is a self-contradictory character in Chunzu’s personality: idealism and hypocrisy, robustness and decadence, coexist in him. This is traceable to his traumatic experience in his pubescent age. Observing the vituperative remarks exchanged between the aggressive in-law Jin Suheng and his elder sisters, “at first he thought Jin Suhen was despicable, but then she fanned his ardor, making him think of her a real heroine. In his youthful, brutish, and fervent heart one wave (of thoughts) beat against another, concepts of good and evil could not be

²¹⁸ Kirk Denton, *The problematic of self in Modern Chinese Literature*, 182.

fixed” (291). This traumatic experience ushers in our juvenile hero’s innocent mind a new moral parameter. Insofar as this moral relativism respects ruthless, primitive power to vie for individual interests and privilege from the old system, this episode can be construed as the “primal scene” – his ritual of adulthood – that initiates him enter the barbarous, secular world. This reverence is also typical of the reverence of the bourgeois class for ruthless energy and vigor to change the existent system to acquire its fortune and property in its uprising stage.

Immediately after this traumatic scene, Chunzu walks into the family garden. In a narcissistic gaze at his own reflection in the water of the pond, he finds the water dirty and himself unattractive. “From now on, all is lost.” He murmurs. The turbid pond is like the dark society that he is about to enter, and his realization of the “paradise loss” implies his premonition of the fated destiny of the existent world. The scene goes on,

He wanted tears, and there were tears. He wanted a song, and there was a song. He felt there was someone – that tragic and beautiful “someone” – caressing him. He was whispering to her “all his secretes,” shedding tears. “I am very bad, my heart is evil,” he said. Then this someone answered: “No, you are the best, the dearest.” “No, no...yet maybe I am, but I have stolen things from people, on that day...,” he said. But that “someone” smiled at him and said: “Your heart is good, you shouldn’t suffer!”... “Ah, thank you, thank you, yes,” he nodded. “You should sing a beautiful song, you should sing... ‘From now on I return to and stay in my native home!’” he sang. “Yes, yes, march forward, forward,” he cried passionately; he was leading a troop of soldiers. Suddenly he turned his head and saw Wang Zhuolun and blushed. He stood up, face in red.²¹⁹

This passage, composed mainly of his self-engaged monologue, is not merely a record of his mawkish and self-absorbed interior whim, but it contains many passwords for his life experience to be unfolded.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 293. Wang Zhuolun is his brother-in-law.

What intrigues us the most is the identity of this mysterious “someone.” It can be regarded as referring to the mother country, but it also can be interpreted as being identical with another mysterious figure – his “Sophia,” which is a symbol of freedom (or, “liberation of personality”) that appears every time when he faces difficulty and turns back to his interior for support and comfort. This “someone” is also comparable to the third mysterious figure named “keli” that we will discuss in more details shortly later, to which Chunzu often calls out to express his agonies. Either way, he devotes his fantasies and passions to this “someone”, who correspondingly yields our hero a proof of his self-salvation and confers upon him honor. This “someone” to him will finally be revealed to be an incarnation of “the people” to which he seeks for help and consolation. But in terms that this “someone” has been manipulated by him to meet his wish and forced to cater to his idiosyncratic whims, it becomes none other than his own “self-consciousness” under the facade of a self-reflexivity. In other words, a seemingly “reflexivity” turns out to be merely a confirmation of his intrinsic “subjectivity,” which fundamentally speaking is his ingrained and iron-clad class habitus that refutes any reform that is not dictated by its own interests. He is his own “God”, and there is none of any outside (moral and political) authority. We will see that in the name of freedom and “liberation of personality,” throughout his life Chunzu will again and again pardon himself all his wrongdoings in this same manner. In all, while his speculation indicates that he owns certain capability to reflect upon his own weakness, the self-endowment and self-exemption by requesting this “someone” to accommodate him, shows that his reflection is greatly circumscribed by his inner pride and feeling of self-importance (or, individualism),

so it never arrives at an ultimate enlightenment that makes him comprehend himself and establishes a real self-identity.

This is the initial stage of our hero's intellectual and emotional growth. In this mirror stage of the psychological development, an infant captures an idealized self-image as "wholeness, plenitude, integrity, and unity" as his ego. The formation of the self-consciousness at this stage is the cultivation of a class habitus, if not yet a clear-minded class consciousness, fostered and brought up by family background, education, and preliminary social association.

When Chunzu comes out from this mirror stage and enters the society, he reaches a new Imaginary period. Oftentimes, he has an intellectual inclination of abandoning social objectivity and favoring subjective reality. Before the Japanese army invaded Shanghai in 1937, he quits school and sets on the road filled with violence and barbarity. This world strengthens his moral relativism: he sees no difference between his deportments and the behaviors of the ragtag, strayed soldiers who are falling short of discipline and morality, who "only knew that they had to survive and that everything was a potential threat to them ... All that had guided them in the past was now useless to them because of this endless wilderness" (71). For him, either one soldier's evil-doing of bullying and stealing of a poor old lady, or another soldier's good deeds of helping the latter, is "of no difference in terms of morality." Here the narrator refrains from making judgments, as if he does not know how to evaluate this amorality, if not immorality, in a desperate situation.

This unusual psychonarration could only be comprehended with the social-historical context as its subtext, in particular the Social Darwinism that was popular since the late Qing period, as well as Nietzsche's call for reevaluation of all morality which was influential at the time. Either way, these popular themes were founded on a discourse of natural humanity, which dictates that in dire circumstance, not only the conventional notion of right or wrong, but also any ideological system that backs up these notions, appear to be irrelevant, merely hypocritical sermon. But although on the surface this view sees through the deceits and hypocrisy of the ruling class (that promoted these moralities), what it stops short of doing is precisely the ideological system that this high-flown belief itself is premised on.

In this world of wildness, the "truth," or the dark reality of the Chinese society, unfolds before his eyes: numerous riots, pillages, murders, rapes, and suicide. This wilderness is both literally and rhetorically, referring to the dearth of Chinese modernity. A place of amorality and unconscious, it is correlated with the "primitive unconscious or power" of the laboring class, as both its source of origin and its equivalent. This force, spontaneous and anarchical, is without qualification justified to be and regarded as "revolutionary force and power" of the people. The state of amorality, or even immorality, manipulated by primitive desire and instinct (such as Guo Su'e we have analyzed), is also the trait of most of the subaltern characters in the writer's stories, who are seen as the proletariat and equated to be "the people." In this novel, the representatives of "the people" are two "sublime" peasant figures. They are robust yet cruel, with sympathetic passions and merciless inhumanness replace one another alternatively.

Lumpen-Proletariat as Hero and “The People”

The first one is Zhu Guliang. Zhu had been an operator of blast-furnace in a Shanghai steel factory for twenty years since he was 12, thus he owns the class identity of industrial worker, which in the Marxist theory belongs to the category of advanced revolutionary pioneer. Furthermore, he was active in the labor movements of the 1920's and even has fought the Japanese invaders after the first wave of Japanese attack of China around 1931. Therefore, his revolutionary parameter is also seemingly complete. Yet, curiously, he is described as a lonely man who has lost his family and his only son, “with all the bigotry and harshness that a lonely man would have,” and “deep in his heart he has (both) a bitter hatred towards the human being, and a latent ambition concealed to everyone” (19). His terrifying amorality, relentless anti-rationalist philosophy of life that rejects love and reason, simultaneously frightens and fascinates Chunzu. The latter joins his group and together they pass through desolated and ravaged villages along a river bank.

The other figure is Shi Huagui, a “sturdy and short” soldier that leads a small itinerant troop, who is described as “the best hooligan that China ever has fostered” (57). Zhu Guliang and his cohorts meet Shi when the latter is going to rape a village girl. Zhu prevents him from doing so by feigning to be a military policeman. The two groups join together and continue delving into the wilderness.

While apparently Shi is a bad guy, just the second day after his interrupted and abandoned rape, Shi endeavors to stop a low-ranked military officer who tries to do the same thing. The narrator informs us, “the reason is quite simple: last night he did not see it, but

now, he saw it. His law is stipulated by what he feels” (57). Yet his hand grenade misses the target. It is Zhu Guliang who now saves his life by shooting the officer. Is Shi good or bad? In fact his life experience is not much different from Zhu Guliang’s: in a confession that he tries to win the sympathy of Zhu, he discloses his own life. He left home at 16, joined a warlord army and wandered in the world for twenty years. Although he has committed numerous crimes such as rapes, robbery, and killing of innocent people, he feels sinless, because to him the evil deeds of various warlords and political forces justify his wrong doings (64).

Chunzu’s attitude towards Zhu Guliang’s motivations is also paradoxical: “Chunzu was deeply moved by the frankness and decisiveness of this man, and the chivalrousness that was manipulated by reason, yet he simultaneously felt that there was a dangerous thing that hid behind this man’s particular sagacity.” (59) This “dangerous thing” refers to nothing but his wild ambition that determines to achieve its goal with any means fair and foul. In this light, Zhu, in Chunzu’s mind clearly a figure of proletarian leader, brings about the latter’s misgivings towards mass revolution. This misgiving is predicated on his weak mind, or his principle of humanism: when he sees the officer’s (who is shot by Zhu because of his crime) pang before he died, he could not but feel that Zhu is “ignorant, inhuman, and soulless.”²²⁰

The blurred distinction between right and wrong, between truth and falsehood, shows more gruesomely in a fatal accident, which led to the death of two men. A delinquent soldier among them carelessly robs one dollar from a gammer, and is ordered to be shot by a

²²⁰ Ibid., 60. Yet when meeting Zhu’s serious eyes, he also “realized his hypocrisy and felt ashamed.” 61.

regiment commander who happens to pass by and witness the misdemeanor. The death sentence is not unusual in war-time circumstance based on military discipline, although it looks cruel in normal situations. But the commander is shot to death by Zhu as a revenge for the soldier. The miserable cry of the commander before he dies: “You betrayed China!” leaves a direful image and pathetic sentiment in everyone’s mind. Zhu’s rationale for doing so is not different from Shi’s: justice and false is decided by themselves as individuals. But the irrefutable sin that he commits reveals that he is not a reliable man that China can entrust its hope; his identity as a “proletarian leader” that is allegedly much better than the army ruffian Shi is also accordingly falsified.

This deconstructive irony finally explodes in a drastic measure: Zhu is murdered by Shi because he has tried to execute the latter when Shi is again intending to rape a girl.²²¹ It is because that earlier Chunzu has stopped Zhu from killing Shi (propelled by his moral relativism) that indirectly leads to Zhu’s death. Witnessing the dreadful scene, Chunzu regrets his misdemeanor, and joins with others to claim Shi’s crime by bombing him to pieces. In this explosion, the contention between two discourses, one based on humanism and the other one on an ambiguous, secular justice or a revolutionary discipline, is seemingly settled. Yet the irony and ambiguity still exists.

The confusion also exists in the characterization: apparently there is no much difference between the two peasants: both come from similar background, both have similar experiences

²²¹ Here the narrator still provides an ironic tone, which apparently implies that this decision is not from an upright mind, and so not a rightful action: “He hoped everyone will marvel at his spirit, so admire his deed. His time of revenging for justice was coming. This was a sublime motive, this motive would make a sublime hero!” Ibid., 98.

and much more common ground in their egocentrism that refutes any discipline and political guidance. What is missing here, however, is the class character of humanity: although Zhu is apparently a proletarian figure, he owns nothing revolutionary features of the proletarian.²²²

These two peasant figures are reminiscent of the worker Zhang Zhenshan in *Hungry Guo Su'er*.²²³ The narrator's description of his moral characters also often makes us suspect the righteousness of his deeds.²²⁴ All those derogative phrases imposed upon him make us wonder whether he is really better than the despots and hooligans who oppress him. When this feeling is read vis-à-vis his experience,²²⁵ it becomes clear that he is a typical member of the lumpen-proletariat. In fact, all these three male characters we have discussed so far belong to this class stratum.

The concept of lumpen-proletariat was used originally in Marxist theory to refer to those members of the proletariat that lacked class consciousness (especially criminals, vagrants, and the unemployed). They are the lowest, most degraded stratum of the proletariat. A Marxist analysis of this class stratum has pointed out,

²²² He "had made schemes, and had betrayed friends out of the human's wild ambition;" he "didn't believe in love, brightness, and reason...now he only believed in power. Because of the hatred and (yearning for) the bliss of becoming successful, in his mind is deeply hidden the wild ambition of manipulating the mankind." *Ibid.*, 20.

²²³ *Luling wenji*, vol.3: 1-112.

²²⁴ See *Luling wenji*, vol.3. He is "cunning," "malicious" (12), "wayward and impetuous," and is like a wolf: "Sometimes his thin and fierce mouth opened slightly, exposing white incisors; and his eyes became grayer, revealing a sly, obstinate and sarcastic smile;" not only these uncomely features, "when his mouth closed mercilessly, his nose crooked, his more dominating feature – his malicious spurn and resentment then shone with a cold steel-grayness in his contracted face, making people feel unbearable"(14). He is "acrimonious," "apathetic," and his lover Guo Su'e calls him "heartless ruffian" (22).

²²⁵ He is "a wondering paper-boy since age five in Chinese metropolitan cities, who could not remember how his impoverished parents died, and how he became a perverse vagrant...He had experienced directly with wars, execution field, rampant fires, working as small spy, was beaten hardly and imprisoned, and became an atrocious youth full of blind animal instincts and avenging determination. In 1929, when he was 13, he fled out of Hunan with a pack of young workers and peasants (to join an army, and when all his buddies died, he later on) became an apprentice of a machine factory," 14.

Despite the fact that most lumpen proletarians are drawn from the ranks of the displaced proletariat, the way in which they make their living is completely different from that of the proletariat, and they therefore have a very different, and in many ways opposite, world view...the destitution of those people does not, in itself, make them revolutionary and in fact the lumpen proletariat, as a whole, plays a reactionary role. This stratum, wrote Marx and Engels, "may, here and there, be swept into the movement by a proletarian revolution; its conditions of life, however, prepare it far more for the part of a bribed tool of reactionary intrigue."²²⁶

One important trait of these lumpen-proletariat members is that they are “drifters” or wanderers, without a firm home base to stay. Always in exile and wandering, their physical displacement contributes to their psychological unsteadiness. Obviously, all these characteristics apply to our three heroes. They are individualized heroes who “without families, homes, or the confining moral system..., defy authority but lack the will or consciousness for sustained political struggle.”²²⁷ Because of their rootlessness and self-alienation, they are “atypical” of the working class; to see their “primitive energy” and impulsive rebelliousness as “representative” of the proletarian class is mistaken. On the contrary, they “often tend to be unstable and advocate adventurism and anarchism, harming the disciplined character of the (revolutionary) movement.”²²⁸

In short, their rebellious act is not out of a proper “class consciousness,” but is merely spontaneous, destructive riots. In the Marxist theory, class consciousness is “neither the sum nor the average of what is thought or felt by the single individuals who make up the class;” but it is an “ideal-type” that represents the rational expression of the working class’s “true”

²²⁶ Mark Evans, Roosevelt Washington, Jr., Rosie O'Connell, “Social Classes in the United States,” *Workers' Herald*, Organ of the Revolutionary Political Organization (M-L) October, 1983, Vol. 4, No. 2. <http://www.mltranslations.org/us/Rpo/classes/classes3.htm>.

²²⁷ Kirk Denton, *The Problematic of Self in Modern Chinese Literature*, 133.

²²⁸ Mark Evans, Roosevelt Washington, Jr., Rosie O'Connell, “Social Classes in the United States.”

interests.²²⁹ Put in other way, a proper class consciousness is not a consciousness by itself, but a consciousness for itself, or a revolutionary consciousness. The former only articulates social beings surrounding a class and encapsulates all the complexities of social existence (such as what we have seen in those debased deportments of the characters). Spontaneous and unknown of its true interests, it is often blind and dangerous. Because the lumpen-proletariat do not see themselves as a united class, and their objective is not aimed at fundamental restructuration of class hierarchy and economic system, but is merely immediate, basic rights of survival, not only are their hunger or desire easily assuaged, but their private struggles targeting specific person(s) are not so significant, for the whole system that provides the ideological rationale and infrastructural support of oppression remains unchallenged, even becomes more consolidated, for the social resentment find a channel to vent it out.

The description of these lumpen-proletariats is more conditioned by a projection of the writer's anxiety and resentment than an objective recording as a narrative act. This can be witnessed in the depiction of the internal psychological movement of the characters, which often shows a complex self-reflection that is inconsistent with their identity. For instance, in the figure of Zhang Zhenshan, we read such descriptions, "the man of Zhang Zhenshan who lacks the strength of intellect cannot clearly understands this (his ignorance of his own absurdity); (because) there is no another Zhang Zhenshan that soberly reflects on himself."²³⁰

In another place, the character muses,

²²⁹ Georg Lukacs, *History & Class Consciousness*; Trans. Rodney (Livingstone: Merlin Press, 1971), 51.

²³⁰ *Lu Ling Wenji*, vol.3., Quoted from Denton 1998:251.

... My caprice is wrong, I should believe in other people's painful experience... we cannot indulge ourselves, we need to choose the road everyone has taken...But how to explain the personality? How did Zhang Zhenshan become Zhang Zhengshan? I can't bear with it! Everyone is destroying us, we ourselves still do not know it. ..Hum, give a blow to them! The society makes me (like this), (so) the responsibility does not lie in me...I'm this kind of person! Go to hell, what the so-called self-reflection or not (Vol.3, 35).

In still another instance, he speaks about the issue of truth to his colleagues: "... What is our authentic truth? That surely is: A worker needs to know himself, his friend, his work relations; he should not make trouble individually. They should develop work relationship, unite themselves, stand together ..." (73) It is ironic that all these words read like the author's own teaching towards this character, rather than the character's lesson to his cohorts, as not only is it incredible that he can speak these reflexive, and also cliché-ridden, political language, but all his own behaviors also precisely violate all these precepts.

Where is "The People"?

After this experience, Chunzu joins a war-time propagandist troupe to contribute his skill of musical composition, and indulges himself in romantic sentiments intermittently. The youthful enthusiasm and political idealism of the theater troupe has filled Chunzu with high spirits, but

he only paid attention to his own infinite chaotic mind; he felt the infinite beauty of his own mind. Although he lived in the group, although he admired those theories that were circulating in the group, he only concerned his own mind – he felt not a little this division. This group and all these theories were only existed for him, for Jiang Chunzu's mind...When the discipline of the group was colliding with him, he repudiated the discipline without hesitation; when he was criticized, he felt that only his mind is the highest authority, the greatest honor, and the best existence.²³¹

²³¹ Ibid., 237.

Propelled by pubertal drives, he also falls into sexual profligacy with an actress in the theater. He tries to legitimize his immoral dissipation with the pretext of defiance against conventional social ethics: he “firmly believed that he was different from others ... he spoke hypocritically and even wept false tears; he understood his hypocrisy but continued it anyway” (285).

Accordingly, he soon collides with its leaders. His refutation of the accusation from the leaders is not based on the lack of evidence of his negligence of his duty, but on their alleged ulterior motivation in launching a critique of him as nothing but a cover for their treacherous motive of jealousy (of his love with the actress). Though he acknowledges his bourgeois background, he declares his individualist tendency unabashedly, and rebukes the leaders for wrongly characterizing themselves as members of the proletariat.

This challenge shows his animosity towards any authority. There is indeed dogmatism in the side of the troupe’s leaders (not to mention their calculation based on their own private interests), yet what Chunzu fundamentally cannot adapt himself to is the disciplinized life of a revolutionary community, and what he prefers is a liberal way of life style that fights the society willfully without the constraint of any morality and principle. This complex can only be understood historically: although the leftists at the time more or less accepted the prevailing Marxist discourse that criticized “bourgeois mindset and behavior,” they could not easily follow a new revolutionary morality that requested their repudiation of their loose life-style (the latter was promoted since the May Fourth period as an assertion of individual rights). They still could not believe in the existence of this new morality, as they lived in a

circumstance where the traditional way of practice and custom still prevailed, so they still held fast the May Fourth iconoclasm which repudiated any moral code and subscribed to Nietzsche's moralistic nihilism.

When Chunzu's refutation seemingly has swayed the meeting, typical of the paradoxical feature of the novel, his high spirits and wordy diatribe are put to ease by an experienced revolutionary named Shen Baijing, who simultaneously rebukes the faults of the leader. This is the only incidence in the whole book in which appears a paragon, an image of a somewhat "standard" revolutionary leader with wisdom and much-needed experience for these fledgling revolutionary youths. Yet the description of his profile is not a flattery one; instead, he is ill-looking,²³² and "has no family, no marriage, none of any specific friends." The respect he owns comes from his "bitter life and upright character" (263). In other words, he is a revolutionary saint, but simultaneously an eccentric; his experience is unimaginable.

But what is worthy more of attention is the contending discourses about "the people" that emerge out of their debates, in which we can find the dilemma that not only these characters face, but also the narrative voice inextricably often implicates itself with. One counter-accusation that Chunzu launches is about how to define "the people" or "the masses" that the leaders refer to when criticizing his dereliction of duty. He questions them, "Comrade Wang Ying says we should get close to the people, but how?" and he argues that "I met Comrade Wang Ying's so-called masses in a lesson of real blood" (256). But the "masses" are not naturally "the people." The former refer to the downtrodden classes that are

²³² He has "heavy side whiskers, ugly, big head, appearing a little wooden and frigid in appearance."

ideologically heterogeneous and without yet a clear class consciousness; while the latter refers to a politically homogeneous entity, a class for itself.

As said, Chunzu (as well as the narrative voice) has confused the lumpen proletariat Zhu Guliang with the revolutionary proletariat. He cannot feel the people, because he targets a wrong object, or he searches it in misplaced sources. Later on, when he muses upon Zhu's death, the psychonarration goes on:

This epoch issues the slogan of "joining with the people"; Jiang Chunzu feels that Zhu is the people, but he couldn't feel him; he imagines that he is Zhu, that they share the same mind, but he still couldn't feel the people. This causes him great mental anguish...

"Why do we love people? Because they are pure, because the law of history. Why love them? Because they are painful, miserable, enslaved and bearing yokes. The more I talk, the more I feel painful..."²³³

He feels painful, because he knows that as a progressive youth open to the influence of the epochal spirit, he has to love "the people" (meanwhile, he needs to contact them in order to absorb their strength to "enlarge" himself), yet he also feels that it is difficult for him to identify him with them because of their allegedly unsophisticated mind, unrefined appearance, and even cruel behaviors. His efforts of finding "the people" are running throughout his life, which also fail throughout, nevertheless.

Earlier, the narrative voice has criticized Shaozu's ignorance of the people, which nevertheless can be applied to Chunzu's sightlessness on the same problem,

Chinese intellectuals were primarily anxiously looking for the settlement of political and cultural issues; they felt that in terms of the people, the road had been determined, or the problem had been settled ... they could rarely feel them; they could not feel their existence; they felt they were alien, but they could not feel the distinction of classes, because what they had seen were strangers and debased neighbors. All are strangers and neighbors to each other;

²³³ *Lu Ling Wenji*, vol. 2, 183.

there is no communication between their minds. Finally, the intellectuals hated these stubborn, stupid, unrefined strangers and neighbors who made the markets stench and streets filthy (202).

Therefore, Shaozu “could not figure out what kind of relations he can entertain with the masses; he thought there was a historical, and abstract relation. In terms of history, or in abstract concept, he, Jiang Shaozu, led the masses and worked for the masses” (Ibid.). Fundamentally, he still holds fast the May Fourth idea that he naturally becomes the people’s leader because of his superiority in knowledge. Chunzu also believes that he is superior to the masses, yet he also feels guilty due to his own class background and life habitus, which is a result of his baptism of the ‘New Enlightenment’ ideas influential at the time. To lessen this sense of guilt, he then projects back the life habits and psychological states of the intellectuals to the masses for self-sanctification and self-legitimation.

The contradictoriness of the disparate discourses of the people throughout the novel, either expressed by the narrative voice or articulated by the characters, which often premised on the discourse of human nature, should be examined by the difference between, as well as certain similarity shared among, the leftists and the liberalist intellectuals at the time. Unlike the profound suspicion of the liberalist intellectuals on any form of mass movement and collective utopia, the leftist intellectuals sympathized and even endorsed the spontaneous struggle of the downtrodden and laboring mass against their oppressors. Yet notwithstanding these differences, they also shared certain common ground, which then grouped Chinese educated intellectuals as an “elite class” for their privileged social status and self-positioning, and their ensuing political isolation from any actual or potential social forces. The concrete

social condition of China since the early twentieth century also presented them with a gruel picture: deprived of the fundamentals of modern education, trapped in economic poverty and political darkness, the masses seemed to be completely ignorant and oftentimes irrationally violent.

While they both think that they work for the people, Shaozu promotes liberalism and believes in liberal democracy (though he is also skeptical of their use and feasibility in the historical context of China); whereas Chunzu knows that in China these agendas are impossible to be realized without a fundamental social revolution. Like his brother, Chunzu also hopes to lead the people, yet he feels that he falls short of the capability, and he knows that he has to join the latter to acquire (his spiritual and physical) power.

Under the intense psychological, moral, as well as ideological burden to relinquish their egocentric individualism for the cause of national salvation and class liberation, which requires uncompromised collectivism, they sought to find, as Denton said, a “common ground” between personal freedom and the historical requirement of transformation of the society. But this common ground was not what they could define by themselves, but was defined by the historical momentum and dynamic, which they could not easily accept and accordingly to adjust their class habitus. Instead, more often than not they demanded the people to accommodate their idiosyncrasies. As mentioned previously, Chunzu often expresses his painful agonies and confesses his guilty feelings passionately to a certain spiritual entity “Keli.” The real identity of Keli is never disclosed, even the narrative voice so indicates that: “nobody knows who this Keli was ... She was probably a beautiful, intelligent,

pure, and nicest woman, like Don Quixote's Dulcinea."²³⁴ Eulogies aside, the comparison of her with Dulcinea is ironical, for Don Quixote's Dulcinea is an illusionary, idealized figure that can never be found in reality. The relationship of the hero to her is never a total submission; rather, while he appeals to her for help and power, more often than not he fancies this Keli would adapt to, accommodate, and even praise his particular mannerism.

The Problematic of Theory and Praxis

This inability to find where the people are ultimately boils down to the problematic of the tension between theory and praxis. As said, Chunzu has mistaken a lumpen proletariat figure as the representative and the leader of the proletariat, and he also confounds the (pre-awakened) masses and the people (with revolutionary consciousness). All these errors are a result of his ignorance and contempt of theory and his preference for anarchical actions. We can witness this paradox from the dialogue between the leaders and Chunzu: on the one hand, from the tongue of the leader is articulated such tenets, "without the revolutionary theory, there is no revolutionary action;"²³⁵ on the other hand, Chunzu has refuted the leader earlier by saying that "revolutionary action is (nothing but) exploding from the pang and agony of the masses of the people!" (256).

In this seemingly competition for the priority between theory and praxis, Chunzu's repudiation of any theoretical doctrine legitimizes itself by resorting to the defects of any

²³⁴ Ibid., 427.

²³⁵ Ibid., 262. This is a crude adaptation of a revolutionary tenet that was popular at the time. Mao has affirmed Lenin's statement now and then, "without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement." See Mao Zedong, *Selected Works*, vol.1, 336. What Mao and Lenin both fundamentally believe is that not any rebellious action or movement is qualified to be called "revolutionary."

theory that might be mechanical in its application in reality. But this thorough distrust of any policy and guideline comes dangerously to a blind, dogmatic exclusion of clear-targeted action and to aimless, anarchical destruction. While it apparently sees through the shortcomings or even illusions of any ideological system, it stops short of reflecting upon its own ideology, and sees itself as ideology-free. In its presumption that it can see through the falseness of the world to reach the “depth of life,” in its ultimate belief that the truth can only come from personal epiphany, it comes close to (and it indeed often falls back on) the Nietzschean doctrine of “superman.”²³⁶

Due to this naiveté of and disbelief in revolutionary theory apart from anarchism, spontaneous rebellion is often treated as revolutionary activity, which also appears in the plot of *Hungry Guo Su'er*. If the two characters, the titled heroine and Zhang Zhenshan, are the principle characters of the story, then the role of the third hero – Wei Haiqing – seems very ambiguous. In the first half of the story, he is only a foil to bring into sharp relief the violent, stubborn and unruly nature of the hero and heroine, almost like a buffoon-like figure: as a remote uncle of Su'er husband, he covets her, yet he only receives cold spurn from the latter; he is coward in face of Zhang Zhenshan's threat; and out of envy, he discloses to Su'e's husband the secret affair, thus he is responsible for the tragedy. But in the latter half of the

²³⁶ According to the Marxists, individualized petit-bourgeois intellectuals, who are resentful of the society and hold rebellious sentiments and romantic yearning, yet distrust the masses or any political organization and only believe in his own “power and wisdom,” can easily go to this way of willful doing, wasteful of his energy and achieve nothing but ruin themselves. The crucial point is that revolutionary consciousness, as a class consciousness, was never spontaneous. By the same token, revolutionary activity also can not happen by its own. To regard spontaneous protests and riots without theoretical guidance as revolutionary activity out of revolutionary consciousness, is only optical illusion born of false consciousness, so to speak.

story, he suddenly expands himself hugely and finally revenges Guo Su'er at the cost of his own life.

This unusual structure and plot-design invites more deliberation. A careful examination of his background as well as a comparison between him and Zhang Zhenshan reveals his real identity as a real hero in the text, an authentic "awakened" proletariat with a true "revolutionary consciousness": in terms of his class identity, he had rented land to till, after his wife died, he lost his land and went to the mine as a worker. In comparison with Zhenshan who only treats Su'er as an object of sexual desire, he takes care of the heroine silently and keeps a relationship with her as "simple and restrained." Out of love, he also reminds Guo Su'er that she needs to take care of Zhenshan, as he believes that the latter is a hooligan not committed to love. A peasant-turned-worker "proletariat," he hates local despot and ruffian. After bearing so many insults and sympathy towards the tragic woman he loves, when he finally confronts the murderer, his hidden "revolutionary consciousness" is bursting out, and he transforms suddenly from a humble coward to a courageous man. But even if we do not take the haphazard condition of his revenge into consideration, this figure still lacks political consciousness: we are informed of the following message about his awareness, "not understanding the secrets of the gigantic labor world, feeling terrified and puzzled, he has a sense of vicious resentment" (Vol.3, 57).

Demise of an Immature Subject

Chunzu enters the wilderness as a fledgling adolescent ignorant of dark society and with narcissistic instincts, and comes out of it as a more egocentric person stripped of innocence

and idealism. The experience does not lead our hero into enlightenment, what he acquires only confirms his class habitus, and strengthens his anarchist inclination, moral relativism and scepticism. This process of formation of a self-conscious ego wants to unabashedly assert itself and achieve any goal it desires. But his pursuit of absolute freedom for himself encounters obstacles anywhere he goes. And though he resolves to combat them, when faced the seemingly insurmountability of the powerful forces, he either quits willingly or recoils and flees reluctantly.

After many setbacks, Chunzu finally dies as an immature subject. After his actress girlfriend breaks up with him to follow a playwright in the troupe, Chunzu goes to a rural area to work as a teacher and schoolmaster, taking on measures to pursue his dreams of reform. Soon he finds that he is surrounded by traditional elements and backward forces, with venal and corrupt gentry dominating the village. He is forced to flee.

In this last stage of his life experience, he is still constantly at war with himself. He has admitted to a person whom he entrusted in the Stone village: “You have the power of will and a stable faith, but inside of me there is only God and the Devil.” He knows he has no staunch faith in any political theory and disbelieves in any political force, and lacks the will to stick to any long-term goal, torn between base desire and honorable motive. While his romantic self-perception is broken, he still follows his ego-centered individualism, and does not know how to join the people.

Chunzu dies in his peasant girlfriend Tonghua’s arms out of tuberculosis. Towards the end of life, he laments his wasted life, “people are working for the protection and

development of some greater cause, but my whole life has been in a complete darkness” (547). In the dying bed, he asks Tonghua to read the news about Nazi’s invasion of Soviet Union and Stalin’s proclamation of resistance, and during the process he imagines innumerable people rushing in a storm towards their enemies. He reflects over his wasted life,

“Why can’t I rush off, rush off together with them to fight and struggle?” thought Jiang Chunzu, “I remember I’ve seen them somewhere before, but where?” ... He was eager to catch up with them, but his sins and cowardliness sank into his heart like a giant stone. “... I am terrified – they have abandoned me.”²³⁷

What he fails to identify and remember is the revolutionary force that he has joined temporarily, yet out of his arrogance and pride from which he withdraws. He is swallowed and engulfed by the black cosmos of the dark society. Yet what now appears clearly in his mind is still the so-called “people” that is “cold and swing to and fro.” In this last scene, Tonghua’s earnest and down-to-earth manner constitutes a sharp contrast to his frivolity and superficial, high-flown “superior spiritual world” that he himself takes it to be. Though the mass revolution unfolding before his eyes intrigues his passion, yet as a man with anarchical passion, full of deconstructive energy, yet without any sense of responsibility and positive, feasible life attitude and refusing to adjust his lifestyle to any revolutionary discipline, Chunzu’s tragedy is doomed from the beginning. In his quest for self-identity by locating his own position in the cause of the national resistance war and mass revolution, Chunzun remains unenlightened throughout, with no clear understanding of his place in the world. His experience epitomizes the “Bildungsroman” of the second-generation urban intellectuals; or rather, this is an anti-Bildungsroman, which is a process of eagerly seeking to acquire a new

²³⁷ Ibid., 549.

subjectivity, yet which is never accomplished. The “self” remains till the end a man without a solid subjectivity.

“Subjectivity” in Vain and a Historical Fable of Failure

To fully understand the life trajectories of Shaozu and Chunzu, and the import of each one, we can not just study them by severing their relationship with the others; instead, we need to place them into the web of social relations. In this light, we can find a picture much larger than what we have discovered thus far. Holding this scheme in mind, now we will study two minor figures of the novel.

The first one is Wang Zhuolun, the husband of the second sister of the Jiang family. He grows up in a declining mandarin family. His caring mother dies much earlier; and his diligent father becomes cynical and resentful of the society, finally leaving the burden of the family to his son. This experience not only endows Wang Zhuolun with a feminine and feeble personality, but also makes him a highly responsible man who sacrifices his youth to shoulder the heavy-loaded mission.

Before marriage, he was pessimistic; yet after that, his idealism resuscitates. Once a frustrated youth, now thanks to the development of social rationalization and his personal struggle in the past ten years, he joins the ranks of middle class and his ideal and aspiration grows: He “walks earnestly and enthusiastically into the society; this country is invested with his rejuvenated youthful ideal.” In his discussion with Jiang Shaozu, against the latter’s decadence, he smiles: “But is there really no way at all? I don’t think the future would be so pessimistic. There is always a way ... First, the country needs to be unified. For a country,

the most important thing is to have military and industrial forces. Once this is achieved, changes are fast and easy” (326). This thinking is not untypical of Chinese intellectuals before the War. However, Shaozu immediately refutes this dream: “Yours is the dream for a civil society;” while “the society itself has an objective orientation ... (considering) the forces of the Japanese, various imperialist forces, together with the forces of plutocrats and warlords.” Yet Zhuolun insists: “What I said is the dream of most Chinese ... It must be realized” (324).

This dream for “national wealth and power” is indeed the aspiration of most Chinese intellectuals ever since the late Qing period. Now Wang Zhuolun, an excellent member of the new social elite class, also endeavors to undertake the project. “He has his plan, though he cannot clarify what this plan is – this is a desire that gradually increases in the peacefully developing life” (340). It is a desire and ambition of a new class, with its newly equipped social wealth, to reform and strengthen the nation-state. But soon, the “objective” social circumstances pointed out by Shaozu frustrate this ambitious plan.

The first half of the tenth chapter devotes to an episode about his errand of assisting Wang Jingwei, who is still a high-ranked KMT official at the time, to accompany a Japanese envoy inspect Chinese naval fleets. The narrative reads, “this half year, the period when Wang Zhuolun most fruitfully develops his career in his life, is also a period that witnesses the most intense vicissitude of Sino-Japanese relationship” (339). The statement implies that the promising prospectus in Zhuolun’s mind would be doomed to be frustrated by the Japanese threats.

Meanwhile, though he has a determined will to serve the country, “the navy department that he works ... for many years is rife with nonsensical and selfish internecine fights” (339). And though he solemnly prepares for the inspection rituals, he also utters sarcastic remark on the dilapidated condition of the fleets. The country is fettered by its internecine power struggle and lack of rationalization.

He also feels that he is stung by the numbness of the people. In his talk with his wife, Jiang Shuhua, he admits, “as the lives of the people are differing, their minds cannot be tied in with each other.” This remark is intended to be delivered to explain to his wife the diverse opinions between them and Shaozu, but it inadvertently also comments on his relationship with the people. He could not understand the people because of his elevated life world and because of his class habitus; and like Shaozu, he feels he fights alone. A lonely individual, he even feels alienated from his wife, “she is not that sort of citizen ... Those meanings are all hypocritical in society...Only...everything of mine is true” (344-345). Either in personal life or in national affair, he does not know how to take a feasible way to accomplish his ideal.

Besides, the military force is also falling short of new military training as well as new ways of discipline: when he just arrives at the fleet, he witnesses a soldier who, because of his incomplete collar studs, is slapped in the face by the ship’s captain and driven out of the queue. The lamentable picture does not show much hope.

However, these drawbacks are seemingly glossed over by a sublime climate surrounding the inspection. Yet the promising vista offered by the grandeur of the military ritual is only a false promise. Throughout the inspection, he stares stately at Wang Jingwei.

““Are you, as everything around you and you yourself has exemplified, a great figure?” ... Wang’s solemn and bright eyes ask.” This description clearly indicates that he entrusts his hope on a historically important figure. Yet within ten minutes, this figure has appeared to be an average man to Zhuolun, though he still wonders “whether I’m right, or you’re right? Am I hoodwinked?” A new social elite holds feelings of misgivings towards the capability and political inclination of one key figure of the ruling class, who finally proves to be betraying his (and theirs as a class) dream. Wang Zhuolun dies shortly after in the resistance war against the full-scaled Japanese invasion.

If Shaozu represents a direct descendent of the May Fourth-type Chinese intellectuals who has endeavored to enlighten the people in the cultural arena to save the nation, then Zhuolun is belonging to another strain of intellectuals that tries to strengthen the national military force, or to empower the nation, in order to realize the ambition of a new class. If Shaozu’s self-conceited and vainglorious public show is a picture of his retrogression to an agenda of neo-traditionalist reform, then the description of Wang Zhuolun’s fruitless efforts meant to be a confirmation of the failure of this other route to national salvation.

On other hand, the vicissitude of life of Wang Dinghe, a Wu Sunfu-like industrial tycoon that had earlier appeared in Mao Dun’s *Midnight*, is a fable of the unfortunate destiny of Chinese industrial bourgeois class. Running cotton mills (typical of Chinese industrial class, like Wu Sunfu), he is cruel and pragmatic, “only when there was a crisis to his interests then he would mention the ideal, the country, as well as the prospectus of industry.” Although he also “had held idealistic passion: he had admired West European, and had touched

Christianity shortly,” but now “he was decadent: he didn’t believe that China could undertake the War and had a way out;” and he seemingly sincerely “believed in traditional Chinese moral ethics, including family systems – though actually he only believed in himself, and knew that it is completely impossible to realize that order in contemporary society” (123). This by no means indicates his moral turpitude, as even his harsh treatment in the factory only speaks to the hardship he has to endure. He clearly witnesses the fact that at the time “the government has no way to develop national industry” (504). A once ambitious entrepreneur has no way to go; to develop national industry is a dream that simply lacks favorable social conditions.

In similar vein, the fiction offers some other minor characters whose experiences are also invested with a nature of social allegory. Wang Lun, husband of Jiang Xiuju, is a mediocre, and even vulgar, Babbitt. Pleasantly feeling that Chinese traditional family system is the best one in the world he “did not refute that the reason for its goodness is that it ensures the privileged rights of men” (312). He joins diplomatic career only to seek the opportunity to go abroad to study theology, and he returns to China later to spread Christianity. This was another way to “save China” among the many projects designed and pursued by the intellectuals at the time. Through the perspective of Shaozu, however, the narrator gives a death sentence on this way of salvation: “He felt that the modernized state that was dreamed by Wang Lun and his group who were young and rich, (even if it’s realized) would be a state that was completely enslaved” (Vol. 2, 221).

In all, if the emergence of various bodily desires in the novel shows an (old) subjectivity that is missing (such as Jiang Weizu's) and anxiously finding every sorts of substitution, then the novel, which shows the unsuccessful process of seeking for and the ultimate failure of establishing a new subjectivity after the downfall of the traditional society, as a whole is a fable of the failure of the agenda of various social reforms. It is not only demonstrated in the vicissitudes of life experience of Shaozu and Chunzu, but is also exemplified in the frustrated efforts of these less important intellectual characters. When the three threads of plots are read together, we can safely arrive at such a conclusion: a new subjectivity that is never established firmly is due to the failure of these diverse social-political reform agendas.

Conclusion

In all, the failed "bildungsroman" of Shaozu and Chunzu can be read as an allegory of the first and the second generations of modern radical intellectuals who, susceptible to a more and more ferocious revolutionary mass movement, try hard to catch up with the tidal wave of the new epoch; yet out of their insistence of personal rights and interests and incapability of recognizing and following the revolutionary direction, as well as their aborted efforts to change their personal habitus, both finally fail to transform themselves to be a new type of intellectuals that could fit into the new epochal trend; their efforts avail nothing significant and their destiny doomed. In addition, the whole novel can be seen as a fable of the failure of the Chinese urban proto-bourgeois class to achieve their social-political and economic dreams to reform the society, to bring to China national salvation, wealth and power.

As a whole, this is a dirge of and complaint from urban (proto-bourgeois) intellectuals about the dark reality, which promises no self-salvation for self-struggling youths to implement Weberian rationality and the ideal of individual liberty in society, offering no hope for this class to accomplish the goal of defending the nation-state and settling domestic class conflicts. Meanwhile, the more progressive parts of them are also realizing and regretful of their reluctance and incapability of putting aside personal privilege and self-importance to join “the people” whole-heartedly.

Generally speaking, Lu Ling’s fiction shows the new development of the leftist works in this period. The similarity as well as the difference of his “realistic” works and the Communist writers’ works of “revolutionary realism,” can be examined with the problematic of “subjectivity” that he describes in his novel. As analyzed, the “feminine subjectivity” and “subaltern subjectivity” as shown in the violent, primordial desires and (un)conscious reactions of subaltern figure are less faithful representation than a projection. In addition, the “intellectual subjectivity” that Shaozu and Chunzu are in pursuit of is much less a revolutionary agency that could fulfill the task of educating and mobilizing the masses, than an intellectual position that protects individual rights and privileges. All of these “subjectivities” are not the sort of class consciousness defined by the Marxist theory. This divergence should be explored through a study of the author’s position. Lu Ling, like Hu Feng, believes that although Chinese writers and intellectuals are mostly from the petit-bourgeois class, since most of them have experienced “personal revolt,” once they join with the people and “shoulder the great historical mission and historical demands,” they then

“become the vanguard of the people.”²³⁸ (Yet in the Leninist theory, “the vanguard of the people” is the revolutionary party that represents the interests of the working class). He thus also opposes the Communist critics’ view that “sees the liberation of personality as individualism, as ‘a discourse of humanity and human character that transcends classes.’”²³⁹ On the contrary, he sees the liberation of individuality of the intellectuals as the self-reform taken by the intellectuals themselves; and the liberation of individuality of the masses as the awakening of the masses. Based on these rationalizations, he believes that Chinese intellectuals are, just like the workers and peasants, the subjects of revolution. Thus the “self-reform” of the intellectuals’ worldview is not an education by the people, or a class educated by another class, but it is a process of asserting the subjective will of the intellectuals. It is very clear that in this argumentation he deliberately glosses over and even displaces the class nature of the intellectuals.

Rather than seeing national liberation and individual freedom, or national salvation and individual enlightenment, as antinomy implicated in a paradoxical antagonism, Lu Ling, as a leftist writer, realizes that personal liberation cannot be separated from the larger, collective struggle for the nation to be free from enslavement, for the society to liberate itself from oppression by residual traditional relations and highly repressive authority. But the paradox is that, while he acknowledges that personal freedom can only be achieved when the nation and the state were free from imperialist domination and control as well as class oppression, with

²³⁸ Lu Ling, “Lun wenyi chuanguo de jige jiben wenti” (On some fundamental issues in literary creation), *Soil* (Ni Tu), 1948 (6).

²³⁹ *Ibid.*

its logical conclusion that it can only be fully realized after these tasks were accomplished, his priority still remains in personal freedom, and believes that “only through this process of personal liberation is the individual able to join the people.”²⁴⁰ In this gesture, it seems that he is requesting “the people,” or the epochal imperative, to accommodate his preference for individual freedom; when the masses were suffering from the toil and shackled in chains and could not be freed, intellectuals had the priority to acquire individual freedom.

But although Lu Ling holds much sympathy over the intellectuals’ social-political predicament and psychological struggle, he also wishes to debunk their hypocrisy and reflects on their class habitus and “bourgeois consciousness.” In this sense, Lu Ling comes closer to the CCP’ call for self-reform of the intellectual. In doing so, the author exposes the problems among the intellectuals, which led the novel become a fable of the failure of intellectuals’ self-struggle, thus an anti-Bildungsroman. This duality explains the various self-contradictory, contending discourses which are imbued with tensions in the novel.

²⁴⁰ Kirk Denton, *The Problematic of Self in Modern Chinese Literature*, 188.

Part Three
Contending for a New Modern:
The Writing of Fiction in the “Liberation Zones”

A Brief Survey of the Social-Political Dynamic

After the establishment of the Second United Front around 1936-1937, the CCP officially gained a legitimate status in the national political arena. Still, it tried to maintain its operational independence, and adopted the strategy of base-building in those areas within its jurisdiction.

Moreover, the party, under the leadership of Mao, developed the Marxist-Leninist thesis of proletariat revolution, and established the theory of new-democratic revolution – a democratic revolution against imperialism, feudalism and bureaucrat-capitalism waged by the masses of the people, on the basis of the worker-peasant alliance, and under the leadership of the proletariat with the party as the vanguard.²⁴¹ For this purpose, the party proclaimed to create a “new democratic culture,” which is a “national, scientific, and mass culture.”²⁴² It is also worthy to note is that this revolution was still regarded by the CCP as bourgeois in nature, while its final goal was to build socialism.

The war became a crucial turning-point for the Communists to win over the support of intellectuals, and the society in general. During the resistance war, the party further built its image as a patriotic political force that fought the invaders courageously and unswervingly,

²⁴¹ See Mao Zedong, “Xinminzhu zhuyi de zhengzhi yu xinminzhu zhuyi de wenhua” (New Democratic Politics and New Democratic Culture), later known on “Xinminzhu zhuyi lun” (On New Democracy), *Zhongguo wenhua*, 1:1, 1940.

²⁴² Ibid.

which attracted a large number of intellectuals and students who wanted to contribute themselves to the cause of national salvation to their areas. Meanwhile, lots of underground party literary workers and academics, who mostly worked in the League of Left-Winged Writers, also moved from Shanghai to Yan'an to assume the posts of teaching staff or administrative office. But these urban intellectuals' idealism and working style did not always fit in with the party's discipline and policy; there were always gaps and tensions between the two.

To understand the drastically new historical experience in the CCP-controlled area, we can only proceed through a cultural-political angle. To study the cultural production in this area, firstly we have to take a brief review of its specific "cultural field." This field is structurally very different from the KMT's, and has its own operating economies, laws and channels. There are several salient features pertaining to this field: first, as these areas were mostly located in countryside, the influence of folk culture was dominant, while the elements of metropolitan culture were limited to higher academic institutions run by the party and staffed by urban intellectuals; secondly, because of this, most cadres, soldiers, and peasants (cadres and soldiers were also predominantly coming from the peasants) preferred visual and performance arts rather than literary writings which demanded higher educational background and more leisure time; thirdly, the practice of cultural activities in the earlier CCP-dominated area (before the United Front, the CCP established its own "Soviet Republic" in its Red Army period) – the so-called "Jiangxi Soviet pattern" which emphasized political education by utilizing local, folk artistic forms as propagandistic prop for

mobilization – was inherited. In addition to folk song and dance, drama was especially welcome. So there were always large numbers of travelling drama troupes working in the countryside.

The following discussion will focus on Yan'an, the cultural center of the CCP-controlled areas as well as the headquarter of the party's top leadership for most of the times of this period (from early 1937 to early 1947).²⁴³

The “Cultural Field” of Yan'an

Located in north-west China, Yan'an was usually regarded as the symbolic place of the Communist Revolution. This is so as much for its political significance as for its cultural creation. The social networks of cultural production in Yan'an were fundamentally changed. There were neither commercial pressures nor economic stimulations for production of works, and the political censorship which plagued many leftist writers in the Nationalist-controlled cities was greatly lessened (at least this was so before the Rectification Movement). Though the material resources were limited, publishing facilities (newspapers and journals) were available.

There had been several small literary and artistic associations before 1937. After the outbreak of the Resistance War, more and more students arrived in Yan'an, so the associations grew rapidly; it was reported that there were several hundred numbers of literary associations in Yan'an alone in 1937. There were two tendencies among them,

²⁴³ Scholars have normally used “Yan'an period” to cover the period “from the arrival of the Communist armies in north-west China in 1935 after the Long March” to the establishment of the People's Republic in 1949. See Cyril Birch, “Fiction of the Yan'an Period,” *The China Quarterly*, No.4.(Oct.-Dec.,1960), 1.

The first tendency is popularization, typified by the Shanxi-Gansu-Ningxia Border Region Cultural Association (*Shan-Gan-Ning bianqu wenhua xiehui*; 1938-1940), which was generally called as Cultural Association (*Wenxie*). Under its leadership, in Spring 1938, several special branch organizations were set up, such as Drama Association, Music Association, and Fine Art Association. In addition to establishing a Literary Advisory Committee offering advice to amateur writers and correspondents, it also published a mimeographed periodical *Wenyi tuji* (Literary Assault), which in its initial period circulated around North Shanxi and the North China front.

Another tendency was “elevation.” There were two institutions inclined towards producing quality arts for cadres and students in Yan’an, and even producing works for intellectual readers in the Great Rear area. *Wenkang* (abbreviation for *Yan’an wentijie kangdi lianhehui*, or the Yan’an Literary Circles Resistance Federation) was founded in September 1938, and in May 1939 it was reorganized into a branch of the National Literary and Art Circles Resistance Association. *Wenkang* published *Wenyi zhanxian* (*Literary Battlefield*), a periodical targeted intellectuals in the Nationalist-controlled “Greater Rear Area.”²⁴⁴ In addition, Lu Xun Academy of Art (abbreviated as *Luyi*) was a high-level art school that trained more sophisticated literary and artistic cadres.

The audience and the cultural activities in Yan’an were radically different from other regions of China, for which the party aimed to establish a masses-oriented culture. Mao in his *Yan’an Talks* had specifically discussed the audience and the cultural activities in this area,

²⁴⁴ Cf. David Holm, *Art and Ideology in Revolutionary China* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 48-49.

The cadres of all types, fighters in the army, workers in the factories and peasants in the villages all want to read books and newspapers once they become literate, and those who are illiterate want to see plays and operas, look at drawings and paintings, sing songs and hear music...²⁴⁵

And the quantities of the readers correspondingly increased dramatically,

Take the cadres alone... they far outnumber the readers of any book published in the Kuomintang areas. There, an edition usually runs to only 2,000 copies, and even three editions add up to only 6,000; but as for the cadres in the base areas, in Yenan alone there are more than 10,000 who read books.²⁴⁶

Not only was there an enlargement of the scope of audience and forms of art, but the persons who created these cultural works were diversified. Here, “plays, poems, stories, novels, ballads, reportages” that “flowered in profusion” were created by veteran writers coming from the Nationalist areas, by professional students of the Lu Xun Academy, but also by farmer and soldiers who were transformed into amateur “cultural workers” – at least this was what the party intended to do.²⁴⁷

To mobilize peasants, wartime propaganda work requires artistic forms intriguing to them. To reach the masses effectively, agitprop pertinent to war mobilization was the priority, which dictated an eclecticism of artistic form, including foreign elite genres and local folk forms, but appropriation and adaptation of local popular forms received more favorite attention. Scholars of the May Fourth era also collected folk songs and legends, but they focused on their literary and social values, while the CCP viewed folk culture through a political perspective. Regarding them as crystallization of collective wisdom of the laboring people nevertheless, they adapted them into propaganda use by adding political messages

²⁴⁵ Mao Zedong, *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1967), 72-73.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 73.

²⁴⁷ Cyril Birch, “Fiction of the Yan’an Period,” 1.

(such as anti-Japanese, anti-landlord, and anti-tradition, etc.). But simple drama was the most favorite form. There were many traveling drama troupes in both the north and the south.²⁴⁸

While they had used such foreign imported genres as spoke drama (*huaju*), living newspaper (*huobao*) and song-and-dance (*gewu*), mingling of these Western-influenced genres with indigenous folk performing art was preferred, as the direction now obviously needed to turn towards folk performing arts. In appropriating traditional form, such as “local theaters” (*difangxi*), “rice-planting song” (*yangge*), and “drum song” (*dagu*), some originally integrated elements would be taken off if they were deemed cumbersome or pernicious in terms of agitprop effects, and new contents added; so in the process the local art forms themselves were also changed.

There was also wide range of other types of literary and artistic production, in which the activity format of *wenyi xiaozu*, or literary and artistic small group, is worthy of a few more elaboration. These small organizations were helped to be established by *Wenxie* and penetrated into various bodies of Yan’an’s “factories, offices, schools, military units, and in the nearby countryside.”²⁴⁹ Most of its members were from the working class or peasants, while veteran writers or students only occupied a small portion. This “soviet-style” work represented a new way of literary activities “away from reliance upon professionals and toward a wider range of working people.”²⁵⁰ It was the existence and the growth of the broad rural areas that made possible the invention and development of this new form of

²⁴⁸ See Ellen R. Judd, “Prelude to the Yan’an Talks: Problems in Transforming a Literary Intelligentsia,” in *Modern China*, vol. 11 No.3, July 1985.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 384.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 383.

organization. Mainly through this channel, veteran intellectuals and students in the Literary Association tied in them with the working people, which led to considerable amount of literary-artistic activities, including “street poetry movement,” in which modern, simple poems were posted or painted in the walls of streets, recited at meetings, etc.

These institutions with diversified purposes still shared the two differing orientations. Some organizations were devoted to popularization, such as the Masses’ Reading Materials Society (*Dazhong duwushe*), the North-west Arts Work Corps (Xibei wenyi gongzuotuan), and the Popular Masses’ Opera Troupe. While the specialized higher institutions, such as *Luyi*, the writer’s union, and *Wenkang*, stressed elevation in studying and creating “high culture”: writers aimed to write quality fiction for publication in the Nationalist-controlled area and earned a nationwide audience and fame; institutions training students of drama staged more European and Soviet classics than creation of new plays with resistance themes. At *Luyi*, the curriculum focused more on great works of world literature, and the teaching style was too rigorously academic and technical to meet the urgent wartime requirements and the needs of the masses. This tendency was later called “trend towards closed-door elevation” and was criticized as divorced from reality.

Nevertheless, as Ellen R. Judd points out, “a pivotal and decisive aspect of the Yan’an approach was the creation of means to link outside (urban) intellectuals and peasants into an effective political force.”²⁵¹ The party made efforts to bridge the gap between (nonpopular)

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 377.

leftist and popular (nonleftist) art, which represented the earliest collaboration between urban intellectuals and local folk artists.

Mao in 1938 had called for the cooperation of elite, urban intellectuals and rural artistic workers. Those writers from “Shanghai pavilions” (*Shanghai tingzi jian*) and those from the rural areas or the mountains should co-worked intimately.²⁵² The war provided such an opportunity for the progressive intellectuals to “go to the masses.” But because heavy agitprop work demanded much of their time and energy, the time for close contact with the peasants were not enough. As a result, they had only a “limited appreciation” of “the cultural milieu of the countryside and an overly simple conception of how to organize cultural change.”²⁵³ Meanwhile, the adaptation of old forms had certain inconvenient limitations for urban intellectuals, as the latter were not experts of these genres. This led to a consequence that “the style of the songs and plays they produced was too Europeanized to appeal to the uneducated majority of the population” and “most activity in literature and art remained confined to the intellectual and student ‘masses’.”²⁵⁴ It is under this circumstance that discussions of “use of old forms” generated much momentum.

From “Use of Old Forms” to “Establishment of National Form”

In the KMT-controlled areas, many of which metropolitan cities, the “old forms” mainly refer to those of traditional, commercialized culture, and the audience was mostly

²⁵² Zhong Jingzhi, “Yan'an Lu Xun yishu xueyuan gaimao ceji” (Sidelights to a general picture of Yan'an's Lu Xun Academy of Art), *Xin wenxue shiliao* (Historical Materials of the New Literature), No. 2 (1982): 52.

²⁵³ Ellen R. Judd, “Prelude to the Yan'an Talks: Problems in Transforming a Literary Intelligentsia,” 389.

²⁵⁴ David Holm, *Art and Ideology in Revolutionary China* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 47.

urban residents seeking entertainment. While in the CCP-controlled area, mostly located in the countryside, the priority was placed on educating and mobilizing peasants. Here, the “old forms” often refer to folk arts and traditional literary genres.

The discussion of “use of old forms” became a hot topic soon after the start of the war. It assumed a new orientation in the wake of Mao’s call for establishing a “national form” (*minzu xingshi*) in the year of 1938, which now surrounded the relations between “old forms” and this unspecified “national form.” But we need to note that Mao’s replacement of “old forms” with “national forms” was aimed to dispel the negative connotation contained in the prefix word “old.” What is more, he essentially changes the term from a literary genre or style to one that is not only cultural, but also pertaining to political realm. But his new term, which invited a new round of debate on “national form,” initially did not lead to fruitful discussions. The intellectuals preferring the May-Fourth New Literature still held their derogative view towards folk tradition. They proposed that this national form should be based on the May Fourth new literature and be integrated with Chinese classical literary heritage and the essence of western culture. But other intellectuals repudiated May Fourth literature, seeing it as catering only to bourgeois readers though it claimed that it was created for the masses. To replace this “limited modernity,” they explored a more inclusive and popularized form than the May Fourth paradigm. Apparently the latter idea fit in more closely with Mao’s agenda.

Mao’s 1942 Yan’an Talk was partially a response and partially an answer to the predicament of the National Form Debates. It is a further revision and adjustment of the

institution of modern Chinese literature. His imagination and invention of “national form” for a new China and a new literature in the 1940s has a double goal: as inheritance and development of national cultural heritage, and as a way to achieve the goal of socialist revolution. The thesis of “Chinese style and Chinese manner” is founded upon a reflection of the limits of May Fourth New Culture, aimed at reintegrating available cultural resources to create a modern popular national form instrumental to the goal of “resistance and state-building” (*kanzhan jianguo*), for the formation of an independent nation-state, and for the cultivation of a proletarian culture. Thus, the national form is a non-existent entity to be imagined, invented, and propagated. The “direction of Worker-Peasant-Soldier” is a clarification and definition of the class subject of this so-called “fresh and lively Chinese style and Chinese manner liked by the masses of the Chinese people.” The so-called “new democratic culture” pointed further to the direction of a different new national culture.

Cultural Production for a “New Democratic Culture”

As a result of the political economy of art in the border regions, intellectual writers and folk artists entered a new type of collaboration. Collective writing groups were formed, which incorporated or were connected with official representatives. Art and literature here is most known for the rustification of intellectual writers and the “worker/peasant/soldier orientation” (*gongnonbong fangxiang*). It is known that Mao’s “Yan’an Talks” proposed a transformation of literature and art that is based on a changed literary and artistic practice, which is founded on a changed political allegiance of writers and artists and also a fundamental change in their social position. In urging writers and artists to put aside their

professions (at least temporarily) and go and live among ordinary working people for an extended time, Mao aimed at a profound transformation of the writers and artists in order to produce a very different literature and art. The literary intellectuals might not have accomplished the change in class consciousness required by Mao's policy, but they seemed to have begun a rough synthesis of their cosmopolitan training with indigenous literature and art. This presumably owed much to the experience of rural life as well as to their study of folk genres.

Thus various forms of cultural productions – fiction, poetry, drama, and fine art – of the period all show the influence of rural northern China in their incorporation of indigenous folk literary and artistic elements. Folk-elite artistic contact in the northwest border regions initially took place on the initiative of a small number of elite artists who were committed to achieving a fusion between their political convictions (nationalist and leftist) and China's folk culture. But to respond to Mao's call to develop "Chinese style and Chinese manner liked by the masses of the Chinese people" in artistic works, a host of productions, which utilized forms resuscitated from popular, folk, and local literary traditions, appeared.

It should be kept in mind when we analyze the cultural works in this area that the communist's project was targeted at the lower-level masses (worker-peasant-soldier and their cadres), who were the majority of the population, to make the popular literary art that had not been co-opted by the May Fourth paradigm as its crucial ingredients, in order to create a literary style that is modernity-oriented, allegedly more democratic and having more "national flavor." This renewed confrontation between folk and elite cultural streams took

place in a milieu of living folk art. The “peasant writer” Zhao Shuli (1906-1970) allegedly achieves this goal of integrating rural/city, intellectual/peasants, local flavor/national style, and tradition/modernity in his own way of literary activity. He was the essential model in this campaign.

Zhao did not disavow the enlightenment efforts combating feudalist concepts and ideas, nor did he repudiate the condition of the circulating market of literature. On the contrary, he saw May Fourth literature as lacking its appeal to rural peasants as its potential patrons. In defiance with the May Fourth tradition of New Literature (which embraced metropolitan citizens and intellectual units as its main audience), he was trying to propose a rural folk culture which had incorporated the modernity-oriented communist ideology. This to a certain extent can be seen as an effort to sublimate from and transcend above the European style of modernity by utilizing the source of Chinese folk culture; in particular, by incorporating popular storytelling techniques into the writing of modern fiction. As local dialects seemed to permit a more intimate contact with the everyday and were conducive to the genesis of a new symbolic order, he repudiated Europeanized language and Western fictional forms, but retained the brevity and simplicity of Chinese traditional fiction. The colloquialized language of his works was achieved not by using dialects, idioms, or patois, but by gearing the words uttered by the characters to suit to their specific identity, physical state, and psychology. Matching each character to his circumstance, those direct words emit enriched local flavor. In terms of stories, they lack a central figure and central event, but are always relentlessly undergoing development. This structuration has direct relationship with the evolutionist

historicism; in other words, this form in its essence expresses evolutionary point of view of history. So we could not say this brand of story is a resuscitation of traditional “old” forms. Instead, the content and form of these stories reflect the most significant epochal change of Chinese rural society.

Under such historical-political conditions that fundamentally changed social relations, the standard of literary evaluation also changed. The core of the May Fourth paradigm is the independent consciousness of individual subject. But the view that treats individualism, or the completion of individual personality as the sole standard of evaluating the “roundness” of characters in fiction, is merely one of modern cultural institutions, which, as a historical category, might prevent us from appreciating different modern modes of life which have their own historical dynamic and idiosyncratic world views. For instance, we rarely see the genre of *bildungsroman* in the cultural works in this area. The characters do become a “new people” (*xinren*). Yet when he becomes a new person, he is not always a core figure standing in front of history, but blends himself into more and more “new people” and becomes again one element of the new community. To appreciate this artistic structure, we need a changed way of thinking, a new conception of the institution of literature.

The sixth chapter will examine the veteran writers who evolved from the New Literature camp, using the famed female intellectual writer Ding Ling (1904-1986, pseudonym of Jiang Wei, courtesy name (zi) Bingzhi) as a case study. Her arduous intellectual transformation and reform was a result of both political pressures (and her correspondent self-mortification and censorship) and the reshuffled cultural field with a new structure and paradigm. She had been

the pioneer of Chinese feminist writing in the post-May Fourth era. Her sensual writing of female bodily feelings and love entangles had triggered sensational effects across the society. Yet since the 1930s, she became more and more left-leaning, and after Mao's 1942 "Yan'an Talks" she finally changed to be a staunch Communist writer who wrote the famed novel *The Sun shines on the Sanggan River*. We need to study how Ding Ling metamorphosed from an uncompromised individualist to a revolutionary fellow traveler, and finally became a firm cog in the party machine, which shows in the changed way she described the "masses" in the latter era, a departure from her earlier portrait of the "crowd." When she turned to revolutionary literature since 1930s, she tried to delve deep into the subjective world of the crowd, to represent the diversified individual image from an internal psychological angle. It is acknowledged that her imagination of the revolutionary subject: the workers, the peasants, and the soldiers becomes more vivid and substantial after the Yan'an talk. But what she tried to represent is still the character's own emotional logic, not the social logic of class subjectivity based on theory of class struggle.

For this new type of literature, we need to keep in mind that "socialist realism" proposes the educational capability, political orientation, and class nature of literature and art. In other words, there was a different institution of literature and art that was established and promoted in a drastically differing social-economic structure and political culture, in which the "political principle" and "cultural principle" of legitimacy in cultural production in Bourdier's theory are essentially identical with each other; and the distinction between "autonomous principle" and "heterogeneous principle" collapses. But this is merely

theoretically so, because the party's policy could not be always identified with the socialist ideal. Thus oftentimes the "political principle of legitimacy" and the "heterogeneous principle" of political imperative prevailed over any other concerns. How did the veteran May Fourth intellectuals and writers respond to this "new society" and "new democratic culture," how did they change their positions and strategies and what kinds of transforming processes they had experienced, need to be examined within the political context, as well as within the historical context, so that their significance, import, and ramifications could be fully historicized.

Chapter Five

“National Form” and “Problem Stories” Rural Society in Transition and Zhao Shuli’s “Peasant Stories”

It has been aptly noted that “if Zhao Shuli had not existed, he would have had to be invented, and perhaps to a great extent he was.”²⁵⁵ But does this argument mean that “the model peasant writer was an ongoing joint creation of the living writer and party ideologues”?²⁵⁶ Instead of following Yi-tsi Mei’s view that Zhao’s writings “seemed to have been tailored-made to meet its (the party’s) specific requirements;”²⁵⁷ which apparently implied that he somewhat arbitrarily “made” stories to “represent” the party’s policies, I will take another perspective by examining how his efforts were coinciding, as well as sometimes in conflict (if that was the case), with the Party’s mandate of creating a “new direction,” in order to understand why Mao Dun praises his work as “a milestone on the way to national form,”²⁵⁸ and why Zhou Yang extols his stories as the evidence that Mao’s idea of a people’s literature was on its way to realization.²⁵⁹

This chapter first takes a brief survey of his literary career and his particular way of literary creation, and then it examines the particular feature of his storytelling. The discussions of his stories show the general theme of a rural society in transition in the “liberated area.” There are two major themes: social improvement with the intervention of a

²⁵⁵ Yi-tsi Mei Feuerwerker, *Ideology, Power, Text: Self-Representation and the Peasant “Other” in Modern Chinese Literature* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1998), 100.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Mao dun, “Lun Zhaoshuli de xiaoshuo,” in Guo Moruo, et.al, *Lun Zhao Shuli de chuanguo* (On Zhao Shuli’s Creation) (Sunan: Xinhua shudian, 1949), 43.

²⁵⁹ Zhou Yang, “Lun Zhao Shuli de chuanguo,” *Jiefang ribao*, Yanan, Aug 26, 1946.

new power-regime, and the “standing up” of the subaltern. These two aspects oftentimes overlap to various degrees, and sometimes there is a hybrid which saliently combines the two themes, such as the novel *Lijiazhuan de bianqian* (Changes in Li Village). The last section will briefly discuss the paradox of the so-called “Zhao Shuli’s direction,” its contributions to represent and educate the masses and its limits in implementing the party’s long-term ideological goal of reforming the peasants’ ethical-moral world.

The Writer as a “Peasant Writer” for the Peasants

Zhao Shuli has strong attachment to rural culture. By defying the expectations of “cultured” society, he is determined to keep a lifelong estrangement from urban worldliness, especially the “lofty sophistication” of the literati or intellectual class, and consciously repudiates the mannerism and comportment generally associated with the literary intellectuals and called himself a “county bumpkin.” Partially because of this, throughout the 1940s, various newspapers and periodicals identified him as a “peasant writer.” This image of personal peasantness, partly a result of his personal profile – a tough face apparently weathered by harsh climate and daily tribulation, and his mien of rusticity – though even persist to this day, is not so accurate in terms of either his cultural cultivation or his family background.

Born in 1906 to a middle-to-lower peasant family in a county of Shanxi province, he grew up with authentic experience of peasant existence. Because his father is an expert string player and is skilled in percussions and woodwinds, he had joined a local art society. There,

he studied playing various instruments and singing opera.²⁶⁰ He was also accustomed to storytelling. In these occasions, he was exposed to the rich and colorful folk language that the people around him used. Later on he reminisced that the Society was his “primary language school.”

But his traditional education is also outstanding. Under the tutorship of his grandfather, he had begun to study Chinese classical poetry at the age of four. When he attended a higher primary school in a neighborhood town, which was a modern institution that provided a foreign-style curriculum plus classical studies, his mastery in classical Chinese literature earned him a reputation. In the following years, he either served as school teacher or senior student, and he avidly read translated foreign literary works written by Gorky, Ibsen, Turgenev, Gogol, Chekov, and Tolstoy, to name a few, as well as works on science and social theory. Therefore, his knowledge of Western Enlightenment Literature and idea is also indisputable. Meanwhile, he perused texts of Chinese colloquial literature, ranging from traditional Ming-Qing novels to May Fourth fiction.²⁶¹ It has been pointed out that he is greatly influenced by traditional Chinese popular novels and stories.

Zhao joined the underground Communist Party in the year 1927 and passionately discussed with his friends the concept of “proletarian literature.” One year later, the warlord Yan Xishan purged the Communists in Shanxi and Zhao escaped to mountainous area and hid there for a whole summer before he returned home. Because of this experience, he was

²⁶⁰ Shi Jiyan, “Zhao Shuli tongzhi shengping jilue” (Brief sketch of Zhao Shuli’s career), In *Fenshui*, 1980, no.1, 50-54.

²⁶¹ See Huang Xiuji, *Zhao Shuli pingzhuan* (Nanjing: Jiangsu renmin, 1981), 16-22.

regarded by the people around him at home as a “washout,” which greatly irritated him. He despised this mentality of social upward mobility, and refuted the dichotomy between (ignorant) peasant and (cultured) intellectual.²⁶² Seeing this separation as a duality between the oppressor and the oppressed, he decided to go “the route of society” rather than the way of climbing upward in officialdom.

The seething intellectual and social issues of the times still greatly intrigued him. The debate on literature and popularization around 1930 and 1931 launched by the League of Left Wing Writers especially attracted his attention. It is said that he had written some articles on this subject to certain Shanxi publications.²⁶³ Also around this time he had experimented with the Chinese traditional form of serial novel (*Zhanghui xiaoshuo*) to realize his dream of popularization for the masses. From 1933 through 1936, he contributed essays to such famed literary publications in Shanghai as the supplements of *Shenbao*, the magazine *Renjian shi*, the bimonthly *Lunyu*, and some local Taiyuan journals.²⁶⁴

In the year 1937, he served as cadre of propaganda for the Sacrifice League, a military unit established out of the united-front policy which was nominally under the leadership of the warlord Yan Xishan, yet in actuality led by the Communists. For the following several years he had worked as editors for several local newspapers and journals, and published

²⁶² In a later reminiscence, he still could not repress his anger: “I thought: I was originally a child of the farm, and in the interim I studied in school for a few years, and now I have returned to the farm again. I haven’t lost any status whatsoever, so why are you calling me a ‘washout’?” Zhao Shuli, “Chulu zatan,” *Zhongguo qingnian* (Chinese Youth), no. 9, 1957.

²⁶³ Liu Panxi, “Zhao Shuli de chuanguo zai wenxueshi shang de yiyi” (The Significance of Zhao Shuli’s Literary Creation in Literary History), *Shandong daxue xuebao*, 1963, no.1.

²⁶⁴ Shi Jiyan, “Zhao Shuli tongzhi shengping jilue,” 52.

numerous works under different pennames. This exceptional amount of works covers diverse forms, ranging from poetry, short stories, novellas, novels to plays, short sketches, essays and criticism. The forms that he utilized also include diverse folk styles, such as “the comic cross-talk (*guci*), the folk song, parables, fables, rhymed narrative, random jottings, seven-word poetry, new style poetry, *Zhanghui xiaoshuo*, short librettos, and *kuaiban*.”²⁶⁵ Before his famed “Little Blackie gets married” was published, he had contributed prolifically to numerous publications for more than twelve years.

Tradition and (an Alternative) Modernity in Zhao’s “Storytelling”

Zhao Shuli is regarded as a “peasant writer” determined to create a new form for a specific class. His stories in this period are mostly short, yet they have much difference from the genre of “short story”.²⁶⁶ His is a style of storytelling that has its roots in Chinese folk art that was popular in rural area, thus it contains many local, traditional elements, with the imprints of the agricultural society. But it is also not a resurgence of traditional art; rather, it is modernity-oriented in the sense that it was produced with a modern ideal in mind, meant to be published and circulated widely across the lower class stratum, and aimed to play a role of mobilizing the peasants to collectively participate in resistance efforts and stand up to master their own destiny. Corresponding with this purpose, its stylistic structure also shows some

²⁶⁵ Josephine Alzbeta Matthews, “Artistry and authenticity,” 72. *Zhanghui xiaoshuo* is traditional Chinese serial novel; *kuaiban* is a local form of allegretto or patter.

²⁶⁶ Walter Benjamin points out that the modern “short story...has removed itself from oral tradition and no longer permits that slow piling one on top of the other of thin, transparent layers which constitutes the most appropriate picture of the way in which the perfect narratives is revealed through the layers of a variety of retellings.” Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, tr. Harry Zohn, ed., Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 93.

modern features. A comparison of the writer's own way of storytelling with Walter Benjamin's concept of "storyteller" is illuminating.

Benjamin points out that with the arrival of the modern world, "the art of storytelling is coming to an end." Because human experience fell in value with the propagation of information (which is typified by the news reports widely circulating everyday in newspapers), the ability for people to exchange experience is greatly weakened. Because of this, he believes that "peasants and seamen were past masters of storytelling." But in China, the slowly developing yet retarded process of modernization, as well as the predominant population of rural peasants, determined that the folk art of "storytelling" still persisted in rural China in various forms, such as local theaters and dramas, clapper talks, etc. As Chinese rural society still kept its long-term organizational structure, and the traditional community maintained its ethical-moral life world, the "communicability of experience" was not decreasing so much as its western counterpart.

For Benjamin, stories are characterized by an orientation toward practical interests. Every real story contains "openly or covertly something useful," which either has a moral import, or offers practical advice, "a proverb or maxim," etc. Just like a traditional storyteller always has "counsel for his readers," Zhao also provides moral-ethical teaching to his implied audience. But his teaching on one hand is predicated on Chinese folk ethical world, on another is based on a revolutionary ideology. The two are not distinctly divided but often overlapped. Thus if for traditional storyteller, this counsel "is less an answer to a question than a proposal concerning the continuation of a story;" then for Zhao, this counsel is meting

out an “educational” message more or less pertaining to mass revolution. If, as Benjamin says, folk wisdom is what the traditional storyteller is in pursuit of; then for Zhao, this wisdom is added with new elements that foster class consciousness. For Benjamin, this wisdom is dying out as “a concomitant symptom of the secular productive force of history” (the capitalist industrial revolution); for our writer, the wisdom of a revolutionary baptism is newly arrived as a result of mass movement that tries to bring about a new culture. If the source of the material that the traditional storyteller draws forth is mostly the folk’s “experience from afar,” which is “passed on from mouth to mouth;” then the source that Zhao’s stories utilize is the contemporary happenings that influence the life as well as the minds of the peasants day and night. Furthermore, the divergence can also be witnessed in the disparate epistemological foundation on which traditional tales and Zhao’s modern stories are based respectively. For the former, it is premised on “a divine plan of salvation” in which men’s fate is determined; for Zhao, his stories are predicated upon a modern evolutionary scenario in which history makes progress forward.

What the common ground the traditional storyteller and Zhao share, however, is that the experiences they relate are both instantly comprehensible to the audience because they had a common base of experience, which point to the peasants as a community. And they all make what they tell the experience of those who are listening to their tales. Though, as said, the nature of this sharing is different. These different purposes also condition their stylistic divergence: though for both forms of storytelling, “the psychological connection of the events is not forced on the reader,” and it is up to the latter to interpret things as he understands them,

Zhao's stories do not always keep a story free from explanation, because he needs to make his message unambiguous and clear. In short, he has changed the traditional storytelling as a simple artisan form of communication that merely delivers information. In this light, like traditional storytellers, Zhao "joins the ranks of the teachers and sages," yet he is not a master or sage by himself, but a loyal member of the party's cultural workers aimed to educate the masses.

Benjamin's differentiation between traditional storytelling and modern novel and news report also helps us understand Zhao's singularity. A novel is a wholly self-contained world that the reader enters as an outside observer. The novelist has isolated himself and is "no longer able to express himself by giving examples of his most important concerns." Thus writing a novel means to "carry the incommensurable to extremes in the representation of human life." The news we read is not memorable, which make our historical knowledge paltry because they are far outside our experience (at least at the time). They are also too routinized to invite us exploring it in depth. Unlike these sorts of individualized (atomized) or routinized narrative forms, Zhao's stories essentially are a record of a transitional life form with a collective nature and a historical import. They are close to the intended audience's collective experience and memorable to them. Therefore, if there is a "duality of inwardness and outside world" in modern novel because of the separation of meaning and life, as the theory of novel by Lukacs has contended,²⁶⁷ then this duality does not exist in Zhao's stories, as now life and meaning are united on the plan(e) of "liberation". Yet this rupture for Zhao is

²⁶⁷ See George Lukacs, *Theory of Novel*, trans. Ann Bostock (Cambridge: Mass., MIT Press, 1971).

not thorough and comprehensive, as more often than not his stories, after following the formula of traditional stories by which the evil is punished and the justice is done, fall back on traditional ethical world, thus being only a tale about morality.²⁶⁸ This “incomplete modernity,” as a narrative dilemma, explains his ultimate historical predicament.

As regards the medium of transmission, if for Benjamin “what distinguishes the novel from the story ... is its essential dependence on the book” (because only with the invention of printing, the dissemination of the novel became possible); while “what can be handed on orally ... is of a different kind.”²⁶⁹ Then for Zhao, his alternative “storytelling” meant to combine the mass production of an industrial mode and its ensuing mass propagation with a popular way of telling folk tales. In all, all the aforementioned differences speak to his efforts at an “alternative modernity” for the purpose of mass education.

Reading Experience and Stylistic Effects

The reading experience of Zhao’s stories is one of being physically transported to the locale and thus sensory apprehension of its sights and sounds. But this experience should be differentiated from that of the implied audience of the original text. Insofar as many of Zhao’s stories have a diegetic storyteller as the narrator, the audience of this presence, as noted, “is not one ensconced in chairs in private studies in distant enclaves of metropolitan civilization.”²⁷⁰ This is determined by the presentational mode of the story which, as is aptly pointed out, “reflected the assumptions composing the regional *mindscapes*.” This is because

²⁶⁸ Benjamin says, “the first true storyteller is, and will continue to be, the teller of fairy tales.” And the fairy tale says, “and they lived happily ever after.” *Illuminations*, 102.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 87.

²⁷⁰ Josephine Alzbeta Matthews, “Artistry and authenticity: Zhao Shuli and his fictional world,” 10.

“though this inscribed narrator is only occasionally self-assertive, his voice throughout is unmistakable, while the naiveté he projects is not that of himself (at least not necessarily) but rather that of his audience.”²⁷¹

Put in other way, here the implied reader, if it did exist, is not the atomized individual in our common reading experience nowadays, but still mostly the original audience of the storyteller, and those rural residents like them.²⁷² While the others of its actual reader, such as us, are just like voyeurs peeping into an alien world. The difference in this readership between Zhao’s stories and modern fiction can be briefly witnessed in the following diagram.

| Zhao Shuli’s stories | Modern Fiction |
|--|--|
| inscribed audience: the public in front of the storyteller | N/A |
| intended audience: mostly illiterate, not directly receiving the stories from a professional storyteller but indirectly from a re-teller | N/A |
| implied reader: equivalent to intended audience, but he/she must be literate | inscribed reader (varies depended on the context, sometimes it can be specific characters, but all are atomized, literate ones) ²⁷³ |
| intended reader: literate residents of the countryside, especially party cadres | intended reader: urban literate dwellers |

²⁷¹ Ibid., 10.

²⁷² For instance, a record of the “Xiao Erhei mania” had described this scene: “especially among the young, it became all the rage” to read the story, and “fields, homes, and mess halls became the scenes of avid discussion, while young people carried around frayed and dilapidated copies of the story in their pockets.” See Gao Jie, et.al., *Zhao Shuli zhuan*, (Taiyuan: Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 1982), 77.

²⁷³ Wanyne Booth’s concept of “implied reader,” is aptly summarized by Josephine Alzbeta Matthews as an “imaginary ideal reader who shares the author’s values and beliefs and would be totally in agreement with the author’s ‘stance’ or ideological point of view.” “Artistry and Authenticity,” 33.

In short, Zhao's stories are intended for the rural audience as a community, which marked its stark contrast to the urban individualized consumers as private readers. It basically is a difference based on class divergence. This is the first step for us to appreciate Zhao's singularity. Under this perspective, his language, which is equipped with all the features of vivid colloquial expression, is less than a display of a unique speech act of style than carrying on the imprint of the social structure and form of life to become a "stylistic effect."

Ultimately, it is the totally different historical experiences that co-ordinate the differing literary skills, readership, and stylistic purposes. While traditional storytelling had rapidly faded away with the institutionalization of modern rationality and "the full control of the middle class" ("the latter of which, having the press as one of its most important instruments in fully developed capitalism,"²⁷⁴ propelled the coming to maturation of the novel as a modern genre); Chinese rural areas still kept its own historical dynamic; and, in the "liberated (rural) area," the utilization of the press was in the hand of a political force that endeavored to promote modern knowledge and political education to the masses. Because the "communicability of experience" did not diminish, the art of traditional storytelling did not decline drastically. Yet Zhao adapted this traditional art (with its various local forms), so his stories contain more modern elements, because what he tells is not traditional folk tales but the stories of "the masses" in a new historical dynamic.

Rural Society in Transition I: Social Dynamic and New Power-Regime

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 88.

One of his most famed stories, the plotline of “Little Blackie Gets Married” is nevertheless quite simple, which surrounds the settlement of a love tangle: Xiao Erhei and Xiaoqin are two young rural peasants in love with each other. But because Xiao Erhei’s father Second Zhuge, a necromantic master, by superstitious practice regards the couple an unpropitious match, and Xiaoqin’s mother Third Fairy, an old-fashioned shaman and coquette, wishes to keep Xiao Erhei as her potential prey, they both oppose the marriage of the couple. Meanwhile, some local bullies coveting the beauty of Xiaoqin also intimate and threaten them. Out of the intervention of higher authority, the bullies are punished, the parents yield to the youngsters’ will and the youngsters finally get married.

There are many separate motifs in the story that can be addressed, which make its “central theme” controversial. It can be said that it is a tale that debunks the peasants’ superstitious mindsets and their “feudal consciousness” (the patriarchal habitus that sees the determination of the junior’s affairs the senior’s rights in a family). But this debunking is not based on a falsification of the internal logic of superstition, because in the very beginning, when the narrator introduces the origin of the nicknames of Third Fairy and Second Zhuge, the invalidity, inefficacy, and the fraudulent nature of the traditional practices have been disclosed, and they are well-known to the local community.²⁷⁵ Being local laughingstocks, that they keep their business and mannerism is merely out of the inertia of rural society.

²⁷⁵ “Fairy,” or *xian gu*, in traditional Chinese folk tales refers to female spirit that has certain power. The woman is called fairy because she pretends to have magic power by assuming to be possessed by the long-dead which purportedly transmits message to the living. Whereas “Zhu Ge” refers to the famed character Zhuge Liang in the traditional novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, who in traditional belief owns superior wisdom to such an extent that he becomes almost a god. Yet the man acquires his nickname not because his infallible insights, but because his behavior of constantly consulting tossed coins and the

This situation should be understood vis-a-vis the historical subtext: because the collapse of traditional cosmology and epistemology which supported traditional beliefs, the Chinese countryside, after two decades of development since the establishment of the Republic, though still more or less ignorant in terms of modern concepts of science and technology, was more enlightened, so those residual traditional persuasion no longer strongly held its sway among the rural community. Therefore, rather than a tub-thumping promotion of the motif of battering down the feudalist superstitious consciousness, which was common in the New Literature of the earlier decades (usually by exposing the dire consequence of human cost by such a practice), the falsity and stupidity of superstition is taken for granted and serves as the starting point of the story. This, however, does not deny that there is still a structural side-effect of such a plotting: with the presentation of its absurdity and perversity, the story strengthens (and helps to breathe the anti-superstitious mentality into) the (un-)consciousness of the audience.

Although this falsification is not the central concern, the graphic description of the superstitious practice and custom still makes the two “backward” characters, with their comical, eccentric mannerisms, outweigh the “new heroes” of the couple, who are indeed lackluster. For example, Third Fairy’s outlandish appearance is portrayed vividly. Her sartorial and cosmetic excess is not merely funny for comic effects, but is intimately related with her personality and behavioral features, which are immediately revealed to be a result of

Book of Changes for divinations looks weird and even ludicrous to the villagers, especially when the results tend to be yielding to debacles. In other words, the two nicknames are both ironic parody.

immaturity due to a psychologically traumatic experience: as the prettiest girl in the village, she nevertheless was married to a stodgy peasant at the age of 15; therefore, out of loneliness, she hung around with youngsters. Vehemently reproached by her uncle for the ignobility, she fell into a coma and when she woke up, she became the practitioner; under this veil, she can still entice young men, though she does not realize now that after twenty-more years, she has become too old to maintain her attraction.

In the New Literature, this experience would probably be elaborately illustrated to expose the cruel reality of rural area that destroys love and passion of striplings, but here it is only briefly introduced. This is not because the writer lacks skills or knowledge of the New Literature, but it is still attributable to the psychological habitus of his intended audience of the peasants: due to their ingrained literary taste, they will not appreciate sentimental description and “enlightenment” drama promoting a feminist message for an ignoble woman, who in their eyes has threatened the ethical-moral world of the community.

The graphic and lively portrayal of these two comic figures seemingly offers “typical” examples of two unenlightened peasants. “Typicality,” a terminology of literary realism, means “the truthful reproduction of typical characters under typical circumstances,” as Engel has proposed.²⁷⁶ In other words, whether certain character is “typical” or not is premised on whether it “faithfully” represents the historical experience as a particular “moment,” which means this representation does not merely present the reality “as it is” as if it is a photocopy,

²⁷⁶ Friedrich Engels, “Letter to Margaret Harkness,” quoted from Martin Travers, *European literature from romanticism to postmodernism* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1997), 123.

but it is a re-presentation of “the real” which can point to the direction of historical development.

That the two comic characters, though exaggerated to a certain extent, are not totally distorted figures precisely lies in their genuine presentation of the “typical circumstance” of the historical moment. Insofar as the two comic figures, as well as the local bullies, are embodiments of the social impediment towards progress, they are the cardinal protagonists of the story (that it is the comic parents rather than the evil bullies that are focused on in depiction might be again to cater to the literary taste of the peasants; though more descriptions of the bullies could add more dramatic effects into the play). To be sure, insofar as the two young peasants are catalyst of the dynamic social change of the rural society, they are also protagonists, yet the readers clearly feel that they lack their salient personalities. Again, for the tastes of rural peasants, who prefer more storish elements than individual characterization of ordinary, familiar characters,²⁷⁷ the writer obviously pays less attention to the portrayal of their character. More descriptions might be warranted, yet we also need to note that the thematic focus of the story is the social dynamic, rather than any individual character.

But here the idea of “personality” itself needs reconsideration. If this “personality” is shown more vividly in the comical parents than the new youths, it is because the latter is submitting to a historical momentum for which their personal struggles become merely

²⁷⁷ We should note that although to a certain extent they are “new youth,” they are not the type of traditional heroes that the peasants are familiar with in their folk culture. The defiant spirits of the two youngsters in the eyes of the elder peasants are merely due to childish immaturity.

medium, and in which their personalities are in the formation. Their individual love story in this momentum is a case representing the fights against the existent unfair social institutions (such as the patriarchal or “feudal” practice of arranged marriage) and relations (those bullies that manipulate and control local affairs). This is a kind of typicality, or better, “representativeness,” about a typical event happened in a typical historical situation. Insofar as it demonstrates that if there were no changes in the village, the couple’s happy ending would have turned into a tragedy, the storyline is closely related to and exemplifying the internal social dynamic that sanctions and propels it.

This dynamic of social transformation first manifests itself in the change of personality of Third Fairy and Second Zhuge. Under the pressure of the new regime and the public opinion, they put down their arbitrary, patriarchal arrogance, acquiesce to their children’s choice, and are forced to give up their public showing of superstitious practice. The social dynamic also shows itself in the second generation, which is often mistaken to be the central concern of the narration. The youngsters’ rebellion against their parents’ arrangement of their marriage is not merely a result of their parents’ lack of popularity that dilutes and deligitimizes their authority. Their spontaneous spirit of defiance is analogous to the May Fourth young intellectuals, which now, under the new historical situation (with the support of the new authority which aims to mobilize the peasants to undertake social revolution), is spreading to the rural areas. They are struggling for individual rights and freedom by breaking out of the patriarchal relations; with the blessings of the new authority, this fight also means to overturn the existent social order.

This is because what makes the story to be an instance of “problem stories” is that local bullies now infiltrate into and assume administrative position in the new regime, and try to employ their power to punish those who disobey their will. It is only because of the intervention of the higher authority that the case is finally settled in a happy ending: when the ruffians accuse the youngsters of “adultery” and pull them off for a trial, the district government lends support to the latter and penalizes the hooligans. This narrative of justice being done is another individual motif. It is more than clear that the new authority ultimately plays a crucial role here.

The prevalent use of this mode of *dues-ex-machina* structure in the writer’s stories makes it almost a pattern which is often attacked as being propagandistic. But, the goal of this narrative setting is less to be a party propaganda than to point out problems. This does not mean there is no ideological effect here, but this effect conforms to the traditional political (un-)conscious of Chinese peasants: what they yearn for is a fair and capable power of regime that can set the right from the wrong for them, and can provide safety and prevent them from being bullied. Thus the happy ending satisfies both the will of the party and the political-aesthetic habitus of the peasants. When the peasants themselves were still not awakened and mobilized and incapable of bringing about their own liberation, a positive ending is probably necessary to show them the direction to go – especially if we remember that the author’s intended and implied audience/readers are the peasants and local cadres.

To the extent that the new power and its new laws exert influence on the ongoing transformation of the local society, the story can be read as a story about a new society in its

struggling to establish its own law and self-image against the traditional patriarchal system and its ideology. All these transformations are predicated upon the change of power-regimes: it is the establishment of new marriage law by this new regime that sanctions and endorses the couple's will; and fundamentally, it is the intervention of the higher authority of the new regime that sets the right from the wrong. The story shows the social dynamic finally lies in this new sovereignty that supports the will of the people. Therefore, overall, the story is about a society in a transformative stage, during which the individual peasants, the interpersonal relations, and the local regime all undergo fundamental changes.

This ultimate thematic motif is conveyed with the help of a "spirit of comedy," which is both its asset and its burden. The sobriquets that the two comic characters receive are full of folk color and have rich, traditionally comic connotation. Insofar as they are closely correlated to the agrarian culture, they have been studied vis-a-vis the classic *alazon* in the western culture.²⁷⁸ The following comic features that they show is so prototypical in the agrarian society as to become somewhat "universal," and thus they are integrated into various characters in the writers' later stories,

... the nicknamed women impress the observer as overbearing and calculatedly, even vulgarly, self-centered, wreaking havoc in their homes as well as disturbing the peace in their society. The nicknamed men, by contrast, are ingenuous droll in their eccentricities and express their self-centeredness in more subdued, if tenacious, manners. While the women are

²⁷⁸ Josephine Matthews points out that *alazon* is "the obstructing character of the comic mythos." The characters of this type "all scheme to prevent their respective children from marrying the person of their choice," and they "play the role of obstructionists to a smooth transition to a new society, one in which people organize themselves into collective labor arrangements." Meanwhile, "all of them make themselves conspicuous in their society by talking or behaving in a manner inconsistent with society's expectations." In particular, "in their role as imposters, the woman are often unabashedly vocal, employing a decibel level that draws to them a concentration of attention greater than that normally encountered in small village life." "Artistry and Authenticity," 275-276.

virulent, the men are merely deluded. While the women exhibit repugnant personality flaws, the men manifest quaint recalcitrance.²⁷⁹

They are comical because their behaviors violate the agrarian society's expectation – which means its conventional concepts and moral-cultural institutions – so as to create farcical effects. This also implies that the story will inevitably end in a restoration of the long-standing ethical-moral world, which both ensures its entertainment value to the peasant readers, and promises its distance from the party's long-termed objective of reforming the traditional society (together with its existing ethical-moral order).

The problems exist in the works under the party's supervision in a gigantic social momentum is subtly exposed here, but they are more seriously represented in “The Just Prevail” (“Xie bu ya zheng”), which was published in October 1948. Again with the entanglement and trouble of a marriage engagement as the storyline, it concentrates now on the abuse and corruption of some local Party cadres who undertake the mission of land reform: it not only involves use of public office for private gain by encroaching on the interests of middle peasants, which is violating the policy of the Party's policy; but also includes the act of threatening the disempowered peasants for marriage contract. Thus, by infiltrating into and usurping the power of the local administration through pretending to be activists, and through bribing and favoring weak-minded party cadres, the hooligans maintain their interests, while the masses still cannot live a better life. It is only with the arrival of a new, higher authority who finds the faults that the situation is redressed. Justice finally prevails not as a result of the peasants' revolutionary consciousness or their democratic

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 277.

participation in the administration of local affairs to be the “master of their own life” (*dangjia zuozhu*), but fundamentally it is still an issue of good or bad governance or good or bad administrator, although the old class hierarchy now seemingly has been subverted. Nevertheless, when the peasants claim that “this is really a place that reason can be asserted,” it implies that they have realized that this is a new age that justice can be done.

Another case of the variation of the theme of new social dynamic is “Li Youcai banhua” (The Tale of Liu Youcai’s Rhymes), which was published in the same year when *Blackie gets Married* came out, and had the same popularity. A scholar has argued that the central theme of the story is about “the contrast between the styles of two political workers.”²⁸⁰ This argument is seemingly substantiated by the writer’s own argument that he wrote it because “some enthusiastic young colleagues who did not understand the real situation in the rural villages were misled by some superficial achievements.”²⁸¹ Indeed, as a “problem story,” it aims to expose the problems. But insofar as what the author describes is a process with the final result always being the victory of the masses, and the peasants occupied more heavy proportion in the implied readership, the central theme is still a new power-regime in its road to combat obstacles, including its internal enemies, to establish itself as the “the people’s regime” (*renmin zhengquan*). For this purpose, the contrast of the working styles between the two party workers merely becomes the material of the plotline.

²⁸⁰ Susan S.H. Macdonald, “introduction and notes,” *The tale of Li Youcai's rhymes*, (London: Cambridge U.P., 1970), xvii.

²⁸¹ Zhao Shuli, “Preface,” quoted from *Ibid.*

Youcai is a poor peasant but an expert in composing spontaneous rhymed rhymes, or a form of local satirical *kuaiban* verses – as a “clapper talker,” he is a folk artist. Rural rhyme itself is an artistic practice that is traditionally beyond the horizon of literary ambit, either in the official realm or in the May Fourth writers’ ken. The author uses his rhymes as a structure to tie in popular storytelling technique with the general style of modern fiction, because the rhymes here function as recapitulations of the preceding story and comments on the characters and the ongoing event.

The first section “The Origin of the Book’s Name” simultaneously introduces this character as well as the relation between the I-narrator and the story,

From the time of the anti-Japanese war, many changes took place in Yanjiashan, and Li Youcai made up some new clapper talk about them. This got him into trouble. I want to talk about these changes and have copied down some parts of his clapper talks during those changes for your diversion. As a result this book was written.²⁸²

This passage recalls the narrative voice in the beginning of Lu Xun’s “The Diary of Madman.” The difference is that what this narrator records is not simply the character’s actions and psychological movements, but “the changes,” that is, a historical process, and he meant to “talk about these changes.” Therefore, he is not merely a transcriber, but a mediator.

But contrary to this promise, the I-narrator immediately gives way to a third-person narrator. The plot motivation of the story “revolves around the struggle to establish grass-root level political power through the election of a village head;” and this major plotline is in accordance with the important historical experience in the rural area at the time, “the

²⁸² Yi-tsi Mei, *Ideology, Power, Text*, 128.

movement for the reduction of rent and interest announced in January 1942.”²⁸³ Like the previous stories, it presents a situation in which the reactionary “feudal” force still manipulates local power. Although the former evil village head has been removed by higher authority, in the following reelection Yan Hengyuan, a local landlord, with his wily stratagem fools the party cadre, a young and inexperienced Comrade Zhang, and keeps his power force unchanged. Moreover, he corrupts two other important local cadres, Xiaoyuan and Ma Fengming, by cajoling them into accepting his favors, thus terminating their obligation of representing peasant interests. In this way, he changes the color of the new regime.

Observing Yan and his lackeys cheat the new regime by applying false method to measur the land in order to conceal their real properties, Li Youcai makes new verses to expose their scheme. This causes his land to be confiscated and he is expelled from the village. It is the arrival of a higher party authority that restores the much-wanted pristine ethical world.

This last-moment *dues ex-machina* is embodied by Comrade Yang. As the chairman of the County Peasant Association, he was a poor peasant and is familiar with the rural reality, which is a sharp contrast to Comrade Zhang, a bureaucrat fooled by surface phenomenon. An idealized party cadre, Yang parries the ingratiating of the local bullies, investigates the local affairs by living with and working with the masses. He not only embodies the party’s work ethics of following the “mass line,” but typifies the traditional role of an honest, upright, and perceptive official who is the incarnation of both sovereign power and reliable authority –

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, 128.

with the difference that he is from the lower masses and he joins with, or rather, is at one with, the masses. Like traditional capable officials (Bao the master is a representative figure familiar to the Chinese peasant world), after he learns the true situation of the village through investigation, he discharges the bad local official and summons district cadres to hold a mass struggle meeting, which brings down the chief villain Yan Hengyuan. The local administration now is restored to a healthy order: Yan and his flunkies are forced to return land and extorted money to the peasants. The final scene is that Li Youcai, at the request of Old Yang, composes a new song for the celebration of this victory.

In showing the peasants, with the help of the party leaders as the catalyst, having their revolutionary consciousness raised, being capable of assuming active political role and participating in the revolution and collectively overthrowing the local power structure, this story is a development of the theme of new social dynamic and new power-regime, and it comes close to articulating the second theme of Zhao's stories: the liberation of the masses.²⁸⁴ Its graphic representation of the "mass-line" in a natural manner, which is different from the formulaic descriptions of dogmatic party cadres in later propagandist works, is also a good lesson for local cadres.

To the extent that it shares the features of traditional Chinese legal case stories that involve a judicious judge correcting the wrong by punishing the wrongdoer, again traditional elements persist in this story; what makes it distinct is that it shows the process of

²⁸⁴ Cyril Birch has pointed out that "the real and astonishing achievement" of the party's work as represented by the Communist fiction of this period is that the peasant "was goaded into...believing that he was being guided, not directed, by the Communist Party to a position of control over his own destiny." See Cyril Birch, "Fiction of the Yen-an Period," *The China Quarterly*, No.4, (Oct.-Dec., 1960), 8.

establishing a democratic village government in the lowest level by the subaltern themselves, during which they have seen the sham democracy manipulated by the residues of the old power. Through this popular and entertaining tale the author achieves the aim of entertaining and educating the peasant masses of their interests and rights. The literary effect that it imposes upon the (peasant) readers is that with the presentation of a new “legend” (which is realistic, however) about the realization of a collective dream, it articulates the political unconscious of the folks and satisfies their deep yearning for social justice in a form that is familiar to them, and in a hilarious sentiment it instills a new passion for individual (which simultaneously means collective, because they are a subaltern class) rights into their minds.

Moreover, this liberation is accomplished with the assistance of a new language – the partyspeak. Edward Gunn has teased out some of these new terms, such as “status, identity” (*shenfen*), “organize” (*zuzhi*), “importance” (*zhongyaoxing*) and “significance” (*yiyi*), etc.²⁸⁵ They appear in the letter of introduction for Comrade Yang. These words bring in new message, i.e., to “educate” the peasants to learn their “identity” as members of a community, an oppressed class, thus to “organize” themselves and learn the “importance” and “significance” of this action. Only through acquiring this new language, which ultimately speaking is to be equipped with a (revolutionary) class consciousness, can the peasants stand up for themselves by speaking out in struggle meetings, overthrowing the existing power structures controlled by local despot, and taking charge of their own matters. But the same languages are also shown in the bureaucratic party worker Comrade Zhang’s high-flown

²⁸⁵ Quoted from Yitsi Mei, *Ideology, Power, Text*, 132.

speech. Therefore, the valid and effective way to implement this language lies in the extent of integrating this language with the peasant's language through following the "mass line." In other words, whether this modern language is useful or not, abstract or concrete, still depends on a correct way of joining with the masses and penetrating into the rural reality.

On the other hand, the story also conveys that to enhance the power of common people, especially those poor peasants who are in the lowest stratum of the society, the measure of incorporating folk tradition and promoting the language, forms, and voices of the masses, which in the text shows it as the adoption and promotion of the folk art of clapper talk, is not enough, and not the goal itself. It is only through studying a new revolutionary language, by which to reform the old, folk language (as well as the traditional consciousness embedded in), can the peasants, under the blessing and guidance of the party, attain their will. It is no surprise that in later Communist stories, these two aspects are emphasized simultaneously: the party's teaching and education of the unenlightened and highly oppressed subalterns, and its close ties to and inalienable assistance by the latter. The medium to undertake this two-end transaction is more and more assumed by an incarnated model party worker. This story can be seen as embryonic in this pattern of writing.

In this process, the intellectual writer also plays a key mediating role. That Li Youcai's traditional-styled verse is framed within the narrator's modern narrative might be seen as symbolic of this function. As a mediator, the narrative voice assumed an apparently neutral yet actually authorial voice, helping to integrate the three sorts of discourse: the folk artist's, the average peasants', and the party's, together.

Rural Society in Transition II: “Standing up” of the Subaltern

In the second category of stories, Zhao emphasizes that the social dynamic represented by the theme of justice being done by a new regime is fundamentally the liberation of a class, which also offers the liberation of women from traditional patriarchal straitjacket. This theme is often expressed in a new term from the party’s jargon “fanshen,” which literally means “turning over” or “standing up.”

“Meng Xiangying fanshen” (Meng Xiangying Stands Up) was completed in 1944 several months after Zhao attended a conference of model party workers of the Taihang area. The titled heroine was a person he met there. The text apparently blurs the distinction among reportage, feature, story, and biography. This difficulty in assessing the fictionality of a work was typical of a group of literary works at the time, both in the KMT-controlled area and the “liberated area,” which reflects the fundamental alteration of historical experience. Zhao has indicated that what he narrated “were prevalent in the society of those days,” and he “had been used to seeing them.”²⁸⁶ What is different of this story from the similar genres before is that the model is now not a courageous fighter, but “an illiterate, impoverished, and oppressed peasant woman.”²⁸⁷

As a model party worker, the heroine has mobilized the women in the village to unbind their feet (the description of her large feet reveals her unconventional spirit of rebelliousness and non-conformity, because bounded feet was traditionally regarded as the norm of

²⁸⁶ Ibid, 124.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 124.

femininity), to attend literacy classes to move their illiterate status (since traditional Chinese women were praised for their illiteracy as a token of virtue, this is a laudable move), and to undertake agrarian works such as gathering wild plants to stave off famine. But the writer still focuses on how she has been “liberated from under the oppression of the forces of old society,” because he believes that “how a person changed from not ever being a hero into a hero was also what everyone would like to know.”²⁸⁸

The story is divided into ten sections, each section narrates an episode. Large space (the first three sections) is devoted to depicting the miserable life that Meng has endured during the bad, old days: as a bride, she was maltreated by both her cold husband and hostile mother-in-law; and although she had tried to fight back courageously, the cruel flogging she met destroys her spirit and she had intended two suicides. As noted, the “dynamic of dominance and suppression” in the family “replicates in microcosm society’s macrostructural” pattern of oppression.²⁸⁹

In the description, Meng’s mother-in-law’s sharp tongue and verbal abuse is highlighted, but the physical violence that Meng is subjected to by her husband is not portrayed in graphic ways. This had incurred protests from some scholar, who accused it as “sexism.”²⁹⁰ This argument neglects the historical subtext: in the rural area at the time (in fact for thousands of years), the awkward and full-of-tension mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relations had often resulted in bitter feelings and tragic consequence. As a

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

²⁸⁹ Josephine Alzbeta Matthews, “Artistry and authenticity,” 191.

²⁹⁰ Yi-tsi Mei, *Ideology, Power, Text*, 125.

centuries-old problem, it always attracted the attention of the villagers themselves and so is the priori issue to deal with for the new regime which aimed to bring in a new social order; whereas the maltreatment of husband, though a prominent problem as well, is comparatively of the secondary importance due to the deep-rooted patriarchal value-system. To be sure, the writer still spills his ink to this phenomenon: in showing the pains that Meng endures from her husband, the message is clear to those male villagers as implied readers/audience. More graphic descriptions might add to its dramatic tension, but the intended audience of the local peasants might feel uneasy, or these presentations of the familiar yet tabooed scenes would cause their antipathy.

After Xiangyin becomes the leader of the Women's National Salvation Association under the aegis of the Party, her life changes. The empowering efforts of the Party help this female figure "stand up" before her husband, her mother-in-law, and in the society as a whole. But her change is only briefly introduced: through her participation in the revolutionary process, she sees the power of the mass movement. The narrator tells us, "after the struggle meeting, she became bolder."

Apparently, this story only provides the most prominent episodes in the whole process of transformation, but neither does it show the heroine's acquisition of revolutionary consciousness, nor does it describe how she experience a profound change in her psyche. This might make this piece less persuasive to intellectual readers and appear primitive in reference to the "Literature of Worker-Peasant-Soldier" of a later period. In this light, the view that Meng's strong voice is "mainly a voice through which the party communicates its

revolutionary message” is undeniable,²⁹¹ though we need to keep the implied audience in mind: through seeing this gigantic changes, although no psychological metamorphosis nor revolutionary consciousness is presented, the peasant readers could still feel that a great social transformation was taking place and were mobilized. In showing that a poor woman peasant is empowered to transcend herself to contribute to the collective goals, the story shows (to the peasants) that their personal destiny is bound up with the collective goal, and the assertion of their individual rights (including women’s rights) is intimately correlated with the validation of the existential value of the subaltern.

Once this knowledge is applied to the analysis, not only would the episodic structure be better appreciated, but the function of the narrator, who “assumes the stance of a chatty oral storyteller in giving out occasional background information,” and to “record events as they unfold,”²⁹² is justified. On other hand, from the perspective of the party’s long-term ideological goal of instilling advanced class consciousness to the masses to reform their traditional mindset, the plot that Meng works hard to carry out the party’s policies is merely through an expression of her defiance against the traditional ethos that had injured her, but not through a commitment to the new ideology, is not sufficient – which means its educational effect is limited.

The motif of liberation also saliently exhibits itself in the character of a social pariah. The story “Fugui” (*Fugui*) covers the life of the titled protagonist from the age of 12 to his

²⁹¹ Ibid., 126.

²⁹² Ibid., 126.

middle age. Fugui becomes a pariah not because of his indulgence in pernicious habits, but because of social oppression. We have seen this familiar figure in many stories written by leftist writers ever since the May Fourth period, from Lu Xun's Ah Q to Lu Ling's Luo Dadou; but now the story of this type of figure and experience is narrated from a different angle. Rather than stressing the dejected spirit and hopeless, ignorant psyche of the characters to expose their bad "national character," the writer not only shows the social-political circumstance that Fugui is trapped in which contributes to his current status, but exemplifies the unfair, chilling social prejudice that he is subjected to; and he even ascribes virtues to this miserable outcast: though Fugui's reputation is destroyed by the cold, dark society, nevertheless he still holds virtuous characters, as shown in his love and care towards his wife; and though the misfortune has outstripped any material property from him, he still bears courage and tenacity to fight against odds in life as best as he can. In this way, the one-way "representation" of the suffering yet fatuous masses by those urban intellectuals with their sense of superiority and the May Fourth-styled enlightenment mentality, is replaced by a description from the perspective of the subaltern themselves (to let the latter speak out for themselves), at least from an intellectual who stands at the same foothold with the represented. This does not mean the agenda of enlightenment is displaced or replaced, but it is sublated into a higher program of education that aims to propel the peasants to know their collective (as a class) interests and rights, and this is to be conveyed through a side-effect: the readers note that Fugui as a social pariah is evaded and despised by everyone, including those at the same rank as his (which, though not stressed, is clearly presented). They also learn that

his virtue and perseverance persists even in his most despicable existence, and know about the cause of his degradation. All these facilitate the peasant readers who might have shown the same derogatory attitude on the social pariahs in similar situations recognize their faults.

A bright and diligent young lad, Fugui had been a popular figure in the local community. Before he falls down and is despised by his fellow villagers, he also performed excellently in local opera troupe. His road to debasement is induced by none other than his virtue and hope of living a decent life, yet the possibility of achieving material affluence is deprived by the existing social-economic system. Two events happened before he entered the threshold of adulthood threw him into the never-ending cycle of debt and drives him into the irrevocable fate, and these are nothing but the most common, yet most important things in the rural area: marriage and funeral service – his dying mother, due to her sense of responsibility, urges him to get married with his child bride that she has arranged for him since his childhood (a popular custom in rural areas then). The wedding and shortly after, the handling of his mother's funeral ceremony, both of which demanding abundant trappings and elaborate extravagance, forces him to borrow usury.

As a consequence, the rapid increase of interests year by year soon forfeits his small parcel of land. Assiduous labor simply cannot pay back the debt he incurs and even adds more to his burden. Insolvency despoils his incentive to cultivate his land; and furthermore, starvation propels him to gambling and thievish activities, and to undertake the socially disrespected profession of serving the dead and the funeral, which is regarded as the pinnacle of degradation, in order to sustain the life of his family. Thus, it is not personal depravity, but

social prejudice, cruelty, and hypocrisy (those ingrained political, economic, and cultural institutions) that divests him of his human dignity and forces him to disregard social conventions, abandon his honesty, and take any measure that can support the livelihood of the family.

If in terms of character description, Fugui is somewhat a new character, then Wang Laowan the loan shark, the individual person who is responsible for Fugui's misery, is a familiar figure in the gallery of modern Chinese literature (again in terms of trait-characterization). A revered clan leader, he lays claim to higher moral pretension, exploiting the popular belief that the fall of the social pariah is the result of their own turpitude, in order to maintain his high-moral profile and satisfy his interests.

But he is not described as a villain in his nature, and his "typicality" in the sense of bearing the cardinal class consciousness and behavioral pattern of the Power Class is not distinct. On other hand, his "representability" in terms of showing the general dynamic of that society is more than clear. Not only does he teach his children: "to earn money by (lending) money is much faster than making money" (which shows that his avarice is fostered and encouraged by the social-economic institutions), but he also assumes the mask of guardian of the ethical-moral order of this world which he feels at home. Again, his sense of righteousness, just like his non-guilty exploitation of the disadvantaged,²⁹³ is attributable to the existing patriarchal social custom and institutions. Insofar as he is not the "typical" villain

that is more and more personified as the incarnation of evil in the Communist literature, he is still manipulated by the imperceptible force of the social-economic system and sanctioned by its power-structure. Here the writer maintains the left-wing tradition of critical realism.

When Fugui learns that Laowan is planning to lynch him for his alleged crime of besmirching the Wang clan, he flees. The whole process of the Communist reform of the village is not introduced, and when we see him again eight years later, it is the time when this process is completed, which means the source of the threat is eliminated. Because the party reform of social outcasts in the base area, he lives a new life now by farming the land reclaimed for him. The finale of the story is very special and rarely seen in earlier leftist stories: in a village meeting he speaks out courageously to Wang Laowan, now punished, for the unfair treatment that he has been subjected to. What he asks for return from the erstwhile Power Class is neither property (land) nor goods or money, but his reputation, and “the right to exist as a free man with all the rights and privileges normally accorded to members of the human race.”²⁹⁴ In other words, he is demanding from his ‘class enemy’ for his dignity and “authentic self,” his innate property as a man that has been deprived by the Power Class. Now, he has regained it through “standing up” with the help of a new regime.

In this story, the writer’s description of the peasant’s predicament is a departure from the stories of the May Fourth era. Instead of stressing the implicit connivance of the passive peasants with the powerful to perpetuate the existing system, or the ignorant masses themselves the function of the system, it shows that the social tyrant is a “function of the

²⁹⁴ Ibid., 289.

system, both drawing nurture from it and in return helping to perpetuate it;” or, there is a “symbolic relationship between a tyrannous system and the tyrannical individual.”²⁹⁵ It also shows that the Power Class needs these social pariahs, as the “other,” to perpetuate itself, nevertheless this class despises and ostracizes the latter, in order to maintain the “normal” ethical-moral world and ultimately the political order of the society. Under the perspective of class analysis, not only are the social-economic factors exposed in the text, but the persons who carry out and maintain the economic-political structure are singled out, though they have not been “typified,” or characterized as the incarnation of evil.

In placing the tragic life of the poor peasant in a political world in which antithetical relation dominates the social space, the story has exemplified an embryonic pattern of distinction between two camps – the social tyrant’s side and the masses’ one – that we will more and more see in the Communist literature. But here the masses world has not become a unitary community, as Fugui is despised by his villagers. And what it targets at is still subtly more on the system as a whole than on the class enemy. Thus it is still a work residing in the limbo between critical realism and revolutionary realism, or ideologically between the New Culture Enlightenment discourse (which stressed the ignorance of peasants) and the New Enlightenment discourse (which emphasized class politics, or the progressive class consciousness of the subaltern).

Changes in Li Village and Zhao’s Horizon of Social Change

²⁹⁵ Ibid., 290.

Among the writer's stories in this period, there is a hybrid one that combines the two motifs – social dynamic and class liberation – in a piece of work that tries to portray a panoramic change of a transformative society which spans a long period of time. As a result, it also becomes a mixture of genres. This is *Changes in Li Village*, which is said to be “the first modern realistic novel written specifically for a peasant audience.”²⁹⁶ Yet considering its readership, this “modern novel” still bears strong imprints of “story” as a traditional genre.

As its title suggest, the story is again about the social dynamic of a northern village, though this change now is a long-term process. The life world is filled with an antagonistic relationship between average villagers and local evils, which has been aptly called by Josephine Matthews as the force of good versus the force of evil, or the Populace and the Collective Hero versus the Power Class and the Collective Anti-Hero.²⁹⁷ On one end of the antithetical spectrum is Li Ruzhen, head of the village, as well as his two nephews: Chunxi and Xiaoxi; on the other end is Zhang Tiesuo, a poor peasant. Thus we can anticipate that the theme is about emancipation through social struggle. What is unusual of this story among the writer's works is that this story encompasses the whole process of liberation, including the origin of revolution. Its diegetic time runs from 1928 through the next two decades to the end of the Resistance War, altogether 17 years. It is divided into three periods of time, which also represent three stages of development.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 229.

²⁹⁷ Ibid., 230.

At the beginning of the story, Zhang Tiesuo is a middle peasant owning his own house and some amount of land, which makes him able to maintain his life without becoming a tenant. However, this temporary equilibrium is broken by an incident which immediately deprives everything he owns. This is a typical case about the deprivation of peasants' lands by landlords. A false accusation of property-destruction by Chunxi and the ensuing large amount of remuneration requested by him (which is backed by his uncle, the village head Li Ruzhen, and his relative Xiaoxi, who serves a powerful warlord), together with the internment of Tiesuo's wife (for a frame-up charge of assassination conspiracy) out of the villains' fear that she dares to petition to a higher authority for justice, costs Tiesuo his lands, house, and savings. The power of the evil force is so overwhelming that injustice prevails and the poor peasants suffer under their despotic rule. In face of the politically empowered brutality, Tiesuo is shocked to surrender to their despotic rule, without any more consideration of countermeasure. The event, in mapping out the political contour of the countryside, shows the persistence of traditional power structure and its unfair order in the rural area: the allies of the despotic village head is an army ruffian (Xiaoxi) and a school teacher (Chunxi), a traditional-styled member of the gentry's class.

In the second stage of development, Tiesuo comes to Taiyuan to seek employment. He encounters Xiaoxi there and becomes his batman for one year. Though he earns nothing in his job, he meets a student (also a Communist party worker) Xiao Chang, who answers his numerous doubts about the unfair treatments he meets. He gains some faith in life after this experience. But unlike the usual practice in later Communist stories in which some party

member(s) initiatively inspire and teach the masses of revolutionary awareness, here it is Tiesuo who looks for the answer to his inquiries from Xiao Chang.

The third stage is the most crucial in the development of the story, or rather, of Tiesuo as a character. He is imprisoned after he returns home by the authority because he has spread inadvertently what Xiao Chang has told him: the oppressor needs to be overturned; and this is heard and reported by Xiaoxi. He is released because the establishment of the united front, and now again he meets Xiao Chang and helps the latter mobilize the masses. What follows is an episode of the “problem story” that we are familiar with: Chunxi and Xiaoxi manipulate local party workers and usurp the power of the masses organization. With the assistance of the masses, Xiao Chang perceives their scheme and redresses the problem.

From then on we rarely see Tiesuo again. It is often argued that since he becomes a mature, “awakened” people serving the interests of the people, he becomes a member of the revolutionary collectivity, thus he can fade out and back into the background. But obviously Tiesuo is not so mature; at least we cannot feel so: he does not recognize the strategy the villains set up to cajole the cadres. And although the story so far might be read as a Bildungsroman (because it focuses on the experience of Tiesuo), Tiesuo is neither enlightened enough nor does he acquire enough experience to become a conscious revolutionary. We need to note that throughout the story, when it comes to the description of Tiesuo about the events he experiences, the narration is from his perspective, even in the crucial moment when Tiesuo receives revolutionary education. This arrangement is surely out

of the consideration of the peasant readers, but the incomplete description of his political growth makes the novel fail to be a successful story about his intellectual maturation.

The perspective of the particular readership needs to be stressed: rather than a normal novel written by an urban intellectual, all its plot motivations, including the narrative perspective, are subjected to the consideration of their potential effects towards the intended readers. But this also lets the story to be less skillful in terms of its educational potential (for instance, Xiao Chang cannot elaborate on revolutionary message to Tiesuo, but he only answers sporadically specific questions regarding the latter's doubts about his life). Perhaps also due to the consideration of this awkwardness, the writer gives a full presentation of Xiao Chang's speech to the peasants when he enlightens them on the mission of the resistant organization, in which he expounds, with colloquial, popular language, the relations between resistance efforts and the people's awakening to their rights: rent-reduction, freedom, and democracy.²⁹⁸

What follows is the development of the social-political momentum *per se*. Although these villains, now defecting to be the running dogs for the Japanese, have been subjected to a temporary discipline by the resistance workers, they are protected by the warlord Yan Xishan. And later on they make a coup by killing those who are against them and burying alive Xiao Chang. Only with the arrival of a large Communist army, Li Ruzhen is captured and beaten to

²⁹⁸ Likewise, in the end of the story, the writer arranges the new villager to make a speech detailing the contrast between the new and the old life as a concomitant result of the resistance work, with the conclusion: "The world here is not their world anymore! This world has completely become ours." All these plot arrangement, although not organic enough to fit into the texture, meant to emphasize the message of the correlation between the anti-Japanese work and the project of nation-building.

death by the angry peasants who meant to make revenge for their sufferings,²⁹⁹ but Chunxi flees to the warlord and Xiaoxi to the Japanese. The justice has not been fully done, while the curtain of the story is seemingly to be closed soon. Yet the new world being restored is disturbed by new threats, so the story ends with an epilogue that is not less important: in the celebration party, Tiesuo announces the message of the KMT's contagion of the party, and mobilizes the villagers to join the army. It ends with a warm send-off to the newly expanded army in which Tiesuo's wife encourages her grown-up child to emulate his father fighting the reactionary bravely. This ending is a development of the formula of disturbance-intervention-restoration of the writer's stories thus far, which shows a direction that would be emulated by other Communist writers, such as Ding Ling.

To fit in with the party's "new democratic" policy, the novel also describes an enlightened gentry, Wang Anfu. Through his personal experience, it shows the party's policy of uniting with all patriotic elements to facilitate resistance efforts. Wang Anfu is a more than sixty years old gentry with large amount of lands, and has suffered much in the turbulent time. After the education of Xiao Chang, who clarifies his misgivings about the alleged radical policy of the party, he self-willingly makes rent-reduction and contributes to the resistance efforts; as such he also has been ill-treated by the reactionary. The adding of this new element not only shows that the author conscientiously devoted his writing to anti-war enterprise, but also confirms the fact that he now intends a broader readership than before.

²⁹⁹ The mob dismemberment of Li Ruzhen might look gruesome by itself, but since it fits well into the narrative structure, the readers only wait impatiently for this late justice. This model indeed also inspired many later writings on land reform.

Taken the story as a whole, we can see that probably to cater to the peasant's taste for storish plots, the writer blurs the distinction of genres (Bildungsroman, problem stories, resistance novel, etc.) and mingles (elements of) them together, though this does not affect its central concern: the thematic focus of novel is about the defeat of villains and the establishment of new regime, propelled by the change of social-political institutions. In this social momentum, either Tiesuo or Xiao Chang is only its medium rather than individual heroes; whereas the villains of the Power Class are the obstacles to this objective or historical direction. So they show themselves (or in the background as the hidden threats) throughout and need to be wiped out. This thematic subject finally explains our earlier question that why the persons who run through the whole diegetic space are those of the villain group, but not Tiesuo and the model party organizer Xiao Chang.

Adapting to the narrative purpose, the writer develops his literary skill in this novel. To accommodate the requirement of storytelling but also to meet the demands of modern novel, the author skillfully expands or contracts storytelling time (for instance, the events happened in six months is covered in three chapters, while two chapters include a span of seven years), and uses various immediate scene and summary narration, which has been perceptively studied by Mathew.³⁰⁰ In particular, the writer applies the perspective of a multifarious narrator.³⁰¹ Among these techniques, he aptly changes between the "telling" mode and the

³⁰⁰ Josephine Alzbeta Matthews, "Artistry and Authenticity," See "Chapter VII: Narrative Strategies: The Case of Changes in Li Village," 229-268.

³⁰¹ Mathew has cited A.W. Friedman's description to explain this concept: "At times he may approach omniscience, at others provide only occasional explication of the internal realities of those within his province, at still others become little more than a roving reporter ... a 'camera' eye." Quoted from Josephine Alzbeta Matthews, "Artistry and authenticity," 233.

external point of view, which can push the passage of time rapidly, and “showing” mode and internal point of view, which can emphasize the characters’ individuality within the flow of events. The description of the environment is not for its own sake, but to clarify the character’s perception, but functions to portray the characters by revealing what intrigues their interests. All these arrangements are done in consideration of the interests of its particular readership.

“Zhao Shuli’s Direction”

Zhao Shuli realizes that the May Fourth-style New Literature was not effective enough to accomplish its goal to snatch away the dominant position of feudal culture. He believes that China’s “Literary altar” (Wentan) was “too high for the masses to clamber up to,” it had to be torn down and be replaced by “literary mat,” literally means the small mat that market vendors spread out on the ground to display their wares. He recognizes that to weaken the dominance of hegemonic feudal culture and “feudal consciousness” among the masses, progressive works had to “crammed into *A Whole Forest of Jokes and Seven Heroes and Five Gallants*,” the latter the only traditional reading materials that were popular enough to intrigue the interests of the masses of the peasants to appear frequently in vendor’s mats.³⁰² And indeed, the influence of his works are said to have surpassed the latter. It is due to the capability of attracting the peasants towards the fictional world, which is based on their own realistic life, that Zhao’s stories are regarded as a perfect vehicle of “national form” for promoting a “new culture.”

³⁰² Huang Mei (Chen Huamgmei), “Xiang Zhaoshuli fangxiang maijin,” *Renmin ribao*, Aug. 10, 1947.

First and foremost, the subaltern is now being represented from the perspective of himself/herself. This is obviously seen in “Fugui.” The narrator stands at the same level as the latter, rather than on top of him, to understand his bitter life and his feeling, rather than merely to “expose” his ignorance.

Secondly, Zhao’s stories are mostly adaptation from real incidents. The ways of adaptation point to the later development of “socialist realism.” For instance, the scenario of “Little Blackie Gets Married” is derived from a real-life murder case in which the young man who offered the model for Xiao Erhei was beaten to death by the malicious rivals who had snatched away the administrative position in the local government. And although most of the people there thought the boy should not meet his death, nevertheless they believed that he needed to be punished for his transgression of the more of the society.³⁰³ If it was a decade earlier, the May Fourth enlightenment agenda would encourage the writer to apply the critical realistic mode of writing to make this tragedy a typical case that exposes the ignorance and cruelty of rural peasants. The way that Zhao Shuli changed a real tragedy into a comedy does not indicate his hypocrisy or his ingratiating with the Party, but this adaptation reveals his fundamental understanding of the peasant’s mentality and aesthetic habitus: it is hard for them to appreciate any literary works or performance that is about a tragedy, as an intellectual may prefer, but a story with a comic form is much more easy to enter into their heart (and then mind); that is, to entertain them while simultaneously to educate them. This education is

³⁰³ See Dong Junlun, “Zhao Shuli zenyang chuli ‘Xiao Erhei jiehun’ de cailiao de,” *Wenyi bao* 1949, no.10.

a positive education: the falsity of the patriarchal parents is only shown with its ridiculous effects, but not by exposing any innate evilness; the ingrained “feudal consciousness” of the majority of the peasants in real life (displayed by their attitude of coldness towards the victim) is also not represented faithfully. With a subtle yet crucial modification, they are shown to be standing in the politically-correct side, at least maintaining a neutral stance. This is not distortion in the normal sense, but an adaptation for the sake of educational effectiveness.

Similarly, in “Meng Xiangying stands up,” the writer has a light-toned depiction of the villager’s reaction towards the tragic life of the heroine (before the liberation), which makes some scholar complain that it “creates a curiously discordant effect.”³⁰⁴ But this is not discordant at all, because the narrator has informed us that “according to the ‘old rules,’ there was no need to ask why a man had hit his wife,” the statement of which has repudiated the legitimacy of the patriarchal tradition; in addition, according to the new belief, the backward consciousness of the masses are susceptible to change: what matters is not to expose their ignorance and even cruelty under the sway of old concepts, but to deliver them out of them. When a work is really intended for the masses to read, to educate them, it requires a more subtle way of doing. In this way, Zhao’s stories follow Mao’s teaching “not to expose, but to teach.” It is due to the consideration of the implied audience and their ingrained habitus of taste that this self-controlled narrative aimed to be compatible with the “structure of feeling” of the peasant world. It asserts positive influence on the audience, as the play in the stage

³⁰⁴ See Yi-Tsi Mei, *Ideology, Power, Text*, 125. The example she presents is the reaction of the villagers towards the mistreatment that Meng has been subjected to from her husband: when the latter hacked a bloody wound on her forehead, the villagers “were only saying that he had hit her in the wrong place, nobody asked why he had hit her.”

helps them differentiate the right from the wrong, thus “indoctrinating” the correct ideas into their mind imperceptibly by its theatrical effect. It is also in this sense the story can be said as “pointing to a new direction.” This subtle modification also shows the gradual yet fundamental change of, or rather, supplement to, the concept of “typicality,” and contributes to a new idea of “representability”: It re-presents the “spirit” of a historical moment that points to what is supposed to occur in the near future.

Zhao Shuli also skillfully utilizes and adapts folk language and style. “The Rhymes of Li Youcai,” as noted, is “above all a response to Mao Zedong’s call for the use of national or folk forms, a practical example of the writer speaking to and for the masses in their own language” (though I will argue that this is not necessarily a conscious “response to,” it might be an incidental echo to).³⁰⁵ Youcai in the story is just like a model party writer, who transvalues popular folk entertainment, and shifts “conventional associations of such rhymes with the risqué and ribald release of sexual tension ... to new associations with political activism and ultimately political panegyric, to express the will of the Communist leadership on behalf of the peasantry.”³⁰⁶ In other words, the traditional folk arts such as clapper talk are now “detached from their folk origins, revised and adapted to new use.”³⁰⁷ This new use, for the enemy is to make satire, for the masses is to work as props of agitation and education. Thus it appears as a creation that meets Mao’s call for a “lively (national) form that is catering to the taste of the people.”

³⁰⁵ Ibid, 130.

³⁰⁶ Quoted from Yi-tsi Mei, *Ideology, Power, Text*, 130.

³⁰⁷ Ibid., 130.

In the story, the intuitive wisdom of the peasant embodied in Youcai is affirmed. His superior vision, knowledge, and skillful literary capability is an echo of the party's promotion of the rights and intellect of the peasants, against the label of the May Fourth-typed intellectual who regarded them as ignorant that needed their enlightenment. In addition, Youcai also offers a model for intellectuals. Although he himself is a folk artist, this image can still be seen as a mirror image of a fully localized intellectual figure (or at least he provides such an idealized image) who, with his identification with the masses, is integrated with the latter to be one of them, becoming an omniscient, resourceful character. Meanwhile, this folk wisdom itself coincides with and cooperates with the party's analysis of the local situation and supports its move. This narrative strategy efficiently represents the party's "mass-line": the integration of party policies with the reality of the masses, with "investigation and study" (*diaocha yanjiu*) as the "tool" (*gongju*).

In this process, the party plays a leading and authoritative role. Not only does Comrade Yang redress any wrongdoings of the local despot, but also, with the knowledge and help he acquires from poor peasants, he restores order and rebuilds local regime. When everything is done, he orders Li Youcai to compose a celebratory rhythm and praises it as "summing up the whole business!" The voice of the Party is heard, his authority represented and implicitly eulogized. But his authority is accomplished through the way he lets the subaltern speak up for themselves. In this way, the empowerment of the people and the authoritative party control or direction is supplemented with each other.

Here, the function of the author is also worthy of attention. It is noted that as a mediator “between the village community and the broader readership ‘out there,’ between the two languages of folk idiom and ‘official speech’ – that is, standard Chinese,” this narrator, although “remains in charge of plot action,” yet does not comment on unfolding events directly, the latter function more yielded to the diegetic clapper talker.³⁰⁸ He is an outsider, but simultaneously an insider – because he has been integrated seamlessly with the peasant world and has acquired its grammar: the intellectual writer finally “joins the people:” he does not “represent” them, but he let them speak up for themselves.³⁰⁹

For this purpose, the language of the story is a joint of folk, colloquial language and modern, literary language, which produces a new, lively style; as Yi-tsi Mei notes,

The author/narrator incorporates local idioms and strives for a folksy down-to-earth style himself, seeking to make his own language and vision converge with that of the folk artist’s ...The juxtaposition of two genres of different language and compositional forms – one more literary, intellectual, and modern, in spite of its adoption of the oral story-teller’s voice, the other folk and traditional – within this joint narrative enterprise enables them to interact and create a relationship of mutual endorsement in the text.³¹⁰

This contributes to a popular style of writing, which is both entertaining to the masses and appearing less vulgar to the urban educated readers (though we need to note that the intended readers were largely still those with literacy in the Communist-controlled rural area). Apparently, in the eyes of veteran writers (such as Guo Moruo), this is the advantage for an alternative literature to build a “new culture.”

³⁰⁸ Ibid., 130-131.

³⁰⁹ Yi-tsi Mei points out that the modern narrative structure links Li Youcai’s clapper verses and provides them with a framework in which “the people will appear to have their say; their wisdom, their true perceptions of the world, are given a vocal presence.” Ibid., 131.

³¹⁰ Ibid., 131.

But on other hand, it is also due to this self-imposed goal: to accommodate the ethical-moral as well as the aesthetic parameters of the peasants in order to entertain and to educate them, that Zhao fell short of attaining a more far-reaching imperative which intended to fundamentally change the peasant's ingrained ethical-moral principles, to educate them to acquire a revolutionary consciousness to be "a class for itself," in order to usher them into a supposedly higher ethical-moral realm that aimed to build a new world, or to construct an "alternative modernity." The narrator could not assume a persona of a mediator, nor could he provide a model party member with higher revolutionary morale to instill further revolutionary message into the implied readers.

For instance, as said, what the writer's "problem stories" show is that, though the old hierarchy has been overturned, the economic disenfranchisement of landlords and rich peasants, as well as the action of social leveling, does not itself fully achieve the goal of social justice. Without enough education of the peasants and an effective democratic process, the new power itself is easily to be penetrated by traditional force and falling back to the old track. Yet ironically, the correction of the problem still often solely relies on the dues ex machine of a higher authority. Thus both the merits and the limitation of these particular stories lie here: in terms of showing the "democratic" (in the Communists' term, this means collective sanction) operation of the new power, they succeed in showing the (final) victory of the masses under the blessing and leadership of the new regime; yet in terms of ideological mission of awakening revolutionary consciousness, of mobilizing the masses to be the masters of their own life, it only partially and vicariously meets the demands. For instance,

the couple in “Blackie Gets Married” need not expose their parents’ fault by disclosing the absurdity of their practice; and they also never have the sense that the power (the sovereignty) should be of the people and by the people, as the party’s propaganda had claimed; in other words, they still keep traditional consciousness looking passively to an authority that can issue fair judgment for them, no matter what ideology this authority might assume. It is still power that counts here. But if it is only about a change in power that alters their fate, it is only another dynastic alternation.

In short, this sort of story, in its salutary narration of inalienable government intervention, usually represented by outside cadres correcting local corruption, projects what might be achieved if leaders governed well. So, in terms of showing what “should” happen, it points to the direction of socialist realism; yet, rather than a confident eulogy of the success of revolutionary struggle, it is located still in the midway towards this direction in the sense that they are only “reverse cautionary tales,” with the endings often less credible or probable in consideration of the social circumstance and the level of political awakening of the characters.

Furthermore, although the stories exemplify the falsity of superstition and “feudal consciousness,” they also fundamentally still keep the traditional social more and ethical concepts of the peasant world. Once the bullies are punished or abnormality redressed, the ethical world seemingly resumes its harmony, blessed by the new patrons. Here we have “Little Blackie Gets Married” as our case study.

The story in general follows the ethical norms and moral concepts of the traditional peasant's world as a self-sufficient community with its own ethical-moral cosmos. The fact that Third fairy has allured the youngsters for thirty years and, in the age of forty five when her beauty has faded away, still relies on heavy make-up and wiles to attract young lad (which probably involves physical affairs), and tries her best to frustrate her daughter's genuine love, is by local ethical-moral norm inappropriate, as it threatens the interests of the community (the adultery undermines local order). Therefore, her giving-up of her make-up and coquettish manner is a restoration of the normal ethical world of the rural society. The local bullies' behavior also sabotages their long-ingrained idea of fairness and justice; the intervention of a higher authority restores a peaceful world. To this extent the whole story is satisfying none other than the political unconscious of the peasants and their political-aesthetic habitus. Thus, although the happy ending signifies "the desirability of the individual's unqualified subordination to the proclaimed interests of society,"³¹¹ the society itself is not a totally new one. Therefore, the story has not become a socialist realistic story, and it has not conscientiously applied its creative principle. Put in other way, the characters here still lack the "typical" characteristics: class consciousness. They are still a class that needs to be represented, but cannot represent themselves.

This lack of revolutionary consciousness is shown both in the party members and in the oppressed masses. For instance, although Meng Xiangyin is a model party worker who could encourage those women who are oppressed, her lack of self-consciousness makes her less a

³¹¹ Josephine Alzbeta Matthews, "Artistry and authenticity," 283.

satisfactory candidate in this regard. In “Little Blackie,” there is no party’s guidance throughout, all are spontaneous reaction. There is also no “class subjectivity” in the writer’s fictional world. Although “Fugui” depicts a dichotomous world that is fundamentally political in nature,³¹² thus implying that the overturning of the class hierarchy can only be achieved through a wholesale reform of the society, it does not show how the party liberate the local society and how the tyrant submits to the power of the new regime. Through the actions of the tyrant, it displays their malignancy, but it can neither show clearly the illness of the old system (which can only be inferred), nor can it exemplify graphically the class division (Fugui is only an individual separated from others and so cannot be classified as a class by himself). This is so probably because Zhao tries to meet the literary/cultural habitus of the peasants, so he merely describes the “facts” themselves. And although *Changes in Li Village* is especially about the theme of proletarian emancipation, there is neither a model hero, nor a revolutionary collectivity to achieve superhuman feats. So it is untypical in the sense that this social dynamic finds no personified class hero and revolutionary leader (at least it is very vague and transient, like Xiao Chang) to represent its direction and ethos. The enlightenment of the oppressed is also not through the approaching of the party member (Xiao Chang), but it is the peasant who takes initiative to make inquiry. The description of the oppressed is also not “typical.” Endeavoring to portray life “as it is,” Tiesuo in this period drags on a life that might be contradictory to his “class identity”: he can cooperate with his oppressor, even to run for buying opium for the latter, essentially becoming a debased and

³¹² Josephine Alzbeta Matthews, “Artistry and authenticity,” 292.

degraded lackey. To be sure, this sort of descriptive mode is sanctioned by the social-political conditions in which peasants, and even many party workers, were still in the process of acquiring revolutionary ideology. Yet, with the development of social revolution and the ensuing radical political consciousness it demanded, this mode of writing would soon have to catch up with the social tide.

The same paradox applies to the literary form. Although Zhao's "subordination of his literary craft to the masses" validates "his own credentials as a revolutionary writer,"³¹³ for those with urban and Western educational background, these stories, having much more flavor of folk art than metropolitan tastes, still appear naive and less refined. The dilemma of Zhao Shuli's "alternative modernity" is simultaneously a predicament for the "new democratic culture" that he endorsed and tried to devote his passion to create.

³¹³ Ibid., 131.

Chapter Six

Feminine Woman, Social Critic, and Cultural Worker Identity (Trans-) Formation and Ding Ling's "Stories of New Woman"

If it is the consensus that Ding Ling's fiction "undergoes distinct phases of development," which dramatizes "the succession of creative dilemmas confronting the modern Chinese writer,"³¹⁴ then how did Ding Ling in her literary works negotiate her feminine and feminist concerns with the causes of nationalist salvation and mass revolution? What psychological trajectories she had experienced? This study tries to place her works in the social-historical context (shown mainly as her biography) to find the motivation underlying her dramatic changes, as well as the continuity and rupture between May Fourth literature and Chinese literature in the 1940s. I will suggest that the four stages of development Ding Ling experienced before 1949, both in her personality and in the style of her literary works, were simultaneously a shifting process of her intellectual commitments and identities (trans-)formation, in which she changed from a feminist woman concerning exclusively on woman's love and sex to a social critic with more or less left-leaning tendency presenting the conflicts between "love and revolution," and through being a cultural worker devoted to the masses to become ultimately a "party's intellectual." These differing identifications of her identity not only show her drastically shifted subjectivities in her efforts to conquer her sense of alienation, but also correspond to four shifting notions of literature, or literatures as social-cultural institutions.³¹⁵ But the concerns over the "woman problem" ran

³¹⁴ Yi-tsi Mei Feuerwerker, *Ding Ling's Fiction: Ideology and Narrative in Modern Chinese Literature* (Cambridge, Mass, and London: Harvard University Press, 1982), 3.

³¹⁵ As Tani Barlow points out, she belonged to the "first, large, group of writers who came to prominence

through her creative career; this four-stage change of her intellectual position is simultaneously a gradual adjustment of her perspectives and revision of her opinions of the problem: there was a shift of focus from the women themselves to the society and its power of structure as the cause of problem, and the correspondingly modification of her cultural/political strategy.

What needs to be stressed, however, is that there was no a clear-cut distinction of the four stages. They were oftentimes overlapping; some elements salient in earlier phase persisted in later development, some of which even remained till the end of her life. Only with this in mind, can we understand why there are many “fissures” in her most-famed work *The Sun Shines Over the Sangan River*; and only through this examination, can the seemingly self-deconstructive nature of the novel appears logically coherent.

A Frustrated “New Woman”: Life and Upbringing before the Literary Career

Ding Ling, original name Jiang Wei, was born in 1904 in a rapidly declining gentry’s family in a small county of Hunan Province. Her father, who died when she was three, had studied law at Japan, yet this foreign education availed nothing for him. But her mother is “regarded as an outstanding member of that remarkable generation of prerevolutionary mothers,”³¹⁶ even at the time. When she became a young widow she persevered with the hard life with a strong will, endeavoring to sell the small sum of property to pay back debts, and

by producing Western-style literature for a restricted middle-class audience in a special language, a mixture of colloquial Chinese and more classical syntax,” yet later on we witness that she changed to write a style of fiction with “Chinese characteristics” for the broad peasant masses and revolutionary soldiers and cadres. See Tani Barlow, “Introduction,” in Tani E. Barlow, ed., *I myself am a Woman: Selected Writings of Ding Ling*, 6.

³¹⁶ Yi-tsi Mei Feuerwerker, *Ding Ling’s Fiction*, 4.

was bold enough to enroll in a new-styled normal school when she was back to her hometown Changde, and then to Changsha, where she also taught at elementary school.

Jiang Wei followed her mother to these various places and attended schools. She was influenced by her mother's spirit of independence and antitraditionalist views, but was more deeply moved by the May 4th Movement. She joined student demonstrations, listened to speeches and attended meetings. She also cut her braid and taught abacus in a night school for the masses when she was fifteen. In the same year (1919), she transferred to Changsha's Zhounan Girls School. There she not only studied articles from *Xinqingnian* (New Youth) which her progressive teacher used as teaching material, but again joined student movement against the notorious local authority.

At the beginning of 1922, with an anarchical impulse, Jiang Wei left Hunan. Hereafter she went back and forth from Shanghai, Nanjing, and Beijing, more to observe the local intellectual life than to study. During that period she fell to the enchantment of anarchism, and because of this she changed her name for the sake of simplicity. In 1925, she fell in love with a poor poet Hu Yepin. For economic considerations, she had tried to go to film industry but failed, so she began writing.

The First Period: A Feminine "New Woman"

Up to 1929, the writer saw herself as a feminine (new) woman, an identity based on her opposite "other" of men, and the society in general. In this period, she shared many beliefs of anarchism. The anarchists regarded themselves as severed from conventional moral codes. Seeing this as a break with the traditional world sanctioned by its social structure, they shed

their names, left home to pursue higher education, and engaged in “free love” without much sense of responsibility (in particular, they viewed marriage as a traditional institution needed to be repudiated). Their behaviors might be seen as the first wave of Chinese “sexual emancipation.” For this “erotic utopia,” they were also fond of involving in homosexual love. According to Tani Barlow, as “anarchism was the most hospitable culture available for cultivating independent personality,” Ding Ling had “formally joined the Anarchist Party.”³¹⁷ If we keep this radical trend popular in the youths at the time in mind (many famed Communists also accepted anarchism then before they converted to Marxism), it will help us understand the various “woman problems” described in her stories of this period.

As her friend Shen Congwen has reminisced, the three women in *La Dame aux Camélias*, *Madame Bovary*, and *Notre Coeur* encouraged Ding Ling go to Shanghai before she decided to be a writer. The aborted dream of becoming a movie star also taught her “a meaningful lesson about life,”³¹⁸ because she saw many of the dirty negotiations and exchanges; and these were described in her first published story “Mengke” (Mengke), in 1927. The heroine begins as an innocent artistic student, who leaves school out of indignation of the molestation of a model by her teacher, only losing herself in the society in her efforts of finding a job fitting in for her. She ends being an actress selling her body and soul. What becomes the last straw is not introduced, yet the readers cannot but feel that the mercenary and degraded society is the chief culprit. The accelerant to this transformation is her

³¹⁷ Tani Barlow, “Introduction,” 22-23.

³¹⁸ Shen Congwen, *Ji Ding Ling* (Reminiscences of Ding Ling) (Shanghai: Liangyou tushu, 1934), 294.

experience in her wealthy aunt's family. Her cousin Xiaosong is a newly-returned overseas student, who has new ideas and lifestyles that attract her, yet he only turns out to be a debauchee. When Mengke finds the truth, she leaves her aunt's house. Out of her own "internal impulse and necessity," which involves her adolescent feeling, her sense of being betrayed, as well as economic imperative, she goes to movie industry. Before she makes the decision to sell her dignity and integrity, a scene that would be imitated by Eileen Zhang a decade later shows her affected performance before a screen. Although Mengke has shown her displeasure over the shallowness of some "Chinese anarchists" earlier, throughout she does not find a reasonable life style that she can settle down; on the contrary, in showing her short-term association with the anarchists, and in particular these anarchist women's "demon-like intension and manipulation" of men,³¹⁹ the narrative seems to imply that at least one of the propellants that support her determination to give up her reservation on unrestrained life is their behaviors that she had detested or at least felt uncomfortable.

Mengke's series of experience show the predicament of Chinese "new woman" in the "new society." But although the process of her degradation is explainable by the lack of rationalization of the society,³²⁰ this "new woman" herself is at least partly responsible for her weakness: she is unwilling to "open a school or factory" (she is surely also lacking the capability), or to shift to a new school, and she acknowledges that she could not become a nurse or child-bearer. This is a dilemma for a particular class: as the society is not

³¹⁹ Ding Ling, *Ding Ling Xuanji* (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1984), 27.

³²⁰ For instance, Mengke has said that, if new-styled "free love" is not out of authentic feelings but for money and social status, it is no better than old-styled arranged marriage.

rationalized enough to offer a proper venue for her, a middle class girl, if she could not accept the old-fashioned arrangement of settling down in traditional marriage that her parents provide, then she would have to face the new social settings in which women are only fetishized commodities. After “Nova” leaves the family, she has no many choices to take.

“Shafei nvshi de riji” (The Diary of Miss Sophie) written the next year is a typical case of an anarchist’s life experience. Shafei is “away from home, and living by herself ... not enrolled in the university;” together with her girlfriend, they have “few or attenuated family connections;” moreover, “these young women rarely have family or given names, but take unconventional Westernized ones ... surviving anonymously and precariously in the interstices of the huge city ... economically ...morally and spiritually, they are totally on their own.”³²¹ The “particularity” of Shafei is simultaneously her “typicality”: what makes her different from her other anarchist (girl)friends is her tuberculosis, which metaphorically becomes a token of a restless passion. Here, it is shown as her psychosomatic impulses, out of physical instincts and of dreams about free-wheeling utopia. The illness exempts her from work, providing an opportunity for her to project her fantasy into an anxiety about the impossibility of establishing a female subjectivity.

Her attraction to Ling Jishi, a handsome gentleman from Singapore (and thus bearing the flavor of being a semi-Chinese, semi-Western man), appears as an Sphinx-like enigma for scholars: it is a “perverse passion” because “while she indulges in feverish fantasies of

³²¹ Yi-tsi Mei, *Ding Ling's Fiction*, 28.

longing for him she realizes at the same time that he is unworthy of them.”³²² What triggers her revulsion is seemingly a spiritual elevation which detests Ling’s carnal dissipation and material enjoyment, as well as his “bad” habitus born out of his identity as both a semi-traditional gentry man and a Western-styled *flaneur*.³²³ But this revulsion is closely intertwined with her sexual fantasy, which ostensibly constitutes a split inside her between soul and body, reason and passion. When she apparently has satisfied her sexual fantasy of acquiring this man, she feels that she has won a battle against men yet cannot help but despising herself – she is losing a war with herself.

Is Shafei pursuing a “pure love”? Yet she refuses another lad Weidi’s genuine pursuit and regrets that he does not understand her. But she acknowledges that even she herself does not understand herself. To solve the puzzle, we need to return to the supposedly Ling Jishi’s ideal that she looks down upon. This dream is the ideal of Chinese middle class which not many persons at the time can afford. That he keeps the ideas of the normal social expectation of this class with some residually corrupted gentry-class habits points less to his own “dirty soul” than the semi-modern conditions of the society. Thus the problems seemingly lie more in Shafei herself: the split of her psychology is originated from her incapability to differentiate, on one hand, her true necessity which even she herself might not be consciously aware of, and on the other, the “false desire and will” she clear-mindedly notices. Therefore, her anxiety is much less because “she was only partially freed from the traditional

³²² Ibid., 28.

³²³ See the oft-quoted her psychological movement on Ling Jishi, in Ding Ling, *Ding Ling Xuanji*, 71.

institutionalized modes of womanly behavior”³²⁴ (because she can easily satisfy her physical desire at any time). What matters is that she is seeking for her real identity that sexual satisfaction cannot grant her – she complains that she has no time to contemplate on some crucial issues about “her body, her reputation, and her future” (74).

This unnoticeable sentence offers us some hints, yet the decoding of which still needs to usher in the historical context as the subtext. We need to ask: if her “love” towards Lin Jishi is consummated, exposed and even acknowledged, what would be the outcome? Even if her “reputation” was not sacrificed, for a *flaneur* who has enjoyed reputed Western way of free-styled life and also familiar with Chinese debauched custom, she cannot be guaranteed to be his lawful wife (as many wealthy men at the time kept concubine); and even this privilege is granted and her “body” is saved from being merely a mistress, the outlook of her “future” looks gloomy. This is the ultimate, yet deeply-concealed reason for her anxiety, or, her angst about her dignity and social status, that she herself would not like to acknowledge consciously. In this light, the following argument can be read from another perspective: “finding herself in double jeopardy, Sophie must struggle to define and preserve intact some sense of self,” which is “aloof, haughty, and eccentric.”³²⁵ Also cast in this perspective, Tani Barlow’s reading that Shafei “speaks of the confusion between love and lust and knows her nature is defined by repressed desire” fails to see the historical subtext that underlines the psychological turmoil.³²⁶

³²⁴ Yi-tsi Mei, *Ding Ling’s Fiction*, 44.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, 45.

³²⁶ Tani Barlow, “Introduction,” 27.

But the repressed desire always returns to plague her. So, “she is aware that she is often playing a part, deliberately creating the opposite impression of what she thinks,”³²⁷ as if telling lies was his intrinsic faculty. And much like Jiang Shaozu, she loathes her irresistible desire. This desire, to be sure, does not merely refer to her physical instincts. Tani Barlow’s description of the writer at this time echoes many aspects of Shafei, “she had indeed achieved a life of independent personality, but she found that freedom under those circumstances offered neither livelihood nor even a socially recognizable role.”³²⁸

This repressed anxiety of Chinese precarious proto-middle class woman, who seemingly lacks sense of morality and rationality, then can afford to be read as a symbolic story about the unfortunate predicament of Chinese “civil society,” its difficulty in full rationalization and the ensuing inquietude and misgivings of the “new women” of this fragile class. Although the cause for her sense of disillusionment and emptiness lies elsewhere, this essentially social problem is displaced to be the conflict between soul and body of a fille. But also because of this anxiety, it simultaneously shows the gradual formation of a self-consciousness, a development of a class identity which is seeking for its fulfillment, though it is still in the stage of the Hegelian skepticism that sees oneself as being caught in an inalienable contradictory situation. Tani Barlow has noted that “the context of her first stories

³²⁷ Yi-tsi Mei, *Ding Ling’s Fiction*, 45.

³²⁸ Tani Barlow, “Introduction,” 24. This is not merely a coincidence, as Barlow notes that the writer “borrowed heavily from her own experience,” “the wasted efforts” of her “anarcho-feminist years.” 25.

was the impossibility of female individualism in a...post-Confucian society,”³²⁹ but we need to read this “context” as “subtext.”

Indeed, insofar as Shafei’s morbid “fin-de-siècle” womanly temperament, her restless perversity, and her febrile, sometimes hysterical psychosomatic conditions, are merely a displaced symptom of the societal disorder, to see the individual self as the origin of the social problem is a symptomatic displacement which yet finds the “reason.” Thus this “new frankness, the readiness to speak about one’s weaknesses, passions, and humiliating or shameful experiences,”³³⁰ while ostensibly different from Yu Dafu’s male-centered, chauvinistic exhibitionism, is rooted in the same soil – though with diversified foci: one on the weak nation-state wanted of wealth and power, one on precarious middle class (women) longing for a higher reason for this fragile class stratum to establish a firm subjectivity. The form of diary, as a convenient instrument for developing reflective self-consciousness, thus fails to be a story of Bildungsroman.

Shafei’s subjectivist and individualistic tendencies is much more than a revolt against tradition, because she has already taken self-independence and self-choice as her natural right. Since the trend of cultural iconoclasm has subsided at the time, she has begun to doubt the anarchist trend which proclaims dissolute “free love;” instead, how to secure her social status as her societal identity becomes now an imminent issue. When anarchism loses its attraction, her “source of the self” remains a gigantic void that plagues her.

³²⁹ Ibid., 25.

³³⁰ Ibid., 30.

This sense of boredom and frustration, this feeling of no place to go and no resource on which to transcend the oppressive conditions of this “new society” for educated women, was the prevalent mood for the writer’s stories in this period, such as “Shujia zhong” (Summer Vacation) and “Xiaohualun shang” (On a Small Steamboat). But there was also a story about a member of the lower-class “masses.” “Amao guniang” (Miss Amao) is about a naive village girl falling into the material attraction of the metropolitan. Regretting that she could not live such a life, deeply loved by her husband notwithstanding, she commits suicide. The story is much less a piece about the “real” life of the subaltern than a projection of the same motif of destructive desire as “Sofie’s Diary.”

In a nutshell, as the writer fails to find the cause of women’s predicament, this social dilemma is presented as a confrontation between the weak self and the relentless world, which is furthermore displaced to be the female’s own self-defeating femininity: their extraordinary sensitivity, capacity for pain, vanity, etc. This process of projection, substitution, and displacement is vividly shown in “Yecao” (Wild Grass), in the figure of a woman writer who mirrors the writer herself. This is how the fictional writer is writing her story “... she had projected some very fervent feelings onto a very cool and rational woman, and had, more over, introduced a light layer of melancholy ... gradually she thought of the social environment that caused women to overstress emotions, she thought how pitiable women were; then as she reflected, she began to loathe herself” (312).

To be sure, the more fundamental reason for this self-loath is her failed comprehension of the problem and its roots. As such, in “Zisha riji” (A Suicide’s Diary), even an imaginary suicide does not solve any existentialist emptiness.

The Second Period: A Social Critic

In the second period, the author identified herself less as a feminine woman than as a social critic, who made critique of the mercenary market – the commercialized cultural industry – in which cultural productions are nothing but commodity; but more important, critique of the dark reality and the “politically reactionary” as her antagonistic other.

Before this period started, the writer had experienced a crisis in writing as a profession; or, she seriously doubted the meaning of her writing. We have witnessed this in “A Suicide’s Diary.” In the end of this story, Isa asks her landlady to exchange her diary for some little money for her overdue rent. Unserious in the profession of writing anymore, it becomes a randomly personal whim, a way for living. Shortly later, in another story, through the mouth of a revolutionary, Ding Ling articulates her new ideas on literature and the role of writers: “I sometimes feel that it would not be much of a loss if we gave it up entirely.”

This sense of despair is based on two reasons. On one hand, there is no much significance for the subjects he writes, “what is the meaning of it then except we’ve gotten paid for it?” On the other, as regards the readership, they are “students of the petty bourgeois class above high school level who have just reached adolescence and are most subject to melancholy,” on whom the works exert bad influence. The protagonist suffers agonies of remorse that “we have dragged these young people down our old paths. The sort of

sentimentalism, individualism, grumblings, and sorrows with no way out! ... They can only sink deeper and deeper day by day into their own gloom, not seeing the connection between society and their sufferings ... what good ... is it to them? What good to society?" (159-160).

Ding Ling herself did not give up writing. But these words more than enough convey the message that she was tired of a literature merely to articulate the complaints of feminine women and/or to cater to the (oftentimes vulgar) tastes of the readers in order to earn a pitiable sum of money – that is, subject to the “laws of the market” which is capricious and mercenary. Instead, she was about to envision a kind of literature that, if it still could only target the “petty bourgeois” readers, is at least can point out “the connection between society and their sufferings” that is “good to them” and “good to society.” This resulted in three stories in “love plus revolution formula” written in 1930.

Again, it is her personal experience facilitated this change. Her husband Hu Yepin was radicalized at this time. He entered the executive committee of the League of Left-Wing Writers and became chairman of the committee on worker-peasant-soldier literature. But Ding Ling had less interest in revolution at the time. When Hu attended the party’s secrete meetings, she was at home writing stories about the contradiction between revolution and love. As a result, the life scenes shown in these stories are generally regarded as not authentically representing the real experience of the revolutionaries.

The first story is “Wei Hu” (Wei Hu). Later on, Ding Ling admitted that she did not intend to make Wei Hu a hero, nor did she plan to write about revolution. What she wanted to do was “merely to write about a few pre-May 30th characters;” nevertheless “I discovered

myself that it was only a very vulgar story fallen into the trap of the love and revolution conflict.”³³¹ The problem with this formulaic pattern is not the subject itself, to be sure, but how to represent the historical experience of the entanglement. This story fails in offering a genuine picture for neither of the two subjects of this “conflict.”

Firstly, the transformation of the heroine from an anarchist girl to a lover of a revolutionary looks less plausible. Lijia and her “liberated” female friends are all artist students. They bear all the features of the Chinese anarchists at the time as introduced earlier. Although it takes two-thirds of the length of the story for her to claim her love with the “revolutionary” Wei Hu, we do not know very clearly what triggers her love, except that she appears tired of the life style of her friends who “merely in a state of bewilderment enjoyed what they themselves considered a free love.”

The remaining section devoted to their passionate life is also lackluster, as it shows nothing more than embraces and kisses. What adds to its flavor is Wei Hu’s reading of poems. Wei Hu’s departure from his sweetheart seems to be the result of the inexorable contradiction between love and revolution, which is at odds with what we might expect of the subject – for youthful idealists, love and revolution are often seen as mutually beneficial rather than reciprocally deconstructive. Why such a gigantic difference? Anyway, this incompatibility only existed in a very short period, i.e., between 1927 and 1930. This unusual model again should be understood with the social-historical context in mind. After the massacre of the

³³¹ Ding Ling, “Wo de chuanguo shenghuo” (My life in creative writing), in *Chuangzuo de jingyan* (Experience in Creative Writing) (Shanghai: Tianma shudian, 1933), 24-25.

Communists in 1927, if leftist intellectuals were to take revolutionary work, they were in immediate danger of losing their lives. There was usually no way for them to have love and revolution together for a long time in the KMT-controlled areas, so even for consideration of protecting their lovers, it is better for them to do the work alone rather than take their lovers in. Besides, because middle class women normally showed much less interests than men in politics, lovers of the revolutionaries were much more possibly coming from the laboring masses. But with the spread of radical ideology, and with the change of political situation as time went on, love and revolution would appear less incompatible later on; especially after the outbreak of the Resistance War, they were indeed more and more working hand in hand in literary works.

Nevertheless, from a theoretical level, the incompatibility of the two at this time shows the conflicts between the May Fourth discourse of “free love” prevailing in the twenties and the leftist discourse of “revolution” gradually emerging since the late of the decade. It was the view of this emerging discourse of revolution that the dominant discourse of “free love” at the time was a manifestation of a bourgeois culture (because it is sentimental and narcissistic, intended for the middle class). As a new ideology working for the masses, this emerging discourse aimed to compete and to usurp the latter’s power of legitimacy in order to become a new cultural hegemony. Therefore, it was also of necessity for revolution to prevail over love.

However, also for this necessity, many times the issue of plausibility was sacrificed. For instance, there is no enough reason for Wei Hu to leave Lisa: though love might make

him neglect his revolutionary duty, Lisa is by no means a vanity girl refusing to join his work, as a result the readers feel Wei Hu a monster who is irresponsible and even immoral, and because of this the revolution seems to be a merciless alien other that injures a perfect love match. Ding Ling surely had no personal experience on this matter – when she initially engaged in love with Hu Yeping, they were merely poor wanderers and not yet revolutionaries. As a result, the description of the heroine and the parting scene look too “sentimental” and mawkish as to backfire, inviting revulsion. The revolutionary also looks worse than irresponsible: not only did Wei Hu own a Russian mistress when he studied there, which is in conflict with revolutionary ethics, but also he departs without notice, leaving Lijia only his love poems, diary, and those Western books for her disposal. Love for him seems only to satisfy his physical desire – from this angle, love and revolution are indeed incompatible. But this idea is merely from an outsider, “bourgeois” point of view, which is unacceptable to most revolutionary writers. In all aspects, Wei Hu appears cold, bloodless, owning “a kind of endurance and hardening of the will” that is inhuman. His “revolutionary activity”, if we can still call it that, only includes visiting friends, chatting, and teaching.

Again, this sort of narration can only be explained from the writer’s own experience: she met a few famed early Communist leaders, especially Qu Qiubai, who was the lover of her close friend Wang Jianhong. But although Qu taught her Russian for her to appreciate Pushkin’s poem, she did not know him much, as she had no much interests on their beliefs and activities at the time. Rather, she felt quite uneasy when Qu married another woman just several months after Jianhong died of tuberculosis (which was believed to be acquired from

Qu), and henceforth she did not associate with Qu until he died as a martyr. In short, as an impetuous young woman who had little experience in actual revolutionary work, Ding Ling took what she saw and heard as all (or essential) happenings to the characters.

In this immature perspective, literature also becomes the scapegoat – although those literary works are all “bourgeois” love poems and stories, ironically what Ding Ling now wrote is a similar story of such a kind. As noted, “by weighting its descriptive interest on the side of love, *Wei Hu* is a nostalgic lingering on what has already been or will soon be lost and past, rather than a positive affirmation of the revolutionary future.”³³² In other words, it is, probably inadvertently, Ding Ling’s last tribute to her erstwhile anarchical, “free and unrestrained love” period. Here the writer also shows her sympathy towards the fate of woman in revolution: insofar as Lijia is discarded by revolution, the latter is to her the other that she would not identify and join. But this identification of the cause of the “woman problem,” whether it was what the writer intended or not, is obviously invalid.

The triangular contradiction among love, revolution, and literature receives a different treatment in the following two stories of the writer, both titled “Shanghai, Spring 1930.” The Series II is apparently a moderate redress of the problem of the last story by arranging the male revolutionary endeavor to convert his bourgeois lover to revolutionary rank. But he only appears too clumsy to do so: he never instills any ideological message into her mind, but only invites her to attend his meeting which is only about concrete daily work. When the efforts fail and she leaves her to fall in the arms of a wealthy man, he even rests assured because he

³³² Yi-tsi Mei, *Ding Ling's Fiction*, 55.

believes now “she is in happiness again.” In repudiating the possibility of ideological interpellation, and in implying that only people in the same class can have the same “class consciousness,” be in a harmonious love, and join revolution together with the plot of the partnership between one of his comrades and a female bus conductor, the writer only shows the inexorable divide between classes, which is wrong in the view of revolutionary ideology, and was regarded as “close-doorism” by the party at the time. Worse, in acknowledging her “life of happiness,” a state of “false consciousness,” the meaning of revolution is also dubitable and even deconstructed. The ending of the story, in which the hero Wang Wei, together with all the other arrested demonstrators in a police car shout a slogan “beat down ...”, appears ludicrous, hollow, and naive. Moreover, in devoting much energy in depictions of the erotic life enjoyed by the indulgent couple, the text shows much more appreciation of the “bourgeois life” than an ostensible critique, if there is any by way of this “exposure.” The narrator even makes the man, in his whim, admit that “perhaps Mary is right,” and fancy that “they finally compromised, and they are still a couple of lover.” In the narrated monologue, the narrator (apparently a woman figure) also becomes the alter ego of the woman by protesting that “she is not un-revolutionary at all, she is not the kind that could not endure hardship at work at all. But if she would undertake the work, she is not willing to sit there (in the meeting) like that.” Though, she immediately adds that “to be sure, this thought is still based on her vanity” (221).

On the surface, “Shanghai, Spring 1930, I” departs significantly from the pervious two stories, as the heroine Meilin apparently transforms herself from a complacent mistress into

an energetic revolutionary. But her “awakening to the truth of her own situation and to the need to reach out for other means of self-fulfillment,” which provides “the prime motivation force” for the plot-development,³³³ is not convincing at all. This is because, granted her decision to be a mistress of a male writer is out of the May Fourth tide of free love, we could not see any thing about revolutionary tenet that provides the motivation for her to leave him, but can only infer that it is because the life appears tedious to her that she needs to find something fresh and stimulating, and even out of a practical consideration provoked by a new social tide, propelled by the rationalization process, that stresses woman’s social status: she regrets that “she should have known that once she lived with him she would lose all social standing ... She realized that apart from him, she had nothing.” In the new social setting in which the May Fourth radical idea of free love was an outdated fashion, the “many classical and romantic novels” she had read appear hollow. Instead, “She had to have more!” (246). Therefore, that she has a sudden interest to dabble in revolutionary work is because the society does not provide an appropriate space for her, as a mistress, to stand up to procure her material and psychological needs.³³⁴

The “revolutionary” Ruo Quan is also presented blandly, almost only a sign. He does not inspire the woman at all; when the latter surprisingly confesses to him her yearning for doing something meaningful, he appears shocked initially, and only after a while he extends his hand: “Meilin! You are so good! Not until now do I understand you!” He is by no means

³³³ Ibid.

³³⁴ “Ever since this spring her husband has a new vexation (because of the disorderly society that he does not understand which Ruo Quan presents to him), she becomes restless. She often wants to go somewhere, but she lacks opportunity and lacks a guide.” *Ding Ling Xuanji*, 193.

a mentor figure, as Yi-tsi Mei has argued.³³⁵ He is indeed “an abstract character,” but this is because the author lacks any real experience of and theoretical preparation for writing revolution. All in all, this conflict between love and revolution is merely a pallid treatment of the subject. That revolutionary activity is appearing as “threatening the beautiful dreams of love, youth, freedom, and romance,” though conservative if not counter-revolutionary, still “remains rather indistinct.”³³⁶

The Third Period: A Cultural Worker

In November 1930, Hu Yepin was elected as a representative to attend an important conference to be held in the CCP’s base Jiangxi province, but he was arrested by KMT agents in January 1931. Without a proper trial, three weeks later he was secretly executed with twenty-more Communist sympathizers. Ding Ling, though oftentimes a sentimental woman, showed her fortitude in face of this incident. She sent her child to her mother in Hunan, and decided to join revolution more actively for her husband’s martyrdom. She accepted the League’s assignment, becoming the editor of its literary journal *Beidou* (Big Dipper), and joined the Party in 1932. This was a crucial period (1931-1936) for Ding Ling’s transition from a social critic to a cultural worker (for the masses).

The transformation is not smooth, however. Instead, it underwent numerous physical obstacles and psychological frustrations, and the writer harbored inarticulate doubts. Her stories faithfully recorded this metamorphosis; one case is “One Day” (*Yitian*), written in

³³⁵ Yi-tsi Mei, *Ding Ling’s Fiction*, 57-58.

³³⁶ *Ibid.*, 58. Tani Barlow also notes that “less vividly represented are the service ethic of Wang Wei and the curious reliberation of the wifely Meilin from the modern love match back to social engagement.” Tani Barlow, “Introduction,” 29.

May 1931. As the title suggests, it records one day life of a writer who just quits “the ball courts of the university” and starts his revolutionary work. As soon as the story unravels, he faces a difficulty in his writing, assigned by his superior, of a report of the activities and lives of the working class. As a freshman of the new job, he was still unfamiliar with this work and his thoughts were now and then disturbed by outside hubbub. But he undertakes his work “out of a kind of self-awakening, a kind of faith.” He knows the significance of his work: “on the next day, all who were slaves of the same kind would read it, and tell it also to those who could not read, they would ... be aroused by the forceful language, they would be awakened, they would unite” (363).

He also needs to contact truculent industrial workers. As an intellectual, he has no such experience. Revolutionary work is not romantic, but trivial and time-consuming that demands his unusual patience. When he goes out to look for two workers, he has to “try hard to assume the manner of the lower classes, his hand in his pocket, wearing an old hat.” But while the outside appearance can be impersonated, the habitus cannot be easily changed. The extremely unwholesome scenes and atmospheres he sees and smells along the road meant to imply his psychological state. Those who reside in this inhuman, repugnant living condition are those poor masses that he is supposed to work for, but they appear not only dirty, but also malicious and unfriendly to him. What is unusual is that, although he is infuriated and feeling humiliated, he does not feel angry for the “mob”, because he knows that that he must adapt himself to the pitiable masses in order to serve them.

This is because he knows that these masses lack the basic human condition which a “common people,” in the historical context meaning a “petty bourgeois,” can afford. So he tries his best to contain and even transform his taste of distinction, to overcome his feeling of repugnance. The ignorance and even petty cruelty of the ugly actuality of the proletarian workers does not weaken his will to work for them. Only after experiencing all the difficulties and chastening his moral convention as well as physical will, does he find how to be a writer for them, “He decided to use a literary form (*wenyi de ticai*) to describe the difficult tasks of the period. And what must above all be expressed was a kind of steadfast, inextinguishable spirit in the midst of difficulty.”³³⁷

“Even though perhaps he was not yet able to perform so very well” (ibid), this is a giant progress for him, which also symbolically transcribes a progress of the mentality of the author, a somewhat successful relocation of her position by balancing her identity between an intellectual writer and a “cultural worker.” This transformation is achieved not through writing as an individualized, secluded mental activity, but through writing as the medium and the tool to penetrate into the reality, to judge the right from the wrong, through which a new subjectivity is in the process of formation by acquiring its source of strength through the hard experience of connecting the individual with the masses.

Apparently, Ding Ling now made a stride towards the role that the party required of intellectual writer in the mass revolution. When Guo Moruo in mid-twenties robustly

³³⁷ Ding Ling, *Ding Ling Wenji* (Changsha: Hunan renmin, 1982), 368.

proclaimed that literature should always be the vanguard of revolution,³³⁸ as noted, he reserved a place “for the special sensibilities of the poet and for the privileged status of literature;” and this celebration is “mainly extensions of the artists’ glorified self-image.”³³⁹ Differing from this individual heroism, after the great setback of the mass revolution, Lu Xun had warned the leftist writers that “the laboring classes certainly have no obligation to treat poets or literary men in any exceptional or privileged way.”³⁴⁰ He urged them to have close contact with the masses and engage in real struggles.

Nevertheless, as acutely observed, here the narration takes a “defensive posture” which shows “a certain hubris and self-importance.” The problem is less “why ... should his particular self-effacement or even sacrifice be considered so noteworthy as to become the subject of writing?,”³⁴¹ than finding the source of his spiritual support from the real life of the suffering subalterns and their struggles, which the text apparently falls short of providing a persuasive explanation. Meanwhile, the character still could not join the masses seamlessly to become one of them, and has not yet completely reformed his intellectual habitus. Accordingly, the whole story is narrated from the horizon of his subjective consciousness. The subalterns are “represented” by him (and the narrator), but they could not speak for themselves. This is not yet a “proletarian literature.” To be sure, this is not totally the

³³⁸ See Guo Moruo, “Geming yu wenxue” (Revolution and Literature), *Zhongguo xiandai wenxue shi cankao ziliao* (Research Materials on Modern Chinese Literary History), (Beijing: Gaodeng jiaoyu chubanshe, 1959) vol.1., 214.

³³⁹ Yi-tsi Mei, *Ding Ling’s Fiction*, 87.

³⁴⁰ Lu Xun, “Duiyu zuoyi zuojia lianmeng de yijian – sanyueerri zai zuoyi zuojia lianmeng chengli dahui jiang” (Opinions Concerning the League of Left-Wing Writers; speech given at the founding meeting of the League of Left-Wing Writers on March 2) in *Lu Xun zawen xuan*, I, 1938-1932 (Selected Essays of Lu Xun, I, 1918-1932), (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1973), vol.1., 158-159.

³⁴¹ Yitsi Mei, *Ding Ling’s Fiction*, 87.

problem he (and the narrator/author) is responsible, but it was conditioned by the social-historical circumstance – the moment for the close contact between intellectuals and the masses was yet to come. Yet, the drawback still shows that his (and the writer's) effort is merely a beginning, an initial step towards a new identity, which is also a process of discovering the position of literature in the new field of a “cultural front.”

It is the real historical happenings that pushed the writer towards this new objective. In the wake of Hu Yepin's martyrdom, she encouraged the readers to give her severe criticism which she was ready to accept whole-heartedly, “because I only belong to all of you!” She acknowledged her new identity as “a small but diligent and faithful worker in literature, who is willing to belong to you.”³⁴² In January 1932, she offered the following suggestions to leftist writers: “Regard the masses as master; ... Do not separate yourself from the people; do not consider yourself as a writer. Remember that you yourself are one of the people; you are speaking for the people, speaking for yourself.”³⁴³ Determined to become one of the oppressed by giving up all her privilege as an intellectual writer and all the difference as a feminine (middle class) woman, now to be a cultural worker is to give up the “individual autonomy” as a prerogative right of the atomized writer in his/her secluded study circumscribed by the market imperative of commercial society, to devote herself to the collective interests of a mass revolution. This is a shifted notion about writing as a social-cultural institution.

³⁴² Ding Ling, “Preface to Yigeren de dansheng,” in *Ding Ling xuanji* (Selected Works of Ding Ling), ed. Ye Wangyou and Xu Chensi, (Shanghai: wanxiang shuwu, 1936), 151-152. Her preface ends with her inscription: “May 15, three months and eight days into the new era.”

³⁴³ *Beidou* 2.1 (1932): 168.

The martyrdom of her husband was materialized in an impersonalized story of “Mou Ye” (A Certain Night) sixteen months later after the incident took place. Its self-controlled, low-tuned prose signifies that the writer (both the one within the story and herself) has determined to devote her private self for the revolutionary cause. That she transformed from a painful widow to a fighting writer through a psychological self-restoration was incarnated in “Cong yewan dao tianliang” (From Night till Daybreak), in which the character recalls her dead husband, remembers his grieving mother, and buys a silk dress for the child of her girlfriend as a psychological solace for her love of her own child now under the care of her mother. Only upon the dawn does she realize that her self-pity prevents her concentrating on work, so she repudiates all these sentimental feelings and sits down to write.

The story that she sets out to write, both in the story and in reality, was “Tianjia Chong” (Tian Family Village). It is a story that vaguely tells a story of a landlord’s daughter, a supposed enlightened revolutionary, who comes to the countryside to evade the pursuit of reactionary force and the urge of her family to return to normal life. She tries to inspire the revolutionary consciousness of the peasants. Nevertheless, the latter only “thought of her as a lovable child, because she did not forget to be deliberately mischievous, to make them laugh, to make them forget her own position, so that they just felt like poking her, touching her, or even embracing her;”³⁴⁴ in short, as noted, she is “almost a fairy-tale figure, a fantasy self-image of the upper-class intellectual among the peasants.”³⁴⁵ Besides, the description of

³⁴⁴ Ding Ling, *Ding Ling Xuanji*, 266.

³⁴⁵ Yi-tsi Mei, *Ding Ling's Fiction*, 61.

the rural scene is from her point of view, so the countryside is like an idyllic ideal world. This “discovery of the natural” is not ideologically-neutral, and the writer confessed that this delineation was from a “middle peasant consciousness” which intended to write the “relatively tranquil countryside of the past.” But though she promised that she “should be able to overcome” this tendency,³⁴⁶ she did it in the same manner two years later in his incomplete novel *Mother*, which in a semi-biographical way records the experience of her mother. She still oftentimes could not help but describing natural scenes as well as the relations between love and revolution from her own perspective with a distinct class habitus, and her own experience of upbringing with less real revolutionary travail. But she made efforts to improve, which was shown in three stories portraying the masses.

If we distinguish “critical realism” and “revolutionary realism” not by the nature of the events narrated in a story (the former “pre-revolutionary,” the latter “in the middle of it”), but by the message it sends forth: whether it exposes the dark reality only to a certain degree, or contains a radical message that the society is totally corrupted and only a violent, radical revolution could change the structure and brings hope, then “Fawang” (The Net of the Law, 1932), in terms of the extent of the miserable life of the subaltern depicted and the inexorable, inescapable power-structure exposed, is a representative work of revolutionary realism.

Gu Meiquan, a blacksmith in a cigarette factory, loses his job because he misses one day’s errand when he has to take care of his pregnant wife A Cui, while his fellow-worker forgets his message to ask the manager for leave and the merciless manager could not accept

³⁴⁶ Ding Ling, “Wo de chuanguo shenghuo,” 62.

his explanation. Losing the only way to support his family, he becomes desperate and turns to irrational way of life, abusing his wife and worse, inadvertently kills the workmate's wife who is his wife's best friend taking care of their welfare. He flees yet her wife is held as hostage and dies in jail. Finally he is also arrested and executed. Before this, his workfellow has accepted his apology; nevertheless, the relentless power and its "law" devour all these suffering people. Here the staple subject of leftist literature, in which a poor criminal is also a helpless victim of social injustice perpetuated by its system as a "totality", is receiving a persuasive representation. The writer now stands in the same level of the masses to show their behaviors in social relations, so their conscious actions, which themselves a result of this network, are in line with their class status, and their psychological state proper to their subaltern identity.

Similarly, "Ben" (Flight), written in 1933, also shows the hopelessness of life by narrating an abject story of a band of poor peasants' failure in locating jobs when they take train from countryside to the metropolitan Shanghai. The bankruptcy of the rural economy propels them to look for their last hope in the city, yet still to no avail. Death, illness, hunger fill the pages. The train, normally a sign of modernity, in the (con) text becomes the token of an oppressive monster that takes these poor masses holding illusory dreams to a doomed destination.

If the usage of imagery as political metaphor in "Flight" is apt and ingenious, then "Shui" (Flood, 1931) is a further development of the writer's skill in describing the crowd. There was a gigantic flood happened in China that plagued 16 provinces in 1931. This story meant

to take this as its subject matter, which reflects the writer's elevated political concerns and sharpened sensibility on real social incident. The elaborate presentation of the peasants' gradual falling into the slough of despond because of repeated aborted illusions and their ascendance of inflammation as a result of being bullied and cheated, naturally and logically lead to the final burst of a riot – a precursor to and a primordial prototype of mass revolution. Psychological portraiture of atomized characters in anxiety is substituted by depictions of the agony and despair shown in members of a family and some other minor figures, which offers a vivid picture of the suffering community.

The writer brilliantly builds a portentous atmosphere by ushering in the discussion of a family about the incoming flood. She also learns to ingeniously apply animistic and naturalistic metaphors. The former is to drive home the fierceness of the torrents, which simultaneously refers to both the mercilessness of the corrupt regime and the unstinted power of the infuriated masses. The animistic metaphor and naturalistic metaphor are combined together later to portray the emotional and physical explosions and the wild behaviors of the repressed and exhausted masses. This literary technique graphically delivers the message that their overwhelming suffering is irrepressibly turning into an overpowering revolutionary power to bombard the dark reality, like the unstoppable flood.

The fatalistic, cyclical view of history expressed by the senescent old who recalls the rampant plagues and famine in the past is subtly subverted by the refutation of the young, which implies that the suffering that has been experienced for generations and taken for granted will be turned upside down. And some of these peasants have articulated such

messages as “fanshen” (Standing up) and the rebellion is “an action of taking back what we owned rather than a robbery;” which would be developed later on by revolutionary writers. All of these foretell, if not directly show, the development of revolutionary consciousness in the writer’s works. Indeed, the choice of the collective peasants as the subject and the improvement of her creative method both reflect a great change of the author. The story is regarded as a landmark of both the writer herself, and the “proletarian literature” in general. However, the problem lies in the fact that the masses, as a revolutionary community, its “subjectivity” is not clearly presented. In fact, this dilemma persisted in the writer’s works before 1949. This was a predicament conditioned and over-determined by social-historical circumstance, which will be discussed soon.

The Fourth Period: The People’s Critic or A Party’s Intellectual?

Ding Ling was kidnapped by the KMT agents on May 4, 1933, allegedly because of the inadvertent releasing of her living address by the man she was living with at the time (who thereafter was seen by the CCP as a traitor). The KMT tried to convert her to its side but to no avail. She was confined for three years in various places. To avert public opinion, the authority did not kill her and she finally managed to free to Bao’an in Shanxi province, then the headquarters of the Communist Party. She was warmly welcome by Mao and his comrades, who held a reception for her.

Ding Ling enthusiastically threw herself into various activities of the Border Regions. With the outbreak of the War, she was assigned the task of leading the Northwest Front Service Corps from Yan’an to Taiyuan. During the several months on the road, they

maintained a military discipline and performed propagandistic plays and songs to the masses. In September 1941, she assumed the editorship of the literary page of the party's newspaper *Jiefang ribao* (Liberation daily). Though she only worked in this position for seven months, the job another important experience for her, as she invited essays from intellectuals, and also wrote by herself, criticizing negative phenomena in the "liberated area" and within the party. Because of this, she was criticized and removed in the end of March the next year when the literary column ran for one hundred issues.

For a long period, Ding Ling took the same attitude of a social critic on the various phenomena of the "woman problem" that she witnessed in the new area. "Sanbajie you gan" (Thoughts on March 8) is one of here most-famed and controversial essay, published in the second day of the "International Woman's Day" in the year of 1942. Here, the writer stressed that women in Yan'an fared much better than women in the other places of China; nevertheless, she pointed out many unfortunate phenomena in this "new society" which were not quite different from those in the "old" ones, and stressed that they were perpetuated by the supposedly "revolutionary" cadres and high officials. Finally, she derived the same conclusion as before and made a petition to high officials as well as women themselves: "I hope that men, especially men in higher positions, and women themselves would see that the shortcomings of women are derived more from the society."³⁴⁷

³⁴⁷ Ding Ling, "Sanbajie you gan," (Thoughts on March 8), *Jiefang ribao*, March 9, 1942, p.4. For translation, see Gregor Beton, "The Yenan Literary Opposition," *New Left Review* 92 (July-August 1975): 93-106.

This concern over the destiny of women is clearly shown in her stories between 1939 and 1942. A piece written in 1939 “Xin de xinnian” (New Faith) is an unusual and weird one. It narrates a change of feminine psychological state, due to the trauma brought about by war rampage, in an old woman. After being physically violated and witnessing the miserable situation of her family members wrecked by the Japanese, she apparently runs amuck. She is talking to everyone the unspeakable details of the atrocity. This loss of feminine consciousness and dignity is initially seen as insanity; but when she is speaking at a mass rally, her story moves and boosts the moral of everyone. This is a noticeable change in the writer’s female consciousness, not only in terms of its gender conception but also in terms of the political consciousness: in the old, or “critical,” realism, this de-sexualized, de-formed old woman would be treated as an abject figure and her experience delivered as a tragedy; but now, although not yet a hero, her “insanity” is an incarnated courage and infuriation against the enemy. This is a subtle transfiguration of the “woman problem,” but this transfiguration looks unnatural and awkward, with a lingering sense of doubt and anxiety. In another story, “Wo zai xiacun de shihou” (When I was in Xia Village, 1941), a similar story about a deformation of a woman’s femininity due to the war experience ,which now occurs in a young girl, the ambiguity is not lessened but magnified.

Zhenzhen, a village girl, was inadvertently captured by the Japanese and forced to serve as sex slave, and because of this the party assigns her to work in the enemy as a spy until she begets serious venereal disease and returns home for cure. A superficial reading interprets the story as a fable about a moral dilemma caused by the contradiction between

nationalism and feminism. This reading falls short of some key evidences. What is the motivation for her to accept the mission? Did she have the freedom to reject the apparently inhuman request? There is no sufficient information we can get from the narrator, who is also a female party cadre visiting the village. We do not see from the text that she has any attitude on these issues.

And to the same critics, the story is also a conflict between modern and traditional concepts of chastity, thus it is about the staple theme of May Fourth Literature on “the new/modern vs. the old/tradition.” This reading is justified partially by the first half of the text: Zhenzhen’s return to the home village brings her different responses from the villagers. While some youths admire her courageous, patriotic deeds (her boyfriend keeps his love unabated), the elder generation of the village folks, including her parents and even a female party cadre, sees her experience as a great shame for a woman, either feeling pity of her or regarding her a trash. This focus on the responses from ordinary people, together with the cause for her falling into the hands of the Japanese which is a typical case of the May Fourth theme of “free love,”³⁴⁸ would strengthen the argument that sees the writer as preaching a feminist message against “feudalist” consciousness. But this explanation cannot cover the information of the whole text, because the youths have been used to the new ideas on chastity and repudiating traditional ideas, and Zhenzhen herself remains unperturbed on any external

³⁴⁸ She had a lover who was poor nevertheless, and so she was forced by her parents to marry to a businessman she does not love, so she went to the nearby church intending to be nun when the Japanese soldiers came by.

reactions towards her experience. The moral concepts of the elder generation matter little in their lives.

Meanwhile, the story obviously is also not a story about the enlightenment of the party on ignorant peasants. The narrator is merely playing the role of a spectator, who often shows her doubts and uncertainty on what Zhenzhen thinks and behaves. If all these commonsensical explanations fail, then what is the “theme” of this piece?

I will suggest that this story, in the facade of a “problem story” about the “woman problem,” shows the psychologically transformative condition of the narrator as an intellectual figure. She is the only and real “protagonist” of the story. When she sees the new outlooks of the young peasants, she observes them with curious eyes and a doubtful mind. Apparently a newly joined intellectual with her distinct habitus, she finds that their behaviors and mentality have gone beyond what the “enlightenment intellectuals” have preached and so she feels bewildered. She approaches Zhenzhen carefully, in order not to injure her sense of dignity; yet contrary to her expectation, it is Zhenzhen who initiates the discussion.

But the narrator’s sense of intellectual superiority remains. Zhenzhen appears curious and envious about the life of the intellectuals and asks the narrator to teach her. Her change is not due to any ideological education, but as she admits, it is only her mind that changes to be harder. This unexplainable reason is premised on a discourse of natural humanity. In short, it is neither the intellectual’s enlightenment efforts nor the party’s ideological teachings that bring about Zhenzhen’s change, but it is due to an enigmatic element that is newly found in the new, young masses, that propels this transformation. The liberal humanistic discourse is

seen here and there: Zhenzhen shows her admiration of Japanese women, because they read books. She also vicariously expresses sympathy towards Japanese soldiers, because they harbor the letters written by their wives or girlfriends in their chests. The cruel invaders are not evil at all, they are human.

In all, the story shows that the intellectual tries her best to observe and understand the “masses” that she has had little contact before and finds that at least some of their thoughts and behaviors beyond her supposition. But she cannot explain these phenomena (Ding Ling never met the prototype of Zhenzhen, but only heard such a story, so all the details were her imagination), but can only attribute this new outlook of the new peasants to their uncouth qualities and, in displaying her antagonistic views towards those “ignorant” peasants: “especially those women, because of her (experience, they) have a respect of their own and see their own sanctities; they are proud of themselves because they were not raped” (447), shows that she still holds the habitus of an urban intellectual with the enlightenment mentality.

Essentially, then, the narrator, who is an alter ego of the writer, has not accepted the epochal discourse of “the (new) masses of the people.” She keeps curious eyes and judges the new phenomena based on her intellectual’s habitus and from her ingrained enlightenment perspective. She approaches the latter, but their feelings, emotions, behaviors appear as unspeakable entity that needs her representation, and she still feels the political correctness of being so: “with the time passes day by day, I even find that Zhenzhen hides something to me, but I never have any resentment on her.” This is out of her belief in a universal humanity: “I

will never touch her secret: everyone has something that she does not want to tell others in her mind; this has nothing to do with others, and it has nothing to do with her personal morality.” Nevertheless, she goes beyond her intellectual parameter to represent her psychology,

Although in such a short period, I cannot find that she has many sentimental feelings and resentment; she never shows a want that she hopes a man to ask for her, or just a solace. But I still believe that since she was injured, precisely because she was so heavily harmed, so it brought about her stubbornness as it is, so she looks as if nonchalant. But if there is some tender care, some pities beyond general sympathy, to warm her soul, it is necessary. I would like that she can cry for a time, to find a place where she can cry for a time. I hope I’ll have an opportunity to drink the wine in the wedding feast of this family; at least I’m also willing to hear the good news before I leave.

“But what is Zhenzhen thinking? This (question) will not be put off, and it should not be a question at all!” I think on in this way, and then I do not think it anymore.³⁴⁹

Here, to this intellectual observer, the “soul” of Zhenzhen definitely needs pacification of a man with a physical touch; it is unbelievable that she does not cry under this circumstance. To the narrator, Zhenzhen should not appear so untouchable, so enigmatic, and so strong-willed. “We” must warm her soul. She should get married. The narrator does not sense her epistemological violence at all. The subaltern cannot speak, they need her representation; their minds are enigmatic, which need physical pacification and comfort.

Indeed, Zhenzhen always appears a Sphinx to the intellectual audience. In the end, she informs the narrator that as she is to be sent to a XX place (probably refers to Yan’an), she wants to stay there studying. Her confession that “I make this plan for myself, but also for others, so I do not feel that I have something begging for other’s pardon” again shocks the

³⁴⁹ Ding Ling, *Ding Ling Xuanji*, vol.2., 448.

narrator, “I was feeling greatly startled, new elements displayed in her again. I felt that she was indeed worthy of my study.”

All in all, the story shows a new phenomenon, which is essentially an emergence of a new morality in the new masses of the people, out of the war experience and in a new area, which the intellectual has endeavored to understand; yet due to her fundamentally unchanged class habitus, this effort fails. And even though Tani Barlow sees that “the narrative *allows* Zhenzhen *herself* to assign meaning to her experience. To the victim, the question is one of the meaning of life, not the meaning of chastity,”³⁵⁰ the scholar, just like the narrator, could not figure out where the character’s “source of the self” come from, and she attributes this to the power of the author. Essentially, then, the scholar identifies herself with the narrator and entraps herself in the same anxiety. In this light, the story is ultimately about a failed romance of integration between the intellectual and the peasant as its “other”.

Against the grains of the intellectual’s “normal” mentality, Zhenzhen shows a staunch subjectivity irrespective of the apparent plight she as a woman confronts, but the source of this subjectivity is unperceivable. Perhaps the party ideologue’s critique of the story offers us some clue: it might be a vicarious protest of the writer against some party officials’ prejudice on her for her political chastity (She was pregnant when she was in duress, living together with the traitor. It is reported that Kang Sheng, a high-ranked party’s security officer, had publicly announced that Ding Ling “was not our comrade and the party school will not accept

³⁵⁰ Tani Barlow, “Introduction,” 38. Barlow aptly notes that the story “refuses closure,” and “no system of pre-fixed meaning supersedes the significance assigned by the woman who suffered the rape.” Ibid.

her to study”³⁵¹). More or less, then, the stubbornness of Zhenzhen, her rejection of all the rumors and slanders, is also likely a projection of the writer’s own anxiety and (in)dignity. As Tani Barlow aptly contends, in the story’s message that “unchastity as an ethical issue is best resolved in political terms,” the character “claims a meaning for herself that will emerge only in the context of personal political practice.”³⁵²

The rural girl Zhenzhen appears a strange outsider, though the writer did try her best to understand and present the progressive masses. In “Ye” (Night), written the next year, we see an illiterate peasant, who can be seen as a representative party cadre, because he is from “almost the poorest small village in the area,” has two kids died of poverty, and he is now a local party director devoted to work. The story covers only one night of his movement after he returns from a party meeting, which, in showing how he neglects attending his land because of his commitment to his busy work, and how he repudiates the temptation of a young woman in his neighborhood, seemingly is a eulogy about a model party worker. But there are many discordant messages in the details. Firstly, as a country bumpkin, he appears quite awkward in paraphrasing the party language that he hears during the meeting which he barely understands; second, the narrative is filled with sexual overtones which imply that as a robust man, he can hardly repress his sexual desire, but he has to do so because of his identity, therefore he appears less human. Moreover, he shows little interests in and caring for his wife, resenting her for not capable of giving birth to child anymore, and even considers divorcing

³⁵¹ Wu Jiemin ed., *Yan’an malie xueyuan huiyilu* (Memoire on the School of Marxism-Leninism in Yan’an) (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kecue chubanshe, 1991), 286.

³⁵² Tani Barlow, “Introduction,” 38.

her because of her oldness. In presenting his anxiety over his cow about to give birth, essentially the woman is compared to a cow, whose status is even worse because she receives less care. In all, this apparent presentation of a man's feats turns to the other side of the coin to be a graphic illumination of the "woman problem."

Party's work does not give this peasant cadre any revolutionary consciousness, though he frets over his job assignment. His resistance of the sexual temptation of his neighbor is out of pragmatic consideration of his social status. He remains fundamentally ignorant, which is even conveyed through a particular way of representing his consciousness: "Who was he himself? He didn't understand anything; he had never been to school; he could not read; he did not even have a son; and now he was county leader and tomorrow he must report on the meaning of the meeting."³⁵³ Although this might be seen as a narrated monologue, it is better to be read as a psychonarration, or a narrative intervention. If he knows nothing about the political meanings of his work, isn't that to ask him to do report a joke, even a ridiculous, Kafkaesque absurdity? The writer can claim that what she represents is a faithful portraiture of the "real" peasant cadre in life "as it is," but in showing his ignorance of the party's ideology, and his reproachable uncouth frigidity to his pathetic wife, it undoubtedly again shows the narrator's sense of intellectual superiority and the right/prerogative to "represent the masses." If she does not understand Zhenzhen, in keeping her habitus unrevised, she fares no better in approaching this "bumpkin."

³⁵³ Ding Ling, *Ding Ling Xuanji*, vol.2., 462.

But not only does the writer, in her enlightenment mentality, “expose” the problems of the masses, but also, holding the habitus of a social critic, she now further exposes the seamy side of the party’s work. “Zai yiyuan zhong” (In a Hospital, 1941) is also led by an intellectual figure, though now a third-person narrator, Lu Ping, a twenty-year girl from Shanghai who arrived at Yan’an not long ago apparently for her idealism. Through her perspective, (the reflection on) the reality unfolds. Holding the ambition to be a political supervisor, her dream was hopelessly frustrated by the party’s arrangement. Because of her educational background, she is assigned to be a midwife nurse in a border hospital. She argues with the superior, talking prices with the latter, only reluctantly agrees to go there in the condition of working in the position for merely one year. This sense of intellectual superiority foretells her unhappy experience thereafter. Indeed, as easily noticed, the “inhospitable reception” she receives, the “primitive conditions” of the newly opened hospital, and “above all...the incompetence and irresponsibility of some members of the staff,” etc., are put in contrast with her dedication to her duties.³⁵⁴ All in all, she feels alienated from her circumstance. She judges on everyone she meet, and regards most of them disgusting. The unsanitary habits of those hospitalized are also unbearable. She argues and proposes in meetings to improve the conditions, but things not bettered. She also has tried to adapt herself into the community, yet avails little. She finally cannot fit in with this community and has to quit her job, shifting to another place.

³⁵⁴ Yi-tsi Mei, *Ding Ling's Fiction*, 109.

But these are all witnessed from her perspective. And even so, we read many conflicting messages from the narration which counteract this perspective. We might notice that although other members of the hospital, including the directors and her two friends were not self-willingly assigned to their present jobs, they adapt themselves well for the needs of revolutionary work. Especially her two friends (one of them, a male surgeon, even “often writes short stories or skits”), whose full-spirited dedication to and excellent skills in their works not only show their maturity, but also educate and inspire Lu Ping.

From the perspective of the party’s critics, Lu Ping does not reform herself to be a revolutionary intellectual. But the seemingly neutrality of the narrative voice constitutes the most difficult barrier for our evaluation. On one hand, the narration shows Lu Ping’s willfulness and immature quality, who “always believes that the truth is in her side.” But because the narrative voice oftentimes tends to identify with the vision of the heroine, this disclosure appears so “objective” and nuanced that the readers hardly notice its critical effect.

To settle this paradox and even conundrum, we have to put the text side by side with the two stories just discussed. The narrator could not understand the “new masses,” nor is she used to their behaviors. This does not mean Lu Ping’s critique is not reasonable (in most case, the negative, or “dark” side that she witnesses does exist), but the problem is that she cannot balance her perspective with that of the others; lacking necessary working skill, her intellectual habitus, a fundamentally individual heroism, can only isolate herself from the community and avail little in real work. That she sees almost everyone as her “other” promises no hope for her ideals; and with this mindset her accusation that all the others lack

love or genuine revolutionary camaraderie is not so reliable – at least she herself is partially responsible for this. Meanwhile, in view of the general harsh conditions of the area, the lack of rationalization indeed needs time to be redressed. In addition, like “Thoughts in March 8,” this piece also shows a divisive tendency: she essentially forms a clique that only sees itself as the only innocent party in the community. Collecting materials, she is to accuse her superiors.

Just at this moment, an inpatient calls on her and gives her a lecture. He has his feet cut three years ago because of bad medical treatment and lack of human resource. His words meant to teach Lu Ping a lesson about how to behave properly, in this light he seemingly is a prototype of a revolutionary mentor figure, which was gradually emerging at the time and increasingly seen in the Communist fiction. But his teaching does not settle Lu’s doubts as she inexorably leaves the hospital. When examined more closely, there is still ambiguity and contradiction in his lecture.

First, he reminds her that no matter who will replace the directors’ positions, the conditions still would not fare much better, because “it will be the same old game for those who come from above.” Essentially, he holds the same position as Lu Ping’s as an intellectual. This position holds the superiority of specialist intellectuals over the non-specialist political leadership. Referring the latter contemptuously as either “illiterate cropper” or “cowboy,” they do not trust them and are unfaithful to their supervision, and believe that they themselves should replace the latter as leaders. This is essentially a challenge to the party’s political line which aims to create an alternative modernity: by

transforming the “(petty) bourgeois” intellectuals into a member of the proletariat by fundamentally reforming their political consciousness, rather than merely doing the reverse of “elevating” the knowledge of the masses with the leadership of the “bourgeois” specialists, the party intends to build a “new society,” a new way into modernity, in which the specialized intellectual plays a key role, but only in the condition that he becomes both a specialist and equally if not more important, a proletarian cultural worker. He would have no “independent” role alienated from the society and the people, but he is expected to be seamlessly immersed in the people and tied in with them. This, together with his requested equipment with Marxist ideology, mandates him to become “the people’s intellectual.” But as he also needs to follow the party’s political line and even concrete policy, he essentially becomes a “party’s intellectual.” Obviously, the writer had not been used to this role. And the inpatient neither.

However, his diagnoses of the problem and his “teachings” have some other problems. What Lu Ping lacks, he informs her, is only the skills of daily affairs as well as certain “strategy.” So what he teaches is a political skill or even calculation to subsist in “difficult” conditions. He even supports her plan of accusing the political supervisors.

Ding Ling was moved from the editorship in March 1942. But she had been persuaded to accept the Maoist ideology and conquered the sense of alienation in her full identification with “the people’s stand,” which in the historical context means the party’s policy. After the Yan’an Talk which is partially a response to this sort of criticism offered by intellectuals like Ding Ling, the writer confessed her mistakes in writing “Thoughts on March 8:” “... the main

thing wrong with the article is its standpoint and ideological method ... it shows that I merely spoke for a part of the people and not from the standpoint of the entire party.” It is apparent that she now identified “the people’s stand,” the “ideological method (of Marxism),” with the standpoint of the “entire party.” So, although what she disclosed were not necessarily, as she claimed, “only some unimportant shortcomings,” she acknowledged that she was “taking a lopsided view of the problem.”³⁵⁵

This is not merely a hypocritical excuse to beg the party’s pardon for personal favor, but it reflects a fundamental change in Ding Ling’s attitude towards the authority of representation. Tani Barlow also has noted that “when she composed the introduction to (this essay)...she had not yet determined how to locate its intended audience. Eight months later, she offered it as she ‘always intended, for the perusal of those people who have similar views.’” If it was difficult for her to locate her audience, there was no uneasy feeling for her belief that “she had a writer’s authority to represent women.”³⁵⁶ This “belief” is out of the conviction that “the realist writer re-presents reality through a unique genius. Thus conceived, a writer could be simultaneously the servant of society ... and the special vehicle of truth, since by bourgeois definition writers had keener sensibilities, better sight, more ‘creativity,’ than other educated people;”³⁵⁷ not to mention those party intellectuals who seemingly are merely crude bureaucrats.

³⁵⁵ Ding Ling, “Wenyijie dui Wang Shiwei yingyou de taidu ji fanxing” (The Attitude and Self-Introspection that the Literary Circles Should Take towards Wang Shiwei), *Jiefang ribao*, June 16, 1942, P.4.

³⁵⁶ Tani Barlow, “Introduction,” 1.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 4-5. Barlow further notes that “the choice to go ahead meant she felt she had the power as a writer to declare when, where, and how the given political line would be evaluated. Her act insinuated

After spending two more years in study and participating in the movement of thought-reform in party school, when she restarted writing in 1944, apparently she shifted to writing the “bright side.” Increasingly she wrote “impressions” (*yinxiangji*), “communications” (*tongxin*), “actual record of life” (*shenghuo shilu*), “reportage” (*baodao*) about model workers and soldiers as well as heroic deeds. As noted, these heroic figures are not individualist heroes, but everyone “has incorporated the ideals and institutions of his community into his own personal behavior.”³⁵⁸ This does not mean that there is no problem in these works. Yi-tsi Mei has aptly pointed out that the characters often appear to be standing alone, aloof to the masses around them; and the collective also seems to be abstract and not real entity, playing a minor role of cheering for the heroes’ achievements.³⁵⁹ In addition to the immature skill of the writer herself, this should be seen as also a result of the social condition. This problematic is now to be examined with her magnum opus of this period.

The Sun Shines on the Sanggan River

In the last stage of Ding Ling’s identity (trans-)formation, by endeavoring to change the way of writing from “speaking for the people” to be “speaking by the people,” she tried to become a party’s “zhishi fenzi” (“Intellectual”), which in her view simultaneously means to become a member of the masses of the people. This is her ultimate identification that

further that as a writer and a woman she might have access to truths of experience beyond that line. It emphasized (at least momentarily) a form of personal politics...” and she “chose to remain oblivious to her essay’s many implications.” 39.

³⁵⁸ Yi-tsi Mei, *Ding Ling’s Fiction*, 111.

³⁵⁹ See *Ibid.*, 112-113.

dispelled her sense of alienation from the “new society” and crude party bureaucrats. But the fissures and cracks still existed, even in this famed novel.

Ding Ling participated energetically in the land reform movement in July 1946. The story, narrating a process of land reform in a northern village, is the incarnation of this experience. As the writer’s first experiment of the genre of novel in depicting the party’s real revolutionary movement, Ding Ling tried to correct her “false stance” by representing heroic party cadres who awaken and mobilize the masses. It encompasses the elements from the genres of detective story and Bildungsroman, the formula of “Love and Revolution” and “problem stories,” and the prototype of socialist realism, which are both its assets and defects, and would receive more refined treatment by other writers later on.

Historically, the purpose of the land reform is as much to distribute the lands of the landlords as to mobilize and awaken the peasants’ class consciousness. As regards the novel, it has been suggested that since the archvillain of the village is ambiguous in terms of his class identity, who is more than double cunning than the real landlord, to find him out lends the story a flavor of detective story.³⁶⁰ But this is not exactly the case, as his villainous nature is exposed by the narrator from the very beginning and learned by the masses for a long time. Thus, the question is only how to expose it.

But this villain Qian Wengui, as noted, seemingly does not qualify himself to be a “class enemy.” He “was not the kind of landlord who possessed conspicuous wealth, nor was he a murderer or rapist who would arouse the people to a struggle unto death. Compounding

³⁶⁰ This is suggested by Yi-tsi Mei, See *Ding Ling’s Fiction*, 136.

the confusion, Qian Wengui has cleverly sent one son off to join the Eighth Route Army and married a daughter to the village security officer.”³⁶¹ Granted these are all true, this argument bypasses many details which are the substantial facts about his notoriety. First, he was powerful through his connections with the Japanese. When the Japanese came, he “established contact with higher circles. No one knew why that later on, for villagers lived in Nuanshui village, even the cases as who would serve to be ward chief, who needed to pay money and provide human service, all of which had to follow his order.”³⁶² He sent his son to the party’s army because this area had been in the party’s control for several years, thus it can be seen as his similar strategy of protecting his interests. Secondly, he is evil. Those who meet him in the road need to pay tribute to him, otherwise they “would be afraid that if you appeared displeasing to him, he would harm you when you were still unconscious.” Thus “the villagers all said he is a ‘racketeer,’ even the top one among the eight ‘racketeers’ of the village” (12). Thirdly, he had committed numerous misdemeanors if not crimes with his outrageous arbitrariness and high-handed manner. He also tries to bribe local cadres using money and his niece as the baits and sabotages the land reform movement with rumors of the party’s military setbacks. The exposure of all these by the villagers in the mass meeting is sparked by a victim’s denunciation, in which the readers are informed that “his father was hounded to death, his brother had turned insane, and all his family was destroyed” through his nefarious scheme. Before he is fully exposed and punished, although the villagers could

³⁶¹ Ibid., 135.

³⁶² Ding Ling, *Ding Ling Xuanji*, vol.1, 12.

shake their fits and shout with the cadres in meetings, they “looked furtively to the place where Qian Qengui was squatting,” and dared not publicly articulate their grievance.

Therefore, as a local despot, Qian’s qualification to be a “class enemy” is both “symbolic and moral” as well as “material.” But if this confirmation of his class identity is through an identification of his image in the peasant’s mind (a local tyrant) with the revolutionary rhetoric in the party’s term (class enemy), then in many other aspects, the ethical standard of the peasants and the party’s ideology are not cohered with seamlessly. This is shown in the key theme of the novel: to arouse the peasants’ “revolutionary consciousness.”

On one hand, the characterization of the change of mentality and behavior of the peasants, especially those ignorant, conservative ones, delivers the message of “fanshen” (standing up) for poor peasants (the representative one being Hou Zhongquan, shown in the contrast between his erstwhile consciousness of submitting himself to providence, and his now excited and “liberated” mind upon seeing his newly-acquired property); on the other, this message of “standing up” is ostensibly challenged by some obscure figures. The misgiving towards this “liberation” is articulated by Gu Yong, a middle peasant. He shares the same desire of Hou’s for land, but his property of land is the second largest in the village, and he even can afford to buy from landlord Li Zijun a house together with two courtyards. But he becomes a well-to-do middle peasant, the narrator stresses, only through forty-eight years of hard work of “dropping their blood and sweat on the barren land, investing in it their hopes, year after year” (9). All his sixteen family members work on the land, and he has no

tenants. But he is wrongly labeled a rich peasant, and out of pressures he is persuaded by a neighborhood friend Hu Tai to submit his land. Isn't this unfair to him?

Why the writer includes this plot that is counteracting the “fanshen” message? To be sure, Ding Ling tried to “expose” the problem in the party’s work. But different from the “exposure literature” she wrote earlier, this is a Zhao Shuli-like “problem story” that meant to invite the attention of the party for correction.³⁶³ Meanwhile, we also need to notice that, although the rhetoric of Hu Tai’s persuasion is couched on pragmatic consideration, there also emerges a concept of equality, “In the past, taxation is heavy, and there are many villains; innocent people dare not offend them, they are often subjected to the latter’s bullying. Now what is promoted is equality, you are free to say what you please, isn’t it good?,” and an idea of mutual cooperation, “there is no land for the poor people, we ourselves had developed from that stage. To offer a hand to them is necessary.” These words finally convince Gu Yong: he “thought that he (Hu Tai) was right, feeling very comfortable over his words, (so he) agreed to do as what he said” (310). The qualms are settled on this score: for a person who is not the enemy of the people, it is the restructuring of the class hierarchy that matters. However, although the concepts of “equality” and charity prevail, they are both traditional ones; and the centuries-old concept of “fairness” still poses a great challenge to the process of social leveling.

³⁶³ For Ding Ling’s words see her “Shenghuo, Sixiang, yu renwu” (Life, Thought, and Characters), *Renmin wenxue* 3 (1955): 120-128.

Similarly, the author, out of her consistent concern over women's fate in this momentous change, also describes the piteous situation of women from the landlord family who suffered in the movement. There is also ambiguity here: on one hand, the narrator indeed presents them as mostly harboring resentment towards the bereavement of their property, a sort of class hatred; on the other, their pathetic performances not only invite the sympathy of the peasants, who consequently often stop their action in face of their tearful faces, but also subtly trigger the readers' complex feelings.

Again, as if to balance this uneasy feeling, we are introduced a girl, Heini. Originally, she had been designed as a close relative of the landlord, but upon revision her identity is completely adjusted to be ambiguous – a niece of the landlord. Her upbringing also distances herself from the landlord family. Clearly, because of the oppressed life she endures, now she changes to be a semi-proletarian figure. Her “standing up” with the fulfillment of her love affair further confirms her real class identity.

This love is between her and a poor peasant, Cheng Ren, now a party cadre. Earlier, their love had been thwarted by Qian, and none of the party leaders ensures Cheng that there is no problem for his love considering her ambiguous identity. This is like a variant of the entanglement between “love and revolution” that the author had treated in her earlier stories. It seems that she is now still considering more from woman's angle the impingement of revolution on love: Cheng Ren had been Qian's tenant, but now he is the chairman of the peasants' association. Although he is guilty that to avoid suspicion, he cannot openly express his love towards Heini, his passiveness towards the disclosure of Qian's evilness still invites

the disgruntlement of his comrades. After a protracted psychological struggle, he finally becomes the first one to vehemently attack Qian, exposing his misdemeanor and his intention of buying him over through offering him lands and Heini. – But we need to note that the dilemma now is not conflict between love and revolution, but between individual interest and responsibility. Hinting that the two will get together only after the great upheaval, the text suggests that once the class enemy is cleared, Heini will have a much bright future. This is a departure from the aforementioned formula: Revolution does not jeopardize love, but only facilitates it.

Another pitiable woman is the wife of the assistant head of the village. Living a poor life even without jacket on, she has received the favor of a landlord's wife, but because of this she is beaten bitterly by her husband. This embarrassing abuse of woman by a revolutionary cadre is again redressed in the ending, in which she gets what she wants of several beautiful clothes and proudly shows them to others when all the villagers are distributing the property of the landlords. In short, revolution can correct all the problems it engenders during the turbulent process. This seems the ultimate message when the writer combines all the ambivalent plots and the final positive settlements together.³⁶⁴

But the ambiguity still exists here and there, which is also shown in the party cadres, who are revolutionary agency yet without proper political consciousness. All of them are not qualified to be revolutionary paragons, unlike those in the writer's literary sketches.

³⁶⁴ Tani Barlow has noted that "it faithfully reflected the notion that the future might indeed bring a transformation of rural sexual relations, but that such change was not an immediate priority." "Introduction," 41. We can clearly witness here that there is no such a possibility for the "priority" to become reality, given the harsh social-historical condition.

The leader of the land reform team is Wen Cai, an intellectual, who is eloquent, brandishing, yet bookish and ineffective. The most prominent party member that captivates our attention is Yumin, the first party member in the village. But he has a dubious background: he had many bad habits of old peasants, the major ones being gambling, alcoholism, and leading a loose life (the story might imply that he had affairs with a bad woman White Lady). The process of his receiving revolutionary enlightenment is also dubious: it is only briefly stated that he attained this teaching when he was sent by the landlord Jiang Shirong to deliver goods to the Eight-Route army. The most experienced cadre is Zhang Pin, the district propaganda head. Yet he also does not qualify to be a paragon: he is too young, and plays only a transitional role directing the last moment of the movement. In addition, the novel provides two female cadres, Dong Guihua and Zhou Yueying; both are leaders of the women's association. Dong is the most competent woman kader, yet not only is she apparently a victim of her whimsical husband, but also she herself acknowledges that she just follows his husband to take part in revolutionary work, or quits from it as required. To be sure, this was only her temporary feeling of disillusionment. She would still play an important role in the work. But all these descriptions partially confirm the point that their backwardness and passive consciousness needs revolutionary enlightenment. Yet the story does not show how this happens.

Again, these "untypical (negative) phenomena" appear as discordant messages in the text, but they serve less as deconstructive elements than showing the legitimacy of the reform itself. This is so not only because these "fissures" are mostly finding their counter-balancing

evidence (for instance, despite the ill-treatment of Dong Guihua by her husband, her strength in her work is also confirmed by the latter;³⁶⁵ and although Zhou Yueying is still beaten into submission by her husband who is a shepherd, the narrator also informs us, “once her temper was up she feared neither man nor devil, and at such times people would gather round her and unite under her passionate leadership.”), but also because when the tasks are performed by these imperfect persons, it shows the movement galvanizes everyone to participate in and elevates everyone in the process.

Nevertheless, the most progressive cadres are still the most ordinary, and are scarcely as perfect as we might assume. What is more, why did Ding Ling choose the “untypical” landlords, middle peasant, as well as poor peasant without salient class consciousness or at least without well-marked outside signs of class distinction?³⁶⁶ In my view, this question is closely related with the writer’s concept of class consciousness and subjectivity, which shows the distance of her idea from that of the revolutionary theory. She had expressed her anxiety about the disagreement between the policy and the real job done, and had acknowledged that “the novel is the ‘interweaving’ of actual personal experience and ideas absorbed from various party documents and conference.”³⁶⁷ To be sure, works of socialist realism intend

³⁶⁵ He has made complaints to his uncle, tenant Hou, “my wife acts like a queen, as if she could really manage affairs. I can’t make up my mind whether to let her go [to the meeting] or not.” Hou laughs and responds, “You’d better let your wife have her way ... Nowadays hens can crow as well as cocks, men and women are equal.” *Ding Ling Xuanji*, vol.1, 106.

³⁶⁶ For instance, Li Zijun is another “untypical” landlord. He has money yet no power. He was urged by Qian Wengui to be a tithing man for the Japanese occupants, but was only fooled and lost one-hundred *mu* of his lands and a house. After the arrival of the work team, he hides himself in the orchard all the day and dares not returning home. Finally, he flees to the nearby city, leaving his wife and juvenile kid to deal with the team.

³⁶⁷ Ding Ling, “Yidian jingyan” (A Bit of Experience), in *Zuojia tan chuangzuo* (Writers Talk about Writing) (Beijing: Zhongguo qinnian chubanshe, 1955), 4.

not only to represent the existent world, but also to detail the process of attaining a new world by constructing “a working model of historical forces in operation,”³⁶⁸ thus they are not merely presenting what really happened or is happening in reality. This points less to hypocrisy or propaganda than to literature as a new institution. But Ding Ling’s uneasiness shown in her aforementioned justification is a symptom of the discordance between empirical reality and theoretical tenets, which still needs to be examined with the comparison between the fissures in his novel and the party’s discourse.

Mao in his “Yan’an Talks” has stipulated that “life as reflected in works of literature and art can and ought to be on a higher plane, more intense, more concentrated, more typical, nearer the ideal, and therefore more universal than actual everyday life.”³⁶⁹ It is clear that contrary to this expectation, all the various characters depicted in this novel come close to real-life figures as we can suppose to meet in daily life. This means less that they are more “realistic,” than the fact that the writer’s concept of class consciousness still does not cohere seamlessly with the Marxist theory. For the latter, a proper class consciousness is not a spontaneous class consciousness by itself that only articulates the social beings surrounding a class which encapsulate all the complexities of social existence, but a revolutionary class consciousness that is aware of its true interests and stakes. If Lu Ling as analyzed in the previous chapter did not understand this concept; then Ding Ling, after the Thought Reform of the “Yan’an Talks,” also stopped at the empirical stage.

³⁶⁸ Yi-tsi Mei, *Ding Ling’s Fiction*, 142.

³⁶⁹ Mao Zedong, *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1967), 82.

Therefore, the subjectivity of the peasant class in the novel is understood to be merely their desire to acquire their land. It is for this reason we see all those ambiguous “masses” and the uneasy feeling for the loss of the land acquired by personal toil. For the party, to arouse poor peasants’ desire, and to awaken their consciousness of their right to have land was the concrete process through which to establish their sense of being a class collectively oppressed by the powerful class. But this is merely the first stage; the more important is that their traditional ethical-moral concepts were to be reformed to be equipped with a higher, revolutionary consciousness of building a new society with new social relations, and the concomitant new idea of property ownership. Thus the more challenging task is that, even after they were aware of their own class interests, they were expected to be elevated into a higher level of consciousness of transcending beyond this interest to accommodate and propel the formation of the class consciousness of the proletarian. Without this second step to be implemented, their “class consciousness” was still spontaneous and to certain extent “backward.”

The incapability of describing this “proletarian consciousness” as the class subjectivity of the peasant masses, therefore, is not owing to the writer’s own shortsightedness, but it was fundamentally conditioned by the Chinese historical reality: the revolutionary consciousness of the “semi-proletariat”– the peasants (theorized by Mao) – was not what it existed as their consciousness of acquiring the land – but needed to be awakened, or better, to be formed out of revolutionary theory and praxis promoted by revolutionaries. It did not exist as the case might be of some industrialized Western countries, in which the “proletariat” – the

industrial workers – had cultivated for a long time a class consciousness which is supposedly identical with the revolutionary consciousness. If the “first enlightenment movement” of the “New Culture Movement,” which focused on the promotion of individual rights, freedom, and liberal democracy among urban citizens by the intellectuals of the May Fourth generation, did not succeed due to China’s social contradiction, then this alleged “new enlightenment,” which centered around awakening the political awareness of the subaltern and establishing a “new democracy,” also did not fulfill its potential. Still, the masses were largely “liberated” by the party, but did not acquire the consciousness and the capability to be the master of their own destiny. This is clearly witnessed in a description of the psychological movement of the party director Zhang Yumin on the backwardness of the peasants.³⁷⁰

Because of the difficulty for the peasant masses to acquire the revolutionary class consciousness dictated by the Marxist theory and requested by the Party for political and military interests, the party resorted to drastic measures, such as instigation of the masses’ openly punishment of the “class enemy” in public meetings aimed for releasing their grievance. And also because of this ambiguous political consciousness (even of the writer herself), we witness the fissures between the revolutionary value system which is yet to be established in empirical reality, and the existent rural ethical-moral world that seems harmonious with “nature” (for instance, the concept of becoming better off through one’s labor and perseverance, as shown by Gu Yong’s way of success and the ensuing middle peasant mentality), posing challenges to the legitimacy of the revolution. Fundamentally, we

³⁷⁰ Ding Ling, *Ding Ling Xuanji*, vol.1, 47-48.

also note that even the awakening of the revolutionary consciousness has to rely on the traditional ethical idea of justice being done through punishing the evil, rather than on any new revolutionary value system. But if the revolution cannot replace the traditional ethical world correlated with the agrarian society and its relations of production, and promote this new value schema among the masses, then the overturning of the existent order itself is merely a dynastic change, a fake “revolution” as envisioned by Ah Q.

Consequently, the failure to present a collective subjectivity works side by side with a weak representation of a new individual subjectivity. This dilemma of forming a class subjectivity –in both the two levels – is also correlated with the predicament of creating a new culture (that is beyond the present objective of establishing a “new democratic culture” catering to the needs and ingrained psychology of the masses), the latter of which both its premise and its desired achievement.

A passage describing a natural scene invites our attention. It is in the early morning in the day that the fruits of the orchards of the landlord are divided and given out to the villagers,

Just as the great earth was awakening in the faint light of dawn, clear sounds of laughter floated up from the still, cool orchard. The joy of the people rose above the sparrows’ chirping, and the small scaly insects that love to flit about in the morning breeze darted uneasily in all directions. Thickly growing leaves trembled slightly on the extended branches, but could not hide the bunches of heavy fruit. In the groves there still remained some sparkling dewdrops, like stars twinkling in foggy night. On the red fruit there was a soft down, or a layer of thin frost, making them look soft and moist. Colored clouds drifted; through the gaps in the thick green leaves shone dots of gold. In the groves were reflected lines of transparent, faint purple and light yellow rays.³⁷¹

³⁷¹ Ibid., 204-205. Translated by Yi-tsi Mei, *Ding Ling's Fiction*, 132.

After Mao's Yan'an Talk, such a lyrical description is really scarce in the writings by Communist writers. It is noted that this is "a lapse from plain writing and the novel's frequent imitation of peasant speech," but its purpose is not merely to provide "the 'objective correlative' of the peasants' state of mind," nor is it simply a residue of the May-Fourth style, but it shows a nuanced effort to create a new culture. The novel itself as a whole can be seen as Ding Ling's efforts in this direction. This also explains why this novel did not solely target at the rural peasants as Zhao Shuli had done; rather, it is clear that she aimed at more sophisticated (which means having more education) urban dwellers. She tried to promote the new revolutionary consciousness – the core of this "new culture" – to the latter through the narration of a revolutionary tale.

This "new culture" calls forth the assertion of a salient class consciousness to constitute a new community, or "the masses of the people" (*renmin qunzhong*), which is premised on a clear class distinction that designates unambiguously its (class) enemy. But the creation of a genuine revolutionary new culture with the "proletarian consciousness" as its core is a far more difficult task, as just analyzed. The masses, as a new historical Subject, their own literary skills, cultural sophistication, and political distinction still have to be fostered and cultivated. And since there was not a stage of fully-developed bourgeois culture in modern China, apart from the traditional culture and the half-baked May Fourth culture which more often than not were despised by this new revolutionary culture, the latter itself needed to be formed almost from void. Also for this reason – a revolution with its Subject as the rural peasants as the "proletarian" – urban life and its different style that many Chinese

revolutionaries had rarely experienced was often falling out of the horizon of this new revolutionary culture.

In short, for this “new culture” as envisioned and tested by Ding Ling, the allegedly historically new “Subject” – the peasant “proletariat” – still had to be represented, but could not represent themselves; and the intellectuals who were to represent them themselves needed to be educated by the revolutionary theory and the Party. In the final analysis, because of the lack of an existent “proletarian consciousness,” it is the Party – allegedly the avant-garde of the proletariat – that says the final words. Indeed, as Tani Barlow points out, the writer “achieves self-definition in the end through service to the Party,”³⁷² and she takes this to be simultaneously a service to the people.

From this point of view, the change of Ding Ling from a veteran May Fourth-styled writer to a staunch Communist writer can be appreciated from a new angle. And the fissures, cracks, and discordant voices/discourses in her novel that we are discussing can be put into a new framework, to be seen as a stage in a dialectical developmental in a transitional period, in an experiment with an “alternative modernity.” The conflicting discourses in her novel, as well as in her articles, can be seen as a result of the social contradiction that is far from being resolved, even to this day.

³⁷² Tani Barlow, “Introduction,” 45.

Conclusion

If the preceding discussions have efficiently substantiated the argument that in modern China, the search for a new subjectivity was undertaken through conquering the identity crisis of the “new man” and “new woman”; we also should note that in the writing of stories, the “control of the form” was simultaneously a symbolic action that articulated the anxiety of the intellectuals about becoming a new, modern Chinese. The first argument yields to a notion that this search for a new identity is premised upon the establishment of a new subjectivity. Indeed, the creation of “subjectivity” was an integral part of the construction of various “new cultures” for modern Chinese intellectuals. But just as “new cultures” had diversified versions and visions, various subjectivities had also been created that were all taken as, or promoted to be, *the* subjectivity for modern Chinese. Therefore, the second argument leads to the point that this symbolic action is closely correlated with differing class consciousness: the various ways to negotiate with or to design the “new culture” that the writers faced, via the refraction of their class consciousness, were expressed as, and incarnated in, the form and the content of their stories. This conclusion intends to make a brief discussion on this problematic between class consciousness, subjectivity, and identity, as shown in the writers’ writings and their literary career.

If the May Fourth intellectuals held exuberant individualism, or “put their priority on an affirmation of the self, championing the individual’s energies and emotional needs,” and believed that “it was only in fulfilling the individual that society could thereafter accomplish

its renewal, reform, and salvation;”³⁷³ then this individualism subsided in the writers of the 1940s. As my analysis of Zhang Ailing’s stories show, her stories as a whole demonstrate that individualism – the cardinal principle of the middle class world – was in a deep crisis, and this is because the social-historical reality – the semi-traditional, semi-colonial situation – restricted and conditioned the expressions of the “humanity,” which has a historical and class-bound nature. Therefore, for many writers, “their doubts that individual needs could be attained and their concern with the theme of self-delusion, upon which both individual ambitions and social institutions were based”³⁷⁴ could only find their explanation from the social-historical context as the subtext of the fictional texts.

As suggested, Xiao Hong’s personal tragedy, a result of the ruthless conditions of the society but also a side effect of her own numerous miscalculated choices out of her weak capability of political judgment, was also symptomatic of the besieged “new women,” which shows the predicament of liberal-humanist intellectuals in the transformative era, and the dilemma of the New Culture agenda in general. While her early stories generally can be read as leftist stories that contain strong doses of class conflicts, what also stands out is a humanist concern. This should be understood in conjunction with her life experience to this moment. The sympathetic feeling for the social outcast was derived from her own wretched experience thus far, which contributed to her sense of merciless class division and oppression. This pre-theoretical recognizance did not necessarily lead to revolutionary thoughts, but it

³⁷³ Edward Gunn, *Unwelcome Muse*, 270-271.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 271.

undoubtedly led to her pro-leftist inclinations with strong humanitarian sentiments. Nevertheless, because she was weak in political thinking, in particular the perspective of class analysis, while her novel *Field of Life and Death* had helped to promote the patriotic, anti-Japanese sentiment of the populace, the multiple thematic concerns in it are not coherently connected but are subtly in conflict with each other, contributing to its thematic incoherency. I suggest that this was a result of the author's unclear differentiation of the priority, and her incapability to look into the innate correlativity, of the three major social contradictions of the time: patriarchal gender inequality, class conflicts, and national resistance. Also because of her little theoretical knowledge of class politics, later on she stopped short of exploring further areas apart from what she observed within her own (somewhat narrow) life circle – the latter of which, furthermore, mainly comes from her childhood experience. Without a broadened social experience in her avoidance of taking part in the dramatically shifted social reality, the largely unchanged pattern shows a predicament difficult to break through, which is also confirmed by the Mediocrity of her “resistance stories.” Her last work *Tales of Hulan River* retreats from her earlier social-political analysis to a culturalist perspective predicated on the discourse of the New Culture enlightenment. Thematically, when compared with the first part of *Field of Life and Death* and her numerous early stories about peasant's lives, this “poetic novel” also implies a reticent “involution,” if not regression, of the author's views regarding the unyielding spirit of the subalterns. All in all, holding little political belief and refusing to enter an essentially political world, she was ultimately a humanist and an individualist who had tried to seek “a room of her own” for

personal security and pleasure, yet the relentless Chinese society amid wartime circumstance did not allow her to do so.

For Eileen Zhang, there was another picture. The connection between her apparent “transcendence of politics” and a profound cynicism and nihilism grew out of her privileged yet disoriented life as a marginalized member (partially also because of her gender) of the cultural establishment of the Republic. Her egocentric self-consciousness and her “aesthetic” attitude towards life could not be dissociated from the aristocratic tradition of the pre-modern Chinese gentry’s class. By meticulously yet coolly documenting and codifying the daily trivial details of private quotidian experience, she tried to define a sustainable pattern of “living appropriately” for middle-class women, which as both utopia and fantasy of that awkward social group, bordered on the explicit abnormality and brutality of the social conditions in 1940s China. For the woman characters in her stories, the agony and troubles caused by marriage and love show the predicament of these social institutions at the time, which in general reveals a deep crisis that the May Fourth individualism had been trapped in, and the impossibility of the “New Woman” project in the historical conjuncture. The identity complex as demonstrated in her works not only shows an unsuccessful transformation of a class identity, but also belies the seemingly apolitical nature of her “boudoir literature.” This “existential” but also cultural-political anxiety brings out a fictional style which is a hybrid of traditional taste and western techniques, as an elaborate mechanism to absorb the frustration and shock she experienced internally, and a labyrinth of symbols and images collected to fend off assaults on vulnerable individuals from a hostile environment.

Edward Gunn has argued that some “‘anti-romantic’ writers ‘affirm their protagonists in heroic roles,’” and “these affirmations of their protagonists also convey messages of the unworthiness of society for the potentials of their heroines.”³⁷⁵ That “the iconoclastic hero” put himself “against a decadent society” indeed shows itself in literature of this period, which, however, is not merely a simple continuation of the May Fourth theme, for its central mission has changed – here I refer to the fiction by Wumingshi and Xu Xu.

If those middle-class women writers in the occupied areas at worst submitted to the politically high-handed pressure and struggled for a humble life of dubious personal happiness amid war-time turmoil – for whom there was no place in their minds for the ideal of the New Culture to be propagated, and at best promoted the modern women’s virtues which was part of the New Culture ideal; then we also witness that some male writers in the Nationalist-controlled areas still laboriously designed and invented various ways to achieve the ideals of the enlightenment dreams of the May Fourth era, though the latter could not be transmitted openly. In Wumingshi’s Novel *Circle Book without a Name*, the hero Ying Di, after experiencing ups and downs in the society, finally believed that he had at last found a genuine way to achieve a bright future, based on a new culture that combines the cultural essences of both China and the West, for him and for the nation. The writer’s other stories were oftentimes cast in a similar vein with Xu Xu’s “modern tales about the strange,” and most of them share similar thematic concerns of a culturalist deliberation on “human nature,” love, beauty, and cosmopolitanism.

³⁷⁵ Ibid., 270.

I have suggested that the two writers' "novel of conception" has a particular nature. Lost in the faith in the intellectual revolution of Chinese Enlightenment that aimed to promote and institutionalize progressive political agenda, they were immersed in the fantasy of fundamentally changing the mentality of the people, especially the nature of the rulers, to be peace-loving, thus to solve the irrevocable social contradiction. The stylistic mannerisms of their works were not only strategies of self-positioning in a rapidly-shifting sociological space, but more importantly, ways of expressing a nascent national bourgeoisie that found itself caught between ruthless class struggle and ideological conflicts that defined modern China. Although their cultivation of fine taste and elaborate style fit in with the agenda of making a vulnerable individuality sustainable, they failed to recognize the collective reality – the once defeated yet persistent mass movement that propelled radical social change, thus their self-positioning revealed a cultural crisis and intellectual dilemma. Their project was at once populist and elitist, as neither the socioeconomic condition of modern China nor its political-legal culture endowed concreteness to their culturalist discourse of salvation. Thus while the male characters in the two writers' stories apparently hold substantial subjectivity and firm identity, the oftentimes pseudo-Bildungsroman in a "spiritual conquest" betray its flimsy nature and vulnerable character.

Lu Ling was arguably the most talented novelist of the "July school" led by Hu Feng, Some writers of this school instilled into their works of revolution and war a plethora of feminine and bodily desires and fantasies of the oppressed peasants and young intellectuals, against a backdrop of intense class conflicts and national crisis. To analyze his works we

need to examine their social and psychological aspects more closely, by dialectically correlating the social content of disorientation and chaos described in the texts with the psychic disorder and fragmentation of the fictional characters. Only in this way can we discover the heterogeneity and contradictoriness of his uncouth language and cumbersome form as a result of displacement and projection of the historical dilemma that the intellectuals felt.

If the subjectivity that the May Fourth writers had created is, without much contention, an individual-oriented subject, then the subjectivity that Lu Ling and Hu Feng had promoted has generally been recognized as trans-individual and collective class consciousness. Yet it is fundamentally differing from the subjectivity that the CCP had advanced, which was also presumably based on a “class consciousness.” Although the desires and fantasies of working-class (or intellectual) heroes and heroines promoted by the two intellectuals were regarded by them as the primitive vitality of the populace and equated with a revolutionary force of resistance (just as femininity and sexuality seemed to mean to them a feminine subjectivity), I suggest that they were only projections of their own resentments and anxieties as leftist intellectuals entrenched in a hard, tumultuous age. In their refusal to “sublimate” and “displace” physical desires (which sometimes were insinuated to be incarnations and expressions of “spiritual” hunger) with a new nationalist, collective motif and in particular, the CCP’s version of “class consciousness,” they showed their strong will to preserve the May Fourth brand of subjectivity, or a prerogative of ego-centrism and romantic self-glorification. To differentiate different “subjectivities” and thus to further probe the

nuances of their artistic contents, we need to analyze Lu Ling and Hu Feng's strategy within the field of positions by situating them in the particular historical moment, and in the particular cultural fields; namely, those of the Communist-dominated and Nationalist-controlled areas.

Indeed, as Kirk Denton points out, what they had tried to do is but to "keep alive within a new and unique historical age the enlightenment values of a May Fourth they idealized;" yet "the heavy demands of the historical moment made any absolute return to those ideals all but impossible."³⁷⁶ Therefore, they all shared certain ambivalent and self-contradictory attitude and psychological struggle in face of the paradox of the historical situation; and we witness that to a great extent Lu Ling is the alter ego of his characters who undergo profound agony and angst during their troublesome, and ultimately failed, identity pursuit and formation.

But these psychological contradictions were to a great extent seemingly solved by the writers from the CCP-controlled areas. In close scrutiny, however, we find that there are still tensions there.

It is due to the capability of attracting the peasants towards the fictional world, which is based on their own real life, that Zhao Shuli's stories were regarded as a perfect vehicle of "national form" for promoting a "new culture." First and foremost, rather than merely to "expose" the ignorance of the peasants, the subaltern is now being represented from the perspective of himself to show his life and feeling. Secondly, Zhao's stories are mostly

³⁷⁶ Kirk Denton, *The Problematic of Self in Modern Chinese Literature*, 22.

adaptation from real incidents. The ways of adaptation point to the later development of “socialist realism.” It is not distortion in the normal sense, but an adaptation for the sake of educational effectiveness. Because now the author/narrator’s consciousness is supposed to stand at the same level of, or be identical with, the “proletariat’s,” the function of the narrator is also accordingly changes. Although he is in charge of plot action, many times he does not comment on unfolding events directly, the latter being yielded to the diegetic peasant character. He is an outsider, but simultaneously an insider – because allegedly he has been integrated with the peasant world and has acquired its grammar. The intellectual writer now does not “represent” the subalterns, but he let them speak up for themselves.

For this purpose, the language of the story is an integration of folk, colloquial language with modern, literary language, which produces a new, lively style. This contributes to a popular style of writing, which is both entertaining to the masses and appearing less vulgar to the urban educated readers. But on other hand, it is also due to this self-imposed goal: to accommodate the ethical-moral as well as aesthetic parameters of the peasants in order to entertain and to educate them, that Zhao fell short of attaining a more far-reaching imperative which intended to fundamentally change the peasant’s ingrained mentality, to educate them to acquire a revolutionary consciousness to be “a class for itself,” in order to usher them into a higher ethical-moral realm that aimed to build a new world, or to construct an “alternative modernity.” Thus the subjectivity of the peasants is ambiguous or amorphous, and the narrator could not assume the personae of a mediator, nor could he provide a model party member with higher revolutionary morale to instill further revolutionary message into the

implied readers. The same paradox applies to the literary form. For those with urban- and Western-educated background, these stories catering to the tastes of peasants, having much more flavor of folk art than metropolitan tastes, still appear naive and less refined.

If the subjectivity of the peasants is merely undergirded and blessed by the party in Zhao's stories, then in Ding Ling's works this subjectivity sometimes curiously asserts itself without any outside assistance. Tani Barlow has pointed out that Ding Ling "belonged to the May Fourth generation, a group of academics, writers, politicians, and cultural revolutionaries who acted as brokers between imperial and socialist China." As to the background of this "group," she continues, "many belonged to the new social category of educated people, the *zhishifenzi*, or intellectual class."³⁷⁷ But Ding Ling apparently repudiated thoroughly the intellectual habitus of this class, and metamorphosed from an uncompromised individualist to a revolutionary fellow traveler, and finally became a firm party intellectual, which she took to be identical with the identity of the people's critic.

The four stages of development she experienced before 1949, both in her personality and in the style of her literary works, were simultaneously a shifting process of her intellectual commitments and identities (trans-)formation. These differing identities not only show her drastically shifted subjectivities in her efforts to conquer her sense of alienation, but also correspond to four shifting notions of literature, or literatures as social-cultural institutions. The contemplation of the "woman problem" ran throughout her creative career. Briefly speaking, in the changes from a feminine woman to a social critic, through being a

³⁷⁷ Tani Barlow, "Introduction," *I Myself as a Woman*, 2.

cultural worker (for the masses and following the direction of the party) to the last stage of an ambiguous role of the people's critic/a party intellectual, the literature she writes simultaneously change its nature: from a "bourgeois," "boudoir" literature to critical realism, through revolutionary realism she finally approached socialist realism.

In most stories of her last period, the subjectivity of the peasant class is presented to be their desire to acquire their land. The incapability to describe the "proletarian consciousness" as the class subjectivity of the peasant masses is not due to the writer's shortsightedness, but it was fundamentally conditioned by the Chinese historical reality: the revolutionary ("proletarian") consciousness did not exist in modern China in reality as the case might be of some industrialized Western countries, in which the "proletariat" – the industrial workers – had cultivated for a long time a class consciousness which is supposedly identical with the revolutionary consciousness. Consequently, the failure to present a collective subjectivity goes hand in hand with a weak representation of an ambiguous, or amorphous, new individual subjectivity. This dilemma of forming a class subjectivity – in both the two levels – is also correlated with the predicament of establishing a new culture, the latter of which both its premise and its outcome.

The dilemma of this "new democratic culture" predetermined its own sublation and development in the "socialist culture" after the establishment of the People's Republic. But at this moment, for this "new (democratic) culture" as envisioned and tested by Ding Ling, the allegedly historically new "Subject" – the peasant "proletariat" – still had to be represented, but could not represent itself; and the intellectuals who were to represent them themselves

needed to be educated by the revolutionary theory and the party – thus their own subjectivity and identity was still not yet solidly formed, which brought about many conflicts, tensions, and agonies.

To sum up, from the death of a “new woman” Xiao Hong, to the “rebirth” of a self-styled “intellectual of the people” Ding Ling, we witness the various cultural forces and trends of intellectual thoughts which coexisted, vied and interacted with each other in the same historical juncture to claim their cultural hegemony. Through a practice of political hermeneutics of fictional texts and social-historical subtexts via an analytical detour of exploring the relationship between class consciousness, subjectivity, and identity, this dissertation intends to show that social modernity and literary modernity in modern China were intertwined and interacting with each other in the development of modern Chinese literature.

Bibliography

- Barlow, Tani. "Introduction," in Tani E. Barlow., and Gary J. Bjorge. ed., *I myself am a Woman: Selected Writings of Ding Ling*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1989.
- Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*, tr. Harry Zohn, ed., Hannah Arendt. New York: Schocken Books, 1968.
- Birch, Cyril. "Fiction of the Yenan Period," *The China Quarterly*, No.4.(Oct.-Dec.,1960):1-11.
- Brook, Timothy. *Collaboration: Japanese Agents and Local Elites in Wartime China*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2005.
- Chang, Sung-sheng Yvonne. *Literary Culture in Taiwan*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.
- Chen Qingsheng 陈青生 *Kangzhan shiqide Shanghai wenxue* 抗战时期的上海文学(Shanghai Literature of the Sino-Japanese War) Shanghai: Shanghai renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1995.
- Denton, Kirk. *The Problematic of Self in Modern Chinese Literature*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998.
- Ding Ling 丁玲. *Ding Ling Xuanji* 丁玲选集 (Selected Works of Ding Ling) Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1984.
- . *Ding Ling xuanji* 丁玲选集 (Selected Works of Ding Ling), ed. Ye Wangyou and Xu Chensi. Shanghai: wanxiang shuwu, 1936.
- . "Wo de chuanguo shenghuo" 我的创作生活 (My life in creative writing), in *Chuangzuo de jingyan* 创作的经验 (Experience in Creative Writing). Shanghai: Tianma shudian, 1933.
- . "Sanbajie you gan" 三八节有感 (Thoughts on March 8). *Jiefang ribao* 解放日报 March 9, 1942, p.4. For translation, see Gregor Beton, "The Yenan Literary Opposition," *New Left Review* 92 (July-August 1975): 93-106.
- . "Wenyijie dui Wang Shiwei yingyou de taidu ji fanxing" 文艺界对王实味的态度及反省 (The Attitude and Self-Introspection that the Literary Circles Should Take towards Wang Shiwei) *Jiefang ribao* 解放日报. June 16, 1942.

- .“Shenghuo, Sixiang, yu renwu” 生活，思想，与人物(Life, Thought, and Characters), *Renmin wenxue* 人民文学 3 (1955): 120-128.
- . “Yidian jingyan” 一点经验 (A Bit of Experience), in *Zuojia tan chuanguo* 作家谈创作 (Writers Talk about Writing). Beijing: Zhongguo qinnian chubanshe, 1955.
- Doleželová-Velingerová, Milena. *Selective Guide to Chinese Literature 1900-1949*. Vol.1, The Novel. New York : E.J. Brill, 1988,
- Duara, Prasenjit. *Sovereignty and Authenticity: Manchukuo and the East Asian Modern*. Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003.
- Fu, Poshek. *Passivity, Resistance and Collaboration: Intellectual Choices in Occupied Shanghai 1931-1945*. Stanford: Stanford University, 1993.
- Fulton, Austin. *Through Earthquake, Wind, and Fire*. Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1967.
- Gao Jie, et.al. *Zhao Shuli zhuan*. Taiyuan: Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 1982.
- Geng Chuanming 耿传明 *Qinyi yu chengzhong zhijian: ‘xiandaixing’ wenti shiye zhong de ‘xinlangmanpai’*” *wenxue* 轻逸与沉重之间：现代性问题视野中的新浪漫派文学 (Between Lightness and Heaviness: The Neo-Romanticist literature in the perspective of modernity). Tianjing: nankai daxue chubanshe, 2004.
- Gilmartin Christina. *Engendering the Chinese Revolution: Radical Women, Communist Politics and Mass Movements in the 1920s*. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1995.
- Goldblatt, Howard. ed. *The Dyer’s Daughter: Selected Stories of Xiao Hong*. Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2005.
- . *Hsiao Hung*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1976.
- Gunn, Edward M. JR, *Unwelcome Muse: Chinese Literature in Shanghai and Peking 1937-1945*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1980.
- Guo Moruo 郭沫若, et.al, *Lun Zhao Shuli de chuanguo* 论赵树理的创作 (On Zhao Shuli’s Creation). Sunan: Xinhua shudian, 1949.
- . “Geming yu wenxue” 革命与文学 (Revolution and Literature), *Zhongguo xiandai wenxue shi cankao ziliao* 中国现代文学史参考资料 (Research Materials on Modern Chinese Literary History). Beijing: Gaodeng jiaoyu chubanshe, 1959.

- Hegel, W.F. *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V.Miller. Oxford: Clarendon press, 1977.
- Holm, David. *Art and Ideology in Revolutionary China*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991.
- Hoyan, Carole Hang Fung. "The life and works of Zhang Ailing: A critical study." Ph.D Dissertation. The University of British Columbia (Canada), 1997.
- Hsia, C.T. "Forward", in Pu Ning, *Red in Touch and Claw: Twenty-six Years in Communist Chinese Prisons*. New York: Grove Press, 1994.
- , *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction*. Bloomington: Indiana Univ. 1999.
- Huang, Nicole. *Women, War, Domesticity: Shanghai Literature and Popular Culture of the 1940s*. Leiden; Boston : Brill: Academic Pub, 2005.
- Huang Xiuji 黄修己. *Zhao Shuli pingzhuan 赵树理评传* (Critical Biography of Zhao Shuli). Nanjing: Jiangsu renmin, 1981.
- Hung Changtai. *War and Popular Culture: Resistance in Modern China, 1937–1945*. Berkeley: Univ. of California, 1994.
- Jameson, Fredric. *Marxism and Form*. Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1974.
- , *Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1981.
- , "Third-world literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text* 15 (1986): 65–88.
- Judd, Ellen R. "Prelude to the 'Yan'an Talks': Problems in Transforming a Literary Intelligentsia." *Modern China* (vol. 11 No.3, July 1985):377-408.
- Lan Hai 蓝海. *Zhongguo kangzhan wenyi shi 中国抗战文艺史* (A history of the literature of the Resistance War). Shanghai: xiandai, 1947.
- Lee, Ou-fan, Leo. *Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China, 1930-1945*. Boston: Harvard Univ. Press, 1998.
- Lehan, Richard. *The City in Literature*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1998.

- Li, Tien-yi. "Continuity and Change in Modern Chinese Literature." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. Vol. 321, No. 1, (1959): 90-99.
- Liu, Lydia. *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity-China, 1900-1937*. Chicago: Stanford Univ., 1995.
- Liu Jianmei "Gender Geopolitics: Social Space and Volatile Bodies, 1937-1945," *Journal of Modern Literature in Chinese* 2.1 (July 1998):53-83.
- Liu Jinghui 刘晶辉. *Minzu, xingbie yu jiecheng* 民族, 性别与阶层 (Nation, Gender and Social Strtum). Beijing: Shehui kexue xenzian chubanshe, 2004.
- Liu Panxi 刘泮西. "Zhao Shuli de chuanguo zai wenxueshi shang de yiyi." 赵树理的创作在文学史上的意义 *Shandong daxue xuebao*, 山东大学学报 1 (1963):
- Lu Ling 路翎. *Lu Ling Wenji* 路翎文集. 4 vols. Hefei: Anhui wenyi, 1995.
- . "Lun wenxue chuanguo shang de yixie jiben wenti" 论文学创作上的一些基本问题 (On some fundamental issues in literary creation). *Ni Tu* 泥土 (*Soil*), 1948 (6).
- Lu Xun 鲁迅 *Lu Xun zawen xuan* 鲁迅杂文选 I, 1938-1932 (Selected Essays of Lu Xun, I, 1918-1932). Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1973.
- Lukacs, Georg. *History and Class Consciousness*. Trans. Rodney. Livingstone: Merlin Press, 1971.
- . *Theory of Novel*, trans. Ann Bostock. Cambridge: Mass., MIT Press, 1971.
- Luo Binji 骆宾基 *Xiao Hong Xiaozhuan* 萧红小传 (*A Short Biography of Xiao Hong*). Shanghai: Qianwen shudian, 1947.
- Macdonald, Susan S.H. ed. *The tale of Li Youcai's rhymes*. London: Cambridge U.P., 1970.
- Mao Zedong. *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1967.
- . "Xinminzhu zhuyi de zhengzhi yu xinminzhu zhuyi de wenhua" 新民主主义的政治与新民主主义的文化 (New Democratic Politics and New Democratic Culture), later known on "Xinminzhu zhuyi lun" 新民主主义论 (On New Democracy), *Zhongguo wenhua* 中国文化 1:1, 1940.

- Matthews, Josephine Alzbeta. "Artistry and authenticity: Zhao Shuli and his fictional world." Ph.D. Dissertation. The Ohio State University, 1991.
- Mei Lin 梅林. *Mei Lin Wenji* 梅林文集. Hong Kong: Lison Book Company, 1955.
- Mei, Yi-tsi Feuerwerker. *Ding Ling's Fiction: Ideology and Narrative in Modern Chinese Literature*. Cambridge, Mass, and London: Harvard University Press, 1982.
- . *Ideology, Power, Text: Self-Representation and the Peasant "Other" in Modern Chinese Literature*. Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1998.
- Ni Wei 倪伟. "Minzu" *xiangxiang yu guojia tongzhi: 1928-1949 nian Nanjing zhengfu de wenyi zhengce ji wenxue yundong* "民族" 想像与国家统制: 1928-1949 年南京政府的文艺政策及文学运动 ("National" Imagination and State Domination: The Literary and Artistic Policies and Literary Movement of the Nanjing Government, 1928-1949). Shanghai: Shanghai jiaoyu chubanshe, 2003.
- Schwartz, Vera. *The Chinese Enlightenment: intellectuals and the legacy of the May Fourth movement of 1919*. Berkeley : University of California Press, 1986.
- Shen Congwen 沈从文 *Ji Ding Ling* 记丁玲 (Reminiscences of Ding Ling). Shanghai: Liangyou tushu, 1934.
- Shi Xiuwen 石修文. "Zhiye funv yu jiating funv" 职业妇女与家庭妇女(Professional Women and Household Women)。 *Daban Huawen meiri* 大阪华文每日(Chinese Osaka Daily) 9, no.7 (1942).
- Shin'ichi, Yamamuro. *Manchuria under Japanese Dominion*, trans. Joshua A. Fogel. Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2006.
- Slupski, Zbigniew. *Selective Guide to Chinese Literature 1900-1949*. vol.2. The Short Story. Leiden; New York : E.J. Brill, 1988.
- Smith, Norman. *Resisting Manchukuo: Chinese Women Writers and the Japanese Occupation*. Toronto: UBC press, 2007.
- Sypher, Wylie. *Loss of the Self in Modern Literature*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1979.
- Travers, Martin. *European literature from romanticism to postmodernism*. Palgrave Macmillan, 1997.

- Wakeman, Frederic Jr. *The Shanghai Badlands: Wartime Terrorism and Urban Crime, 1937-1941*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Wang Yao 王瑶 *Zhongguo xin wenxue shigao* 中国新文学史稿 (The History of Chinese New Literature). Shanghai: Xin wenyi chubanshe, 1953.
- Wang Zhen. *Women in the Chinese Enlightenment: Oral and Textual Histories*. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1999.
- Wu Jiemin 吴介民 ed., *Yan'an malie xueyuan huiyilu* 延安马列学院回忆录(Memoire on the School of Marxism-Leninism in Yan'an). Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kecue chubanshe, 1991.
- Wu Yiqin 吴义勤. "Xu Xu you Zhongwai wenhua Yuan Yuan"徐圩与中外文学渊源 (Xu Xu in relation to Chinese and foreign cultural traditions). *Zhongguo Xiandai Wenxue Yanjiu Congkan* 中国现代文学研究丛刊 (Studies on modern Chinese literature). 3(1993): 146-61.
- Wuming Shi 无名氏 *Luse de Hushing* 绿色的回响 (Echoes of the green). Guangzhou: Huacheng Chubanshe, 1995.
- . *Yeshou, yeshou, yeshou* 野兽野兽野兽 (*Beast, Beast, Beast*). Taipei: Liming wenhua shiye, 1995.
- . *Tali de Nuren* 塔里的女人 (Woman in the Pagoda). Hong Kong: Xinwen tiandishe, 1976.
- . *Jinse de sheye* 金色的蛇夜(Golden Nights of the Snake). Taipei: Xinwen tiandi, 1977.
- Xiao Feng 晓风 ed. *Hu Feng, Lu Ling wenxue shujian* 胡风路翎文学书简(Hu Feng and Lu Ling's literary correspondence). Hefei: Anhui wenyi, 1994.
- Xiao Hong 萧红. "Yongjiu de chongjing he zhuiqiu" 永久的憧憬与追求(Perpetual Longing and Pursuit). *Baogao* 报告(Shanghai), inaugural issue (January 10, 1937).
- . *Xiao Hong Juan* 萧红卷. ed. Fu Guangming. Xian: Taibai Wenyi, 1997.
- . *The Field of Life and Death and Tales of Hulan River*, trans. Howard Goldblatt and Ellen Yeung. Bloomington: Indiana Univ., 1979.
- Xu Xu.徐圩 *Jibusai de youhuo* 吉普赛的诱惑 (Gypsy Enticement). Hefei: Anhui wenyi, 1996.
- . *Feng Xiaoxiao* 风萧萧 (The blowing wind). Guangzhou: Huacheng chubanshe, 1990.

Yan Jiayan 严家炎. *Zhongguo xiandai geliupai xiaoshuo xuan* 中国现代各流派小说选 (Anthology of stories by diverse literary schools in modern China). Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1986.

Zhang Ailing 张爱玲. *Zhang Ailing zuopinji* 张爱玲作品集 (Selected Works of Zhang Ailing). Guangzhou: Huacheng chubanshe, 1997.

Zhang Xudong. "The Politics of Aestheticization: Zhuo Zuoren and the Crisis of Chinese New Culture (1927-1937)." Ph.D dissertation. Duke Univ. 1995.

-----."Shanghai Nostalgia: Postrevolutionary Allegories in Wang Anyi's Literary Production in the 1990s. *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique*. Volume 8, Number 2, (2000):349-387.

Zhong Jingzhi 钟敬之. "Yan'an Lu Xun yishu xueyuan gaimao ceji" 延安鲁迅艺术学院概貌侧记(Sidelights to a general picture of Yan'an's Lu Xun Academy of Art). *Xin wenxue shiliao* 新文学史料 No. 2 (1982).

Zhou Yang 周扬. "Lun Zhao Shuli de chuanguo"论赵树理的创作. *Jiefang ribao* 解放日报. Yanan, Aug 26, 1946

Vita

Xiaoping Wang was born in Fuqing, Fujian, P.R. China in 1975. He entered Beijing University in 1994, and received a Bachelor degree in July 1998 from the Department of Chinese Language and Literature. In August 1998, he entered the Humanities Division of Hong Kong University of Science and Technology and received a master degree in 2000. After working for one year in *Fujian Daily* between 2001 and 2002, he went to the States to pursue his Ph.D. degree. For the first three years he had studied in the PhD program at the department of comparative literature in the University of Colorado at Boulder. Then he transferred to the University of Texas at Austin in the year of 2005. He worked as a teaching assistant in the Department of Asian Studies from 2005 to 2009. He has published articles in *China Perspectives* and *Journal of Contemporary China*.

Permanent address: C/O, Wang Qitao, Bureau of Radio and TV, Fuqing, 350300, Fujian, P.R.China

This dissertation was typed by the author.