

The Wild Individual: Politics and Aesthetics of Realism in Post-Mao China (1977-1984)

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DEDICATION

For my mother Yu Xiangling and father Xie Rongshan.

For my wife Chen Xiangjing, for her love and loveliness.

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PREFACE

What kind of society would post-Mao China produce? It is this question that I ask myself repeatedly during this literary study, in approaching the untrodden path of the late 1970s and the early 1980s. The same question has also been raised by the historian Arif Dirlik in his 1981 article “Socialism without Revolution: The Case of Contemporary China” and put forward once again in his 2011 article “Back to the Future: Contemporary China in the Perspective of its Past, circa 1980.”¹ He reprints the old article in his 2011 article because he finds that the uncertainty in his 1981 observation refuses to go away. These two papers share this same beginning paragraph:

China’s present leaders have turned their back upon revolutionary solutions to the problems of socialism. Are they also prepared to abandon the quest for socialism? As revolutionary will surrenders to social necessity, the future loses its immanence in the present. We must ask once again if socialism can survive the extinction of the socialist vision and, if it does, what kind of society it is likely to produce. The Chinese themselves have no convincing answers to these questions. In an interview in 1980, Deng Xiaoping upheld socialism but refused to predict if it would prevail in the future. His response is typical of the uncertainty over the future of socialism in China that permeates Chinese political thinking today.²

What kind of society is it likely to produce? In 1981, Dirlik found the Chinese themselves had no convincing answers. It was an epoch of disillusion and nihilism, “the future loses its immanence in the present,” or, socialism no longer made promises about the future. But if this paragraph once again serves as the beginning paragraph of the 2011 article, obviously Dirlik

¹ See, Arif Dirlik, “Socialism without Revolution: The Case of Contemporary China,” *Pacific Affairs* 54, no.4 (Winter 1981-1982): 632-61; “Back to the Future: Contemporary China in the Perspective of Its Past, circa 1980,” *Boundary 2*, Spring 2011, 7-52.

² *Ibid.*, 7.

wants to ask the same question today: “Are [China’s present leaders and the Chinese people] prepared to abandon the quest for socialism now?”

Dirlik seems to be confident in suggesting the answer is still “not yet.” Is it too optimistic? Forty years after Mao’s death, so much has changed in China and the world, and China has not only incorporated itself into global capitalism but also seems to have become the dominant driving force of neoliberalism. We can easily find the expansion of capital, dramatic marketization and privatization, and the rising of a generation of bourgeoisie who have energetically pursued their cultural and political hegemony for the building of a bourgeois society. Meanwhile, we witness the dramatic pauperization of workers and peasants, and the repressive and exploitative policies continuously implemented by the regime to keep the working classes and rural population under control. Does it not prove that China has deviated from the quest for socialism?

However, it might be confusing to find that Xi Jinping, the current leader of China, persistently upholds the values of socialism while refusing to predict whether it will prevail in the future. And perhaps we need to also put into consideration the party leaders’ seriousness in recent years to revive Marxist ideology, the activities of so-called New Left intellectuals both inside and outside the Communist Party, as well as the recent left-leaning tendencies prevailing across the academic circle of Chinese humanities, and most importantly, the egalitarian consciousness and the remarkable resilience and perseverance of the ordinary Chinese commoners, as vividly exhibited by the heroine in the recently released movie *I Am Not Madame Bovary* (*wo bushi panjinlian* 我不是潘金莲), a common woman so resolute to

confront government officials at all levels.¹ Hence, we will come to recognize that “capitalism” in China is at least a “capitalism with Chinese characteristics.” But what is it? The answer remains uncertain, as if “the revolutionary past refuses to stay in the ‘dustbin of history.’”² And Dirlik argues, even though “the insistence on ‘socialism with Chinese characteristics’ often sounds quite vacuous, and yet it is a constant reminder of the Chinese resistance to dissolution into capitalism and the continued socialist future.”³

Putting aside the current questions, my research will choose to go back to the past, and give a thick description of the beginning, circa 1980. Indeed, the current debate could be an endless one, and various kinds of wishful thinking, “pro-” or “anti-” socialist, will inevitably color the evaluation of China’s present and future. I am afraid Dirlik himself also shares such a wishful evaluation, a projection of his own hope toward China when he hastily claims China’s continued socialist future. For me, however, the strength of this article does not come from its judgment, but comes from its patient observation, detailed description, and in-depth analysis in its 1981 version, where the facts of history rather than the ideas or desires of a historian speak. Therefore, Dirlik’s observation could at least remind us of two crucial issues long forgotten in the post-revolutionary atmosphere. First, the uneasy beginning of the post-Mao reform era around 1980, the “difficult ideological and political terrain that the Communist Party of China has negotiated.”⁴ It was uneasy because it was an era of chaos—socialism was no longer a future immanent in the present, the revolutions (especially the Cultural Revolution)

¹ *I Am Not Madame Bovary* Dir. Feng Xiaogang, Well Go USA, 2016.

² Arif Dirlik, “Back to the Future: Contemporary China in the Perspective of Its Past, circa 1980,” 8.

³ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 30.

failed, socialism became vague and the future remained uncertain. About the negotiation, Dirlik says it was a negotiation between the idealist revolution—anti-bureaucratism, egalitarianism, perpetual class struggle—and the necessity of “socialist” construction—economic development, political unity, social stability, and the restoration of privilege and inequality. Therefore, Dirlik reveals the burden of revolution at the very beginning of the post-revolution era, which leads to the second issue, that is, the revolution refuses to go away. Perhaps it has remained as a specter. Dirlik argues, it is because the century-long Chinese revolution was not just the product of revolutionary whimsy but was a real response to real problems of Chinese modernity in global capitalism. Therefore the revolution for Dirlik was a resolution toward the real social contradiction. It failed and might be excised from collective memory for a period, but the real contradiction has remained, and revolution would not disappear without consequence. Thus the contradiction, as well as the debts and legacies of revolution will persistently hover around.

This is what I have learned from Dirlik when he tries to understand the future by revisiting the past, or interpret “Contemporary China in the perspective of its past.” It has been a successful trial because we now know the confusion and uncertainty of the current situation of China may come from its uneasy beginning and the haunting coexistence of revolution and post-revolution, Mao and post-Mao, socialism and post-socialism. My dissertation starts from this point. Therefore, it could be considered as a deeper exploration of this intricate and almost untrodden beginning. Like Dirlik, my final purpose is also to understand present China, but the immediate subject of the research is the conditions in China around 1980. What kind of society

was the literature at the period likely to produce? What kind of Chinese experience was expressed?

Despite Dirlik's insight in his articles, his observations are limited by his research materials. As a traditional historian, he only investigates into the government documents and cares merely for the speeches and views of the political leaders. Could an interview about a political leader, Deng Xiaoping for example, represent the total conscious or unconscious of Chinese people in that period? In my exploration, rather, I will take advantage of the intricacy and vividness of the various kinds of literary texts of the period where the collective conscious or unconscious of the society could be approached. Here I am not merely arguing for a homogenous representation, as Benedict Anderson has demonstrated about the political function of "fiction" in imagining the nation-state of 18-19th century Europe, but rather about the "Literary Absolute" of aesthetic modernity.¹ The term "Literary Absolute" is used by Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe in their research on the modern concept of literature.² For them, German Romanticism and the new-born literature in the early 19th century contributed a lot to the formulation of the modern concept of the individual subject and the national Subject, and therefore became a totalizing power at that time when the old religious community collapsed. Now, if we revisit the uneasy beginning of the post-Mao China, we will find a similar situation about the "Literary Absolute." Together with the aesthetic and philosophical fervor of the early

¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London and New York: Verso, 2016.

² Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988.

1980s, there was also a remarkable phenomenon of a “literature boom” around the year 1980. It is a period of literature. You can find literature everywhere, in the numerous resurrected literary magazines, on the political “Xidan Democracy Wall” (“xidan minzhu qiang” 西单民主墙) in Beijing, in the covert art salons, in the underground newspapers, in the heated discussion about literature in university campus, in the air of the national broadcast, and even on the outdoor publicity boards in factories and remote villages. Hundreds of thousands of people wrote, read and discussed literature. If Dirlik is right in pointing out that it was a period of disillusion and nihilism, then it was also a period of self-enlightenment and emancipation of the mind, and it was mainly through literature that a large part of Chinese people rethought the meaning of their everyday life, about human nature and about politics, the ideal society and the future of China. Here, in literature, the anxieties and uneasiness, the complaints and hatreds, the desires and hopes of different fractions of Chinese people were recorded, articulated and fictionalized. This is why I argue the intricacy and vividness of the literary texts are precious resources for our understanding of the beginning of post-Mao China.

However, I will argue this is still a rarely explored field in the English-speaking academia. When I say it is “rarely explored,” I do not mean this “literature boom” did not draw any attention from the western world. On the contrary, today we can still find the curiosity and excitement of Western observers when they first encountered the new literature and new politics immediately after Mao’s death. Not long before we have E. Perry Link’s three volumes of post-Mao Chinese literature in translation (*People or Monsters*, 1983; *Stubborn Weeds*, 1983; *Roses and Thorns*, 1984), then Helen F. Siu and Zelda Stern’s collection (Siu and Stern, 1985),

and also substantive research articles collected in Kinkley's book (Kinkley, 1985) and Duke's individual study (Duke, 1985). But this first wave of studies are inevitably restrained by Cold War ideology, therefore for this first group of western readers, the post-Mao literature, "Scar Literature" ("shanghen wenxue" 伤痕文学) for instance, is mainly regarded as "literature of dissent." Even in Perry Link's 2000 book, the author still insists that "Scar Literature" resembles the "Thaw Literature" in the Soviet Union and thus uses the framework of "Thaw Literature" as his procrustean bed to tailor the otherwise detailed materials he has collected.¹ But it is obvious that the Post-Mao era witnessed the surge of massive works, most of which were historical novels that dealt with the protagonist's unsettling experience in the Cultural Revolution. Hence, these novels did not criticize the Soviet model of bureaucracy, but rather the dramatic anti-bureaucratization in the Cultural Revolution was the cause of the "scar" and target of "Scar Literature." The desire of "Scar Literature" was to reestablish the order rather than to "thaw" it out. We can even say the mainstream was a kind of "freeze literature" upheld by both the "returned" ("guilai" 归来) intellectuals and the "returned" old cadres. Or, to use Dirlik's observation, the politics around 1980 was to end the social antagonism and anarchism caused by the Cultural Revolution, then at the end of 1978, "the plenary session calls on the whole party, the whole army and the people of all nationalities to work with one heart and one mind, enhance political stability and unity."²

It is in this sense that I say the early post-Mao world is a world "rarely explored." If you

¹ See, Perry Link, *The Uses of Literature: Life in the Socialist Chinese Literature System*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 3-55, 4, 2000.

² "Back to the Future: Contemporary China in the Perspective of Its Past, circa 1980," 12.

want to explore a trail, the best way is to walk into it with your own feet, breathing the fresh air and having mud splattered on your shoe, rather than to use a helicopter and view the trail with a telescope, because the lens of the telescope would profoundly confine your perspective, just as Perry Link's procrustean bed, the framework of "Thaw Literature," has blocked him from finding anything other than the "dissent literature." He cannot find the intellectual class' desire and wish fulfilment of enlightening or silencing the proletariat, the various kinds of "human" voices in the period, the utopia of small-producers, the laboring body, and the threat of the "possessive individual," all of which I will elaborate in the following two hundred pages. What I attempt to do is a real expedition into the dark forest of the unclear beginning, to understand the critical social and cultural transformation from socialist to post-socialist China and to study the "individual subject" newly formed in that period, whose influence continues to shape today's China.

Perhaps my central question is then, "how should we understand the 'individual subject' in the immediate post-Mao period"? While it is widely recognized that the politics of the post-Mao era is the emergence of individualism and the farewell bid to Mao's idealism, socialism and collectivism, I will argue the pre-existing categorical framework in understanding the "individual" or "subject" limits our perspective. For Perry Link and other early western observers, the autonomous individual is understood in opposition to the repressive state, and such a binary opposition constitutes the basic ideological assumption of a liberal society in sharp contrast to an authoritarian society of communist state or even Oriental Despotism. For

other more updated books, like Yang Xiaobin's *The Chinese Postmodernism* (2002) and Cai Rong *The Subject in Crisis in Contemporary Chinese Literature* (2004), benefited from the prevalence of post-structuralist or deconstructionist critique of liberal conception of “subjectivity,” the authors now utilize the modernist and post-modernist weapons to criticize the realist representation and “subject” construction in the early post-Mao period. For Yang, the Chinese postmodernism in the “avant-garde literature” is extolled as rebels of the Mao-Deng meta-history. In such a framework the complicated “individual subject” problem in the late 1970s and early 1980s is immediately reduced to a kind of official “representational subjectivity,” that is to say, by using another helicopter or telescope, this “rarely explored” territory is abandoned once again without historical investigation. The only worthy literature for Yang is the one which intensely resists any subject formation - as Yu Hua's dismembered subject or Can Xue's unspeakable individual.¹ Cai's book shows a little respect to the different historical stages from early post-Mao to the late post-Mao. But for her the process of searching for subject in post-Mao China is always the process of the subject falling into crisis. It is a totally negative evaluation. For the early post-Mao period, it is the national and collective Subject in conflict with the individual subject, and for the later post-Mao era, it is market and global capitalism that encroaches on the autonomy of the individual.² Here I find a combination of a halfway post-modernist standpoint with the hidden liberal ideology in both of these two researches. However, what is more problematic in their works is their unreflective

¹ Xiaobin Yang, *The Chinese Postmodern: Trauma and Irony in Chinese Avant-garde Fiction*, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2002.

² Rong Cai, *The Subject in Crisis in Contemporary Chinese Literature*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004.

theoretical precondition of the conceptions of the western individual subject. The Procrustean bed remains and the meanings of Chinese humanity dramatically reduced.

How, though, could I find a new understanding about this “individual subject”? And how could I return to the first question “What kind of society is it likely to produce?” I will argue the Procrustean bed needs to be destroyed and I will manage to explore the trail with my own feet. To destroy the Procrustean bed, I will borrow these perspectives of critical theory in reexamining the limits of the basic categories defined by European humanities, for the latter, I need to engage in an in-depth analysis of the historical experience of contemporary China, as the writers of the period need to deal with both the debts and legacies of Chinese revolution, which made the problem of the “individual subject” extremely interesting and intricate, and out of which there emerged the controversial individual, or what I call the “wild individual.”

ABSTRACT

This dissertation attempts to examine Chinese realist novels (novellas) flourishing in the transitional period between Mao's era and post-Mao era (1976-1984). This period, rarely explored in English-speaking academia, constitutes a critical site to understand the critical social and cultural transformation from socialist to post-socialist China and to study the "individual subject" newly formed in that period, whose influence continues to shape today's China. How should we understand this "individual subject"? While it is widely recognized that the politics of post-Mao era is to bid farewell to Mao's idealism, socialism and collectivism, yet the traditional liberal approach to understand the "individual" or "subject" limits our perspective. As the writers of the period need to deal with both the debts and legacies of Chinese revolution, which makes the problem of the "individual subject" extremely interesting and intricate, out of which I will argue there emerged the controversial individual what I call "wild individual."

To speak specifically, my discussions are divided into three parts. Chapter Two concerns the enlightenment discourse. In my discussion of *The Class Master*, I will show such an enlightening posture is no more than the wish-fulfillment of the rising intellectuals, and such type of "enlightenment" a kind of monotheist enlightenment that intends to "enlighten" others. In my discussion of the *When the Sunset Disappears*, however, I will show a different type of

enlightenment, the atheist enlightenment, which highlights the principle of Spinoza's self-enlightenment.

Chapter Three studies the concepts of "human" in the period. The central text for discussion is Dai Houying's *Human, Ah, Human!* The novel was often interpreted by the liberal humanist discourse as the representative work of the "Thaw Literature." But in this chapter I will revisit the theatrical setting of the novel in which the various newborn "human" figures encounter and contend with one another. Rather than the sudden emergence of a humanist hero, or a Marxist humanist hero, what we see is the encounter of the Machiavellian wild individual, the philistines who pursue earthly happiness, and the romantics. Such encounter between the different types of "humans" provides us the untrodden path to approach the historical Real of the 1980s.

Chapter Four discusses the defective figure(s) of "productive-possessive individual" in the early 1980s. "Productive-possessive individual" is a term I create to approach the western concept of *homo economicus*. Here the use of the "-" indicates the "defectiveness" of this figure(s), that is to say, there were two discontinuous figures rather than one conceptual *homo economicus* at the time. The first figure is a young girl "carrying a load," a figure silhouetted by *A Tale of Big Nur* which presents a utopian figure of the lower-class laborers. The second is the proto-capitalist Little Carpenter in *Descendants of Lu Ban*, for which I will unfold an analysis of his political and aesthetic energy, as well as how this possessive individual caused the crisis of ethics of small-producers in the Chinese context.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION		iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS		v
PREFACE		vii
ABSTRACT		xvii
CHAPTER ONE	Realism and the Real: An Introduction	1
1.1	<i>Hibiscus Town</i> and the Historical Real	1
1.2	“Revisiting the 1980s,” a Revolution of Worldview	31
1.3	An Outline	52
CHAPTER TWO	Lights and Powers	56
2.1	Silence the Hooligan! <i>The Class Master</i> and His Desire	56
2.2	<i>Waves</i> and the Modernist Perspective	87
2.3	Light of Sunset, Or, the Atheistic Enlightenment	126
CHAPTER THREE	Human, Ah! Human	152
3.1	Showing the Real: a note on Form	158
3.2	The wild and the Machiavellian	163
3.3	The Politics of Everyday Life	176
3.4	Romantic Love and the Human	186
CHAPTER FOUR	Productive-Possessive Figure(s)	198
4.1	Defective Figure(s)	198
4.2	Qiaoyun is Carrying a Load: the Individuality of the Labourer	211
4.3	A Proto-Capitalist and the Crisis of Small Producer’s Ethical World	256
CONCLUSION	The Wild Individual	269
BIBLIOGRAPH		277

1.1 *Hibiscus Town* and the Historical Real**The Ideological Investment**

In this study, I will make several political interpretations of the literary texts. All these literary texts in my analysis come from the transitional period from Mao to post-Mao era, that is, the late 1970s and early 1980s, and all are realist fictions. That is to say, I have to cope with the intractable problem of “realism and the Real.” After the famous “Modernist-Realist” debate in the 1930s, and after the post-modernist attack on “readerly,” “realistic,” or “referential,” my claim or reclaim of realism for the Real is necessarily a strong and risky claim. I need an opportunity to elaborate my theoretical ambition, and this is why I choose *Hibiscus Town* (*furong zhen*, 芙蓉镇)¹ to begin the discussion.

The novel *Hibiscus Town* was written by Gu Hua in 1980, honored with the first Mao Dun Literature Prize (maodun wenxuejiang, 茅盾文学奖) in 1982 and was adapted for a film by Xie Jin in 1986 which earned it global reputation. It is an old text. However, perhaps it is one

¹ The Chinese title of this novel is “Furongzhen (芙蓉镇)” and its first English translation titled as “A Small Town Called Hibiscus” (Guhua, *A Small Town Called Hibiscus*, Beijing: China Literature Press, 1983). The novel had its film adaptation *Hibiscus Town* (Xie Jin, 1986) very soon and was apparently more influential than the novel both inside and outside China. In the following pages I will discuss the difference between the novel and the film, but in terms of its ideological effect, it is indeed very difficult to distinguish the film from the novel.

of the few texts in the early 1980s which still speaks to us today, and speaks to us repetitively. For example, it made its most recent appearance in Haiyan Lee's 2014 book, *The Stranger and the Chinese Moral Imagination*. What stuns me in Lee's interpretation, however, is her seemingly unsophisticated way in dealing with the theoretical problem of representation and the Real. In her seven-pages long discussion, the author uses more than six pages to introduce the plot and content of the story, to show the moral hostility of this homosocial Hibiscus Town toward the intrusive, dangerous woman in the novel, Li Guoxiang, as if the text could tell us "the Real" of China directly, that it could "reflect" the moral reality of this town as an allegory of the whole Chinese society.¹ But here I say it is a "seemingly unsophisticated way" because in Lee's chapter on socialist painting "water dungeon," she is sophisticated enough, both theoretically and historically, to expose how this socialist realistic classic is ideologically made up and forged. Why would one kind of realist text "reflect" the Real and another kind "dodge" the Real? Why is there blindness and insight at the same time? It seems to me that the deconstructionist theoretical attacks on representation cannot resist the lure of "realism," our anthropological curiosity toward the "truth." In other words, we need realism to represent the "Real." If the deconstructionist attacks have successfully problematized realism's epistemological claim, they also underestimate the power of its aesthetic and ideological claim. Ever since *Robinson Crusoe*, or let me use its original name, *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, Of York, Mariner: Who lived Eight and Twenty Years, all alone*

¹ Haiyan Lee, *The Stranger and the Chinese Moral Imagination*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014, 147-154.

in an un-inhabited Island on the Coast of America, near the Mouth of the Great River of Oroonoke; Having been cast on Shore by Shipwreck, wherein all the Men perished but himself. With An Account how he was at last as strangely deliver'd by Pyrates, realism has claimed its right and desire to represent the Real. When realism tells stories, it gives accounts about history, it creates figures, and it makes the readers believe. However, it is not these Barthes' misfired "reality effects"¹ which make the readers believe, rather, it is these readers, the rising bourgeoisie who choose to believe. Similarly, Haiyan Lee chooses to believe that the *Hibiscus Town* represents the Real of Chinese society. The text not only serves for Lee's theoretical elaboration, but also serves for her "ideological investment."

I borrow this term from Jameson's understanding of "interpretation" in *The Political Unconscious*. For Jameson, interpretation, or the question "what does it mean?" implies something like "an allegorical operation in which a text is systematically *rewritten* in terms of some fundamental master code."² A text needs to be rewritten when it is intended to mean something else. In the case of Lee's interpretation of *Hibiscus Town*, I will argue, she rewrites it by using the master code of the liberal hermeneutics which emerged from the ideological struggle of the French Enlightenment and has since been embodied in liberal humanism as well as its variant, liberal multiculturalism. In this sense, *Hibiscus Town* is rewritten or re-interpreted in the eyes of liberal humanism as a pre-enlightenment homosocial community. Here Lee might find something usable—an allegorical pre-modern rural society—in *Hibiscus*

¹ See, Roland Bathes, "The Reality Effect," *The Rustle of Language*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1986, 141-148.

² Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, Ithaca, 1981, 58.

Town for the further ideological investment. “Ideological investment,” Jameson talks about it when he tries to explain the master code of biblical hermeneutics in the medieval system:

So the interpretation of particular Old Testament passage in terms of the life of Christ – a familiar, even hackneyed, illustration is the rewriting of the bondage of the people of Israel in Egypt as the descent of Christ into hell after his death on the cross – comes less as a technique for closing the text off and for repressing aleatory or aberrant readings and senses, than as a mechanism for preparing such a text for further **ideological investment**, if we take the term ideology here in Althusser’s sense as a representational structure which allows the individual subject to conceive or imagine his or her lived relationship to transpersonal realities such as the social structure or collective logic of History.¹

“Repressing aleatory or aberrant readings” refers to deconstructionist’ attack on master code which I will deal with later. For now, let us focus on the two sides of this “ideological investment.” On one hand, consciously, individual subject conceives his or her lived image; on the other hand, probably unconsciously, the image deals with his or her transpersonal realities such as the social structure or collective logic of History.

These are the lure of realism, that is, the use of this rewritten text for readers’ further investments. We know, in the case of the Bible, first there is the literal history of Israel, then this history is rewritten around the life of Christ, and then the recoded text is used by a certain group of people in the Middle Ages to conceive their lived relationships to the collective society, for example, to help individuals bond with this world on a moral level and lead them to imagine the destiny of the human race for their collective future. As a Spinozist, Althusser’s redefinition of ideology legitimizes individual’s imagination as “real” and as “reason.” Each individual subject has his/her “passion” or “imagination” of the world, which does not need to be “correct”

¹ *Ibid.*, 31. The emphasis is mine.

or “wrong”; as long as it deals with the world, it works and produces, and thus constitutes the “real,” the “material.” The lure of realism partly comes from such an ideological investment to let people imagine a life world, a utopia or dystopia, and enable them to use it to resolve the real social contradiction, and let the “subject” utter in the symbolic world of language. For Jameson, “ideological investment” comes from Marx’s seminal analysis of petty-bourgeois ideology in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*,

What makes [petty-bourgeois intellectuals] the representative of the petty bourgeoisie is the fact that in their minds they do not get beyond the limits which the latter do not get beyond in life, that they are consequently driven, theoretically, to the same problems and resolutions to which material interest and social position drive the latter politically. ¹

Marx’s political analysis in this article is anything but a mechanical one, therefore we should at first carefully distinguish Marx’s reading of ideology from the traditional ideological analysis of later Marxists. “In their minds they do not get beyond the limits which the latter do not get beyond in life,” it does not mean that the individual subject would be fully conscious of his or her determination by class with sheer lucidity. On the contrary, the individual subject (for example, the subject of petty-bourgeois intellectuals in post-Mao China, which I will analyze in my research) is always obsessed with his/her personal identity, strongly holding to the myth of ego or the self, and therefore is locked into the self-imposed limitation of an isolated individual. But in this way, they simply do not get beyond the limits, which for Althusser and Jameson are the structural limits, that is to say, they need to deal with the transpersonal realities. The consciousness such as wish-fulfillment, desire, or imaginary investment of an individual subject is always positioned within the symbolic language of the social totality, within Althusser’s ideological relationship where the subject utters in dealing with the imaginary relationship with others. Therefore, we can also say that such an ideology functions unconsciously—unconscious in the sense of Jacques Lacan’s famous saying, “the unconscious

¹ *Ibid.*, 52.

is the discourse of other.”¹

In the following a few pages, I will use *Hibiscus Town* to elaborate the function of ideological investment in Chinese post-Mao realistic writings. Just as we do not know about the lives of the people of Israel before they were captured by the world of language in the Old Testament, as the world of things, we also do not know the lives of the people of Hibiscus Town before their stories were collected by Gu Hua, who, as a young writer, went into a small mountainous town in Hunan province to collect folk songs in the year of 1978. He hears a tragic story:

A young, hard-working woman during the “hard years,” she made enough money selling beancurd to build a storeyed house just before the Four Clean-ups Movement. During that movement she was classified as a new rich peasant and her husband, a timid butcher, hanged himself. Being very superstitious, she thought she had been fated to be the death of her husband, so at night she often went to weep at his grave. Then a prospecting team came to the village and was billeted in her house. One of its technicians was a bachelor in his thirties, and some younger members of the team offered jokingly to arrange for him to marry this young widow. Both were denounced and struggled against, and unable to stand the disgrace he committed suicide too. Convinced that she was ill-fated and had caused the death of another innocent man, the widow went secretly after dark to weep at the two graves.²

What we have here is perhaps the first interpretation of the original story. Evidently, it is already a coded story. Here Gu Hua as an anthropologist learned a story told by a native informant. And we find in this plotline the stereotype of a kind of folktales, “widow’s story.”

¹ About Lacan’s “the unconscious is the discourse of other,” Jameson’s article “Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan,” in Fredric Jameson, *The Ideologies of Theory*, London and New York: Verso, 76-124, 2008.

² Gu Hua, *A Small Town Called Hibiscus*, Beijing: China Literature, 1983, 258. See also, Guhua and others, “From novel to film: about the adaption of *Hibiscus Town (Part One)*” (“cong xiaoshuo dao dianying: tan furongzhen de gaibian (shang)” 从小说到电影——谈《芙蓉镇》的改编(上)), in *Contemporary Film (Dangdai Dianying 当代电影)*, No.3 (1986), 16-25.

As a generic type, a “widow’s story” in Chinese tradition always triggers two kinds of aesthetic mechanisms. One is the covert erotic desire, which appears in many places in *Hibiscus Town*, for example, the scene of the widow’s masturbation, “it was hot and she lay naked on her quilt. She covered her eyes as if in embarrassment, then lowered her hands to her breasts, still so full and firm.”¹ The other is the pathetic affect evoked by the painful destiny, and a typical scene of the pathos is that “a young widow goes to weep at his husband(s)’ grave” (“xiaoguafu shangfen” 小寡妇上坟). It is a famous staged image appearing in various kinds of local operas which could also be easily traced in one section of *Hibiscus Town*.² Indeed, Gu Hua is skilled in absorbing the elements of folk culture in his storytelling, which Meng Yue also finds in her case study of *White-Haired Girl* (*baimaonv*, 白毛女). Meng correctly points out that Yan’an culture is “structured around a certain folk lifeworld, ethical order, and moral logic.”³ What I need to add here is that this source of socialist aesthetics is struggling for years against another source of socialist realism—the left-wing enlightenment tradition which has been trying to eliminate the vulgarity, obscenity, and mediocrity of lower class culture. Therefore, Gu Hua’s reappropriation of folk culture could be regarded as a rebel against the asceticism and the neoclassic style in the official culture of the past decade.

Perhaps we could consider this as the first fictionalization of the raw material collecting

¹ Gu Hua, *A Small Town Called Hibiscus*, 186. In this scene, I find the shadows of some popular erotic folk songs, for example, *18 Touches* (*shiba mo*, 十八摸).

² *Ibid.*, 121-128.

³ Meng, Yue, “‘The White-Haired Girl’ and the historical complexity of Yan’an Literature” (“‘baimaonv’ yu Yan’an wenxue de lishi fuzaxing” “白毛女”与延安文学的历史复杂性), *Jintian* (*Today*), No.1(1993), 171-188.

from a remote mountain town. But it has not yet been a text for a worthwhile investment. Just like the particular Old Testament passage needs to be rewritten in terms of the life of Christ, the particular Hibiscus Town story needs also to be recoded into a master code of the period or the mainstream ideology of the time. As Gu Hua himself puts it, “the policy of the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the CPC opened my mind, and provided me with the epistemological position, as well as the courage and boldness to re-discover and re-analyze the South Hunan small town life which I am so familiar with.”¹ But the master ideology does not only directly derive from the official policy, but also contains the political unconsciousness of the readership, that is, the situation of the writer in 1980.

Obviously, I am using Sartre’s term here, and also Sartre’s understanding of “readership.” That is, the readers for whom the works are intended. Gu Hua considers this question seriously, for whom the work is intended? For the widow, the local troupes, or for a broader public? Sartre says, “the public intervenes with its customs, its vision of the world, and its conception of society and of literature within that society.” (76) This is what Barthes later terms as myth, fashion or style. But whereas Barthes cares only about the autonomy of individual “writing,” Sartre emphasizes the meaning of work, the acceptance of readers and the commitment of writers. The “readerly” and the “writerly,” I will argue right away these two dialectical poles should be given equal consideration. For now, I need to stress the importance of the ideological

¹ Gu Hua, *A Small Town Called Hibiscus*, 240. It is interesting to find that this paragraph in Gu Hua’s postscript in Chinese is deleted in the book’s English translation. Perhaps the author or the publisher or the translator do not want the foreigner readers know the close relationship between the politics and the production of this story.

investment for realism – it is where the “Real” is affirmed and trusted. We have mentioned the readers of *Robinson Crusoe* who choose to believe this fiction as real, that Robinson is the first true Man. Ian Watt in *The Rise of the Novel* provides us with a substantial study about the social status, the economic capacity and the religious and ideological imagination of this readership,¹ or, what Marx calls the rising class, which was trying to disengage from the old ideology and was constructing a “better” world or in their eyes the “real” way of life.

Sartre discusses the shared “situation of the writer in 1947,” “we all—or almost all—can be seen together in certain cafes, at the Pleiade concerts, and in certain strictly literary circumstances, at the British Embassy.”² A similar situation took place in 1980s Beijing, when the Chinese Writers Association organized a “Literature Training Institute” (“wenxue jiangxisuo” 文学讲习所) where the most promising young writers gathered together for lectures and seminars, as well as for reading, chatting, dating and dancing.³ According to Gu Hua and also Wang Anyi’s reminiscences, it was in such a collective atmosphere that *Hibiscus Town* was told, retold and finally written down.⁴ Hence, in the new version we find the evident transcoding. First, the plot is divided into four different periods according to the official historiography, and the individual time of the widow—Hu Yuyin in the novel—in the original

¹ See, Ian Watt, *The Rise of The Novel*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1957.

² Jean Paul Sartre, *What is Literature? and Other Essays*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988, 167.

³ Wang Anyi: “Moneries of Literature Training Institute” (“huiyi wenxue Jiangxisuo” 回忆文学讲习所) in *People’s Literature (Renmin wenxue 人民文学)* No.9 (2000), 68-73.

⁴ See “From novel to film: about the adaption of *Hibiscus Town (Part One)*.” See also, Liu, Wei, “The Birth of Classics: General’s Chant and *Hibiscus Town*,” (“mingzuo dansheng ji: jiangjun yin, furong zhen” 名作诞生记:《将军吟》,《芙蓉镇》) in *Xinwenxue shiliao(新文学史料)*, No.1 (2009), 136-143.

story (1964, 1966) now is punctuated by the political or collective time (prior to the “Four Clean-ups,” (“siqing” 四清) from “Four Clean-ups” to the Cultural Revolution, the Cultural Revolution, and the Reform Era). Obviously, the Cultural Revolution and the Reform Era become what Jameson refers to as “axial event”¹—the event to which everyday life is linked. The meaning of an individual’s life is clearly expressed in terms of political implication. Meanwhile, with the vivid exhibition of a heartrending story of a widow, the traumatic History of the Cultural Revolution and even the revolution is allegorically represented. And the resuscitation of Yuyin’s beancurd stand and her reunion with her second husband Qin Shutian symbolically means the resuscitation of China in the Reform Era.

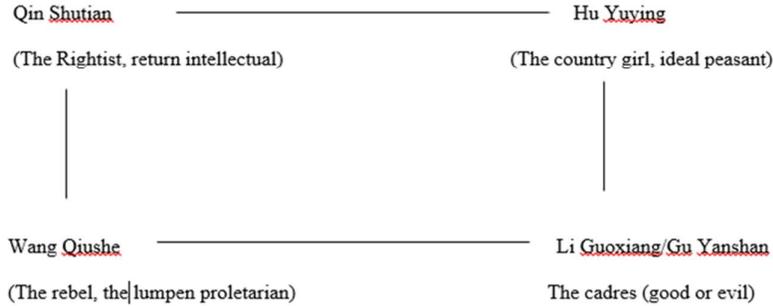
But it is merely a starting point for further ideological investment. Gu Hua has also learned from his classmates the basic coding system of “Scar Literature” (“shanghen wenxue” 伤痕文学). That is, what I will elaborate in detail in Chapter Two, the basic character system—the intellectual and the cadre, the atrocious rebel and the innocent girl. Here we find Gu Hua adds in political allotment of characters to the original moral opposition between Li Guoxiang (the evil woman)/Hu Yuyin (the good woman):

¹ *The Antinomies of Realism*, London and New York: Verso, 2013, 274.

The moral world of the folktale:

A good woman (Hu Yuying) ---- An evil woman (Li Guoxiang)

The political world of the post-Mao society:



Greimas' semiotic rectangle is used here only to explore the semantic and ideological intricacies of this text as well as the "subtext" of the whole ideological environment of the period. I will discuss in detail about how the intellectual's enlightenment wish fulfillment tries either to silence the lumpen proletariat or to sanctify the country girl in Chapter Two and how the ideal subject, the human "writ large" comes from the encounter of three different kinds of human figures (Wang Qiuhe's Machiavellism, Hu Yuyin's everyday life, Qin Shutian's romanticism). For now, I only want to show the process by which the widow's story transcodes into the political story and then to the story of Qin Shutian (the intellectual)'s desire. About the last transcoding, we are lucky enough to find the traces of the history of the writing of the novel. For example, when Gu Hua finished his manuscript, the journal editor thought it was necessary for her to help improve the texts in three aspects:

First, to largely delete the obscene words.

Second, to heroize and to explore the psychological depth of Qin Shutian.

Third, to create the figure of Wang Qiushe, the nasty lumpen proletarian.¹

We know these adaptations have nothing to do with the “real” of original history in a small town at Hunan province, but have a lot to do with the “ideological real” in the writer’s situation of 1980. As a veteran editor in an authoritative literature journal, the editor apparently knew more about the political atmosphere and the ideological environment of the entire readership at the time. Yet the adaptation was not done without resistance from the writer. We know Gu Hua treasured the obscene words and the erotic scene,² and although Qin Shutian finally became the hero in the novel, a few embarrassing moments about him remained and were used to restrain the unlimited elevation. However, all these “flaws” disappeared in Xie Jin’s film *Hibiscus Town*. In the novel, facing the violence of the Red Guards, Qin amuses them with his “devil’s dance,” “His bowl in one hand, his chopsticks in the other, he waved them this way and that, half crouching with his knees apart as he pranced forward, yelling in time with his movement: ‘Black-hearted devils want more! Black-hearted devils want more...’”³ What he can exchange by dancing is merely a bowl of rice, and for the bowl of rice he forgets his self-respect as a human-being. Does it also suggest His resistance? Or is it simply the author’s implied criticism? The text leaves it in ambiguity. But in Xie Jin’s film, this ironic scene is deleted, and in another scene, Qin dances the tango instead of the funny, humiliating “devil’s

¹ See in “The Birth of Classics: General’s Chant and *Hibiscus Town*.”

² We can find in Gu Hua’s later work *Vestal Virgin* (*zhennv* 贞女, 1987), the picture of an erotic woman and a timid intellectual man return. Perhaps it shows the strife between writer’s individual style and social fashion in Barthes’ words.

³ Gu Hua, *A Small Town Called Hibiscus*, 138.

dance,” showing his self-dignity instead of the self-negation. Another scene that disappears in the film, without surprise, is Hu Yuyin’s erotic masturbation. What replaced the scene in Xie Jin’s film to imply the intimacy and love, however, is the hackneyed scene of an intellectual “enlightening” a country girl—Qin teaches Hu to read. All these supplements serve for the desire or will-fulfilment of the rising intelligentsia. The naked body of a widow is seductive, but also dirty, animal-like and dangerous, and we know in the original story it caused the timid technician’s shameful suicide. But now, the desired object becomes a docile student girl, satisfying not only Qin’s sexual desire, but also Qin’s libido of spiritual superiority.

But, there is perhaps the fourth level for ideological investment, analogous to the level of the Biblical hermeneutics, which is the collective meaning of history. Hence we can say this Hibiscus Town is turned into the collective allegory of revolutionary China. As a successful cultural product for its readership at its time, *Hibiscus Town* helps to defuse the radicalism of Chinese modernity and to reorient China into the world history of global capitalism. I have described how its timeline serves for the stigmatization of the past and for the endorsement of post-Mao reform politics and the process of how the story was fictionalized for the wish fulfillment of the rising intelligentsia. But does it only show such an ideological closure? As simply the ideological investment of a particular group of people or as a kind of political literature? It exhibits an ideological picture but I will argue the political interpretation should go a little further. Because the conciousness of wish-fulfillment is also the unconciousness of the discourse of others, the ideological investment works on every social sector and therefore

inevitably encounters resistance. Therefore the entire system of ideological closure is the symptomatic projection of the social contradiction. That is to say, we can see not only the posture of the complacent subject, but also the irreconcilable demands and positions of antagonistic classes, the untamable and the ineradicable. Hence, we need to look at realism with another perspective, from a centrifugal viewpoint.

The Centrifugal Force

I think it is necessary to discuss the centrifugal force of the aesthetics of realist writing to counterbalance the undesirable repetition and dullness of the grand narrative. In this dissertation, I will continue to discuss seven other realist texts produced in the “writer’s situation of 1980.” Could the ideological structure mentioned above be applied to any of these narratives? Even in a single text, does each fragment of the text subject to a unitary, architectonic narrative? Or as Lukács requires, do we have to write as Balzac or Tolstoy with the result that “we experience events which are inherently significant because of the direct involvement of the characters in the events and because of the general social significance emerging in the unfolding of the characters’ lives?”¹ Lukács may not deny that he seeks a unified meaning to which the various components of the work can contribute in a hierarchical meaning system. His totalizing method is defensible in the concrete context of Popular Fronts in the 1930s when new literature for popular mobilization was in demand while the naturalist

¹ Lukács, Georg, “Narrate or Describe?” in *Writer and Critic and Other Essays*, New York: The Merlin Press, 1970, 116.

and modernist writing styles failed to provide the meaning for revolution.¹ And we must also take into consideration that different genres of art require different representational techniques. It is likely the audience of Xie Jin's *Hibiscus Town* in 1986 quickly forgot any unremarkable or insignificant detail of the film when he or she went out the cinema. Indulging themselves in the time line of the melodrama, the audience simply did not have a chance to contemplate or to resist "the spectator's process of association in view of these images is indeed interrupted by their constant, sudden change,"² as Benjamin observed long ago. It is therefore unrealistic to demand them to gain the pleasure of writing like Barthes' elitist, critical and patient reader.

But the aesthetic pleasure of a novel reader is a little different. In my reading of *Hibiscus Town*, what moves me is Yuyin's masturbation scene, in which "it was hot and she lay naked on her quilt. She covered her eyes as if in embarrassment, then lowered her hands to her breasts, still so full and firm;" or Qin Shutian's "devil dance," "His bowl in one hand, his chopsticks in the other, he waved them this way and that, half crouching with his knees apart as he pranced forward, yelling in time with his movement." Or, the moment when the ruthless cadre Li Guoxiang feels moved by the good-for-nothing rebel Wang Qiushe's sincere repentance, "At first Li Guoxiang frowned, then looked grave. His remorseful tears seemed to have softened her heart. Looking rather upset, she wiped her greasy hands with her handkerchief and sat back

¹ Lukács, Georg, "Realism in the Balance," in *Aesthetics and Politics*, London and New York: Verso, 2007, 28-59.

² Benjamin, Walter, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, New York: Schocken Books, 1969.

limply in the wicker chair. She felt rather at a loss—but only for a few seconds.”¹ What touches me here is the intensity of affects from the various kinds of existent individuals. However, they do not have the inherent significance related to the grand narrative; rather, they seem to be the counter force, the centrifugal force of the narrative. If the grand narrative of the novel could be considered as a symbolic act of the collective political unconscious, then what are the functions and roles of these fragmentary pieces for the political interpretation of realist representation?

My term of “centrifugal force” is inspired by Barthes’s thought of “writerly text.” “Why is the writerly our value? Because the goal of literary work (of literature as work) is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text.”² Here Barthes seems to talk about a method, a kind of reading behavior, a way of evaluation, a means of interpretation. But he also suggests a kind of text, perhaps a writerly text which is prepared for the reader’s writing. In contrast to the writerly text is its counter-value, the readerly text, which tries to hold everything together,³ the classic text, the text which Lukács admires. Equally, “the readerly” also refers to a kind of bad interpretation; for example, perhaps Lucien Goldmann’s rigorous interpretation based on the homology between the novel as a form and the “daily life of an individualistic society born of market production” as the content.⁴ If we follow Goldmann’s method, does it not mean once we find a great ideological structure, then every text will lose its difference? Here, a kind of writerly and centrifugal thinking seems necessary.

¹ Gu Hua, *A Small Town Called Hibiscus*, 186, 138, 165.

² Roland Barthes *S/Z*, New York: Hill and Wang, 1974, 4.

³ Gu Hua, *A Small Town Called Hibiscus*, 156.

⁴ Lucien Goldman, “Sociology of the Novel,” *Telos*, No. 18 (Winter, 1973-74), 127.

But we need to be a little patient. Barthes's concept of "writerly" is so famous that most students of literature studies today are all familiar with it. However, it is so easy to forget where it came from and to whom Barthes spoke. I will argue that the writerly/readerly distinction directly came from Sartre's prose/poetry distinction which was invented by the writer to criticize surrealist's obsession with poetic language and to propose a kind of utilitarian prosaic writing, or, the literature of commitment. Sartre's analysis is not unreasonable. He argues poetry is on the side of painting, sculpture, and music while the prose "is, in essence, utilitarian," and "the prose-writer as a man who makes use of words."¹ Therefore, when the modernist poets or surrealist artists resist the meaning as the product of language convention for the autonomy of art, the realist writers or the journalists try to use the language as a tool to fulfill their political commitment. In the eyes of Sartre, the early 19th-century realist writers are revolutionary prose-writers who use their literature to act and to rename, that is, to let the (old) nature lost its innocence and to create a new world. However, at the end of 19th century, the literary words find a moment of action apraxia, acting and undertaking are lost.² But for Sartre, it does not mean language stops being instrumental everywhere; the silence or the inaction is just the passive choice of the men of letters. Sartre thus encourages the revolutionary writers to act in the situation of the imperative and to project a future in his writings; for Sartre, it is a heroic behavior to create a new world of meaning.

¹ Jean Paul Sartre, *What is Literature? and Other Essays*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988, 34.

² Jean Paul Sartre, *What is Literature? and Other Essays*, 36.

I will argue Barthes heroic passion for his ideal readers that the reader is “but a producer of the text” comes from Sartre’s heroism. Besides, he also inherits Sartre’s definition of poetic writings and prosaic writings that the former focuses on the resistance of poetic word and the latter emphasize the communication and utilitarian function of language. Only for Barthes, the hierarchy or moral system of the binary opposition is reversed. In an atmosphere of anti-totalitarianism, the revolutionary commitment is no more than another mythology or writing style, while the critical, active spirit of the writer now is transplanted into the poetic resistance, or, in other words, modernism triumphs over realism once again. However, Barthes also inherits Sartre’s extremity in setting binary opposition. Sartre’s overhasty definition of prosaic writing ignores the anti-narrative motives inside the realist writings, and particularly in the naturalist writings. On the other hand, Barthes’ overvaluation of the unlimited writerly texts disregard the evident phenomenon that in any reading, including poetry reading, but especially the reading of realism, there is always a natural tendency for readers to seek meaning. Just as Jameson points out, with various codes in a text admitted, “as a matter of practical criticism, it must be clear to anyone who has experimented with various approaches to a given text that the mind is not content until it puts some order in these findings and invents a hierarchical relationship among its various interpretations.”¹ We need a readerly text, to put everything together. And I want to add, such a “putting everything together” is not necessarily a forming of a coherent, homogenous totality, but could be a centripetal force in tension with various

¹ Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 31.

kinds of minor centrifugal forces. It is the dialectics of poetic and prosaic, of writerly and readerly, or of affect and narrative as Jameson's new book elaborates, that produces the aesthetic power of realism.

Therefore, in my political interpretation, I will dig out the centrifugal forces of each text and try to interpret them in their own historical situations. In other words, these centrifugal fragments are indexes or entrances to the historical "real" other than the apparent narrative. These entries are decided by historical situations, rather than unlimited infinite writing. Although my analysis benefits a lot from Barthes' anatomy of classic texts as he does in *S/Z*¹, I do not think the writerly production is unlimited and could be done arbitrarily; such a negative, anarchist passion is the result of Barthes' own ideological context as has been argued by Jameson.² My method, therefore, is more Marxist than de-constructionist, which means, any strife or rifts between codes must necessary point to some kind of oppressed social contradiction and thus constitute one element of collective unconscious.

For instances, Barthes lists five kinds of codes for a text, the hermeneutic code (HER), the semantic code (SEM), the symbolic code (SYM), the proairetic code (ACT) praxis, and the cultural codes (REF). If we group them not according to the writerly and readerly but according to the centrifugal force and centripetal force, then we will find it is the proairetic code and hermeneutic code which orient the narrative development while the other three codes may produce some centrifugal force. In *Hibiscus Town*, we have such semantic code as "rightist,"

¹ Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, New York: Hill and Wang, 1974.

² See, Frederic Jameson, "The Ideology of the Text," in *The Ideologies of Theory*, 20-76.

which has strong connotation linked to a fixed figure—a rightist is an upright, romantic, heroic, and Human *writ large*. However, in the abovementioned scene of the “devil dance,” such a figure as the rightist is undermined. This centrifugal force lies in the first level of coding which, as we have already discussed, derives from its original story and the code system of folktale, where a kind of anti-intellectualism is traceable and is related to Mao’s mass politics before the establishment of the new-enlightenment discourse. Therefore, the centrifugal force of this particular SEM code unveils the unnaturalness and instability of meaning. And we can also talk about the SYM, for Barthes, the symbolic code which is used for structuring the symbolic grouping in the text is also a place for multivalence and for reversibility,¹ in my analysis of *Hibicus Town*, I have used Greimas’ semiotic rectangle to explore the semantic structure of the text; and I have exhibited a kind of character system to show how the minor characters are symbolically grouped to serve the ideological function of the hero and heroine, (i.g. the lumpen proletarian Wang Qiushe for the intellectual Qin Shutian, the evil, intrusive woman Li Guoxiang for the good, country girl Hu Yuyin. However, just as Alex Woloch’s book has elaborated, any exploitation of the minor character will cause the ironic effect which could undermine the meaning system of the whole.² The psychological fluctuation I have rendered about Li Guoxiang’s affect toward the good-for-nothing Wang Qiushe functions in such a way. And in the following chapter, I will also dig out the *ressentiment* and hatred of the lumpen proletarian, which shows the meaning structure of enlightenment discourse is nothing but the

¹ S/Z, 19.

² See, Alex Woloch, *The One vs. the Many*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009.

wish-fulfilment and power allotment of the ruling intellectual class, while the rebellious lower-class has never been safely silenced.

Finally, I need to say something about the cultural code (REF). For Barthes, the cultural code is an ideological specter, which only plays the oppressive function through repetition of stereotypes. Here we find that Barthes's ahistorical, anarchist critique of cultural codes fails to distinguish between different sorts of cultural ideologies and to discern their struggle for hegemony in the real history. The conflicts between cultural codes not only derive from class antagonism in a collective society, but also from the coexistence of various modes of production in the transitional period in which there is always a certain "cultural revolution" taking place, as shown in my case. And Jameson put it in this way:

That moment in which the coexistence of various modes of production becomes visibly antagonistic, their contradictions moving to the very center of political, social and historical life.¹

And in the bourgeois cultural revolution:

In which the values and the discourses, the habits and the daily space, of the ancient regime were systematically dismantled so that in their place could be set the new conceptualities, habits and life forms, and value system of a capitalist market society.²

I will elaborate in the following chapters on how a quasi-bourgeois "cultural revolution" emerged right after the death of Mao's Cultural Revolution. If Mao's "Great Proletariat Cultural Revolution" was a kind of cultural war targeting "bourgeois thought" in socialist China, then in the late 1970s and early 1980s realism, we witness the fighting back of the "petty-

¹ Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 95.

² *Ibid.*, 96.

bourgeoisie,” and the fictional world of “realist literature” became a battlefield where the new conceptualities, habits, life forms and value systems clashed and took form. But it is too hasty to say it was a capitalist mode of production forming in the year 1980. Although petty-bourgeois intellectuals learn the subject image and picture of the way of life from the 19th century European realist literature (as well as 20th century’s modernist literature), it is the post-Mao historicity that grounded the collective unconscious of the period. This is a period of the coexistence of various modes of production and also a process full of class antagonism and social contradiction. Therefore, what is worth our attention in the realist representation is not only the centripetal ideological investment, but also the centrifugal fragments causing the contra-investment. For instance, in the instance of Yuyin’s masturbation, such an erotic representation of the body and the everyday life of the country woman comes from the marginalized tradition of Mao’s period, which is the culture of lower-class, or “people’s culture.”

In Chapter Four, we can also find in Wang Zengqi and others’ “Street and Bazaar Literature” (“shijing wenxue” 市井文学) the similar representation, which not only challenges the idealism and asceticism of the Cultural Revolution, but also confronts new enlightenment elitism and its subject imagination. It is in this scene that we find the confrontation of cultural codes of lower-class civic culture and the quasi-bourgeois culture. I will discuss other centrifugal forces throughout this study and I believe only with the attention on such centrifugal forces could an in-depth political interpretation become possible.

Thick Interpretation

Now, if I want to use some words to sum up the method I have used in interpreting *Hibiscus Town* and in the literary analysis of the following chapters, I will term it as “thick interpretation.” This “interpretation” comes from Jameson’s classic elaboration in *The Political Unconscious* which I think is theoretically ground-breaking. Jameson’s theoretical elaboration on realism serves the foundation of my exploration of the late 1970s and early 1980s realism, although due to his overt addiction to narrative analysis, his concrete study on Balzac, Gissing and Conrad in this book might need to be affirmed and supplemented by other studies on the side of anti-narrative or centrifugal elements – just as what he has done in his recent book *The Antinomies of Realism*, in which the affect, the narrative distraction, and the perspective of minor characters have been sophisticatedly discussed in his new study of Zola, Tolstoy, Galdōs and others,¹

Theoretically, I follow Jameson’s claim/reclaim of political interpretation. For Jameson as well as for me, I have argued this political interpretation needs to be distinguished from the Marxist orthodox “ideological analysis,” for which Lukács’ essays on realism serve as important examples. With Lukács’ typifications, the cultural text is taken as an essentially allegorical model of society as a whole, its tokens and elements, such as the literary ‘character,’ being read as ‘typifications’ of elements on other levels, and in particular as figures for the various social classes and class fractions. The crucial issue difference between Lukácsian

¹ Jameson, Frederic. *The Antinomies of Realism*, London and New York: Verso, 2013.

method and mine is perhaps that the literature “mediation” in my studies is no longer a secure one – what have been represented in the world of words may index to the world of things, but it is a defective index rather than a perfect reflection. For the same reason, my interpretation is also different from Goldmann’s structural homology or other kinds of literary sociology influenced by his method. I will not deny the influence of external social elements – technical, institutional, economic, and political elements, etc. – upon the production of literature, but it is rarely an immediate influence on the aesthetics of the work; at least we need to preclude the mechanic determination and the homological reduction. However, so long as I agree with Jameson that (anti)narrative of a fiction is a socially symbolical act, I will not indulge myself in the immanent analysis of the text, and neither will I deal with the historically irresponsible and deconstructionist writing, the modernist or “open” text with the unlimited *écriture* or textual productivity. I still want to interpret the “meaning” of the cultural artifacts. I consider my reading or decoding as a way to access the historical Real.

How then shall we access the historical Real via cultural artifacts? Jameson’s method is based on his elaboration of Althusser’s “structural causality,” and in such a theory, the historical real speaks to the text with its “absent cause:”

That history is *not* a text, not a narrative, master or otherwise, but that, as an absent cause, it is inaccessible to us except in textual form, and that our approach to it and to the Real itself necessarily passes through its prior textualization, its narrativization in the political unconscious; ¹

We need to understand the cause/effect relationship in the Spinozist’ way, as expressed by

¹ Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 35.

Althusser, “the structure is immanent in its effects, a cause immanent in its effects in the Spinozist sense of the term that the whole existence of the structure consists of its effects.”¹ For Spinoza, the cause of the substance or attributes is no longer the abstract God. A particular substance, or an individual is not determined by some outside, universal “reason,” but by the immanent social structure he is trapped in. Following this logic, the division between mind and body as well as the hierarchy established between them are unnecessary. Cultural artifacts, such as Gu Hua’s *Hibiscus Town*, are produced inside the total social structure, the original folk tale, the small town life, the literary institution in post-Mao era, the cultural atmosphere in Beijing, Gu Hua’s personal trauma and desire, etc. “The whole existence” consists in the effects of all these factors. And the realist novel which is produced in the complexity of the invisible social struggles becomes a complicated mediation of the “whole existence of the invisible structure,” or, the structural causality, the historical Real. Therefore, thick interpretations of the literary text is to find the various kinds of ways to access the otherwise invisible history.

However, Jameson reminds us, the text is a free-floating object in its own right: it does not directly “reflect” some context or ground and in that case simply replicates the latter ideologically. Rather, it possesses some autonomous force in which it could also be seen as negating the context and creating the “subtext.”² Jameson may have a reason to emphasize the hero’s narrative act in its wish-fulfillment to write upon this “subtext;” as I have discussed, the protagonist serves as an agent of ideological investment. However, I will argue the “subtext”

¹ *Ibid.*, 24.

² *Ibid.*, 38.

is also written by other minor actors, the minor characters, the anti-narrative codes, the centrifugal forces as I have elaborated above. Their voices may be a little weak and vague, but it is also detectable and constitutes the necessary parts of the text's aesthetic power. Therefore, the coding, recoding, counter-coding work all together in the literary text in such a way that it makes itself to be seen as the rewriting or restructuration of a prior historical or ideological subtext. Such a text might be an imaginary resolution of the real contradiction, but it might also be an unsuccessful or unfulfilled resolution; in most cases it turns out to be the confrontation of different worlds. The latter then brings in the issue of a real intertextuality of various texts in a shared literary subtext. Different texts coexist yet not in a coherent way, rather, they appear in the form of the dialogical and the irreconcilable demands and positions of antagonistic classes. It is exactly what I want to render in my seemingly repetitive analyses of eight texts in total in this study. In other words, I will not only give some interpretations, but will also attempt to provide the thick interpretations.

I borrow the word "thick" from anthropologist Clifford Geertz's famous elaboration of "thick description" in "Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture."¹ Geertz's theory of culture shares with Jameson a similar theoretical background and critical attitude. The reason I mention him and make this final detour is not that I want to resort to the methodology of anthropology to assist my literary analysis. On the contrary, it is due to the academic situation I have faced, that is the literary studies in the field of East Asian Studies, which has already been severely

¹ See, in Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, New York: Basic Books, 1973, 3-30.

invaded by anthropology in its traditional and conservative sense. Naoki Sakai's excellent articulation of the problematic of the field in *Theory and Asian humanity: on the question of humanitas and anthropos* may provide us with a clear picture of the situation. He mentions the two movements of knowledge production in Asian humanity,

1. The first is a centripetal flow from peripheral sites to various metropolitan centers in Western Europe and North America. However, this flow of factual data about anthropos provided by the peripheries it therefore requires translation into the more general theoretical language of humanities.
2. The second movement is a centrifugal flow of information about how to classify domains of knowledge, how to evaluate given empirical data, how to negotiate with the variety and incommensurability of the body of empirical data from the peripheries, and how to render intelligible the details and trivia coming from these sites to a "Western audience."¹

To put it simply, the global division of labor in the production of knowledge about Asia is based on the old anthropological model. That is, treating Asia as the peripheral sites which provide the factual data, and North America as metropolitan centers which provide the theoretical language. In this sense, Sakai argues, Asian humanities is indeed a world of anthropology and only the European humanities is considered as the real humanities. Just as what I will show in Chapter Two, most of the discussions about Dai Houying's *Human, Ah, Human* in the English world focus on the misfired debates about whether the real "(western) human" appeared in China or not, or whether the Chinese individual subject is still in crisis today.² In this study, however, I will first ask, what is "human"? In the whole dissertation, I will focus on three categories, "the enlightenment," "humanism" and "homo economicus." All

¹ Naoki Sakai, "Theory and Asian Humanity: on the Question of Humanitas and Anthropos," in *Postcolonial Studies* Volume 13, (2010), 455.

² See my discussion in Chapter Two.

of these categories or theoretic conceptions come from western scholarship, so how could I use them to deal with the empirical data, the cultural artifacts from a Chinese context? Am I going to collect the Chinese empirical data and test them under the supervision of western categories? Or do I need to abstain from the intervention of western theory and to create the Chinese category, for example, the Confucian understanding of the human for interpretation? Perhaps Sakai has already given me an answer, that is, the East/West binary must be broken up, and so must the theory/practice division. For example, I will discuss the empirical history of the Enlightenment or the historical formation of “homo economicus” in Europe, and I will also investigate the genealogy of the theories about the “human” in the contemporary Chinese context. All these trials, however, need to be rethought and rearticulated under the theoretic contemplation of “thick interpretation.”

Indeed Clifford Geertz uses this category to deal with the basic anthropological dilemma between the abstract concept and the actual life world, that is, the difficulty of speaking with a stranger. Geertz points out, “doing ethnography is like trying to read (in the sense of “construct a reading of”) a manuscript - foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious emendations, and tendentious commentaries, but written not in conventionalized graphs of sound but in transient examples of shaped behavior.”¹ Geertz argues elsewhere it is very close to the experience of reading *Madame Bovary*, and I think it is necessary to add that such a reading is a patient Jamesonian reading, a reading of the shaped behavior of actants as socially

¹ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 14.

symbolic acts.¹ In this sense, the east/west division is not theoretically necessary for the anthropological dilemma, and we can find the same problem in the present/past division. How should we re-visit the past cultural artifacts? Or, how could the history speak to us? About this classic question on hermeneutics, for me, both Jameson and Geertz side with Paul Ricoeur's critical hermeneutics. First, Geertz argues, "what the ethnographer is in fact faced with is a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures many of them superimposed upon or knotted into one another."² This requires us to interpret with a great deal of care and to "find our feet in" their world, to think as the inside actors think. They practice (act and think) in their own social world where the meaning of their actions are determined. Geertz gives us an example, just to assume that in a village, one child twitches, and the other child winks, and the third imitates the winks, and the fourth parodies the twitches. A thin description is that all of them "rapidly constricting their right eyelids," while a thick description will try to provide us a stratified hierarchy of meaningful structure in terms of which the children twitches, winks, fake-winks, parodies. A good anthropologist will sort out their different significations and explicate how this meanings or codes overlap, conflict with, and coexist, and will explain their social grounds and imports. I think what I want to do is very close to such an anthropological analysis, for example, to sort out three different enlightenments in Chapter Two, three distinct faces of "human" in Chapter Three, a series of discontinued figures of "homo economicus" in Chapter Four and then also to reveal their determining grounds and imports.

¹ *Ibid.*, 15.

² *Ibid.*, 10.

But finally, the critical hermeneutics of all three scholars, Geertz, Jameson and Ricoeur, emphasize on the power of theoretical reflection or abstraction in their last analysis. This is not because they consider their interpretations to be scientific knowledge or as the objective reflection of the Real; but rather, it is because they believe their interpretation is merely a fiction, fiction in the sense of “making,” or an attempt to elaborate the theoretical meaning of the remote past, or the remote east, to us and to now. Thick interpretations work for the theoretical reflection as a practical intervention, which is not without political and ideological implications. Why do I want to launch a theoretical and practical revisiting of the almost untrodden world of realism in the late 1970s? I think it is necessary to give a “thick description” of the rising interests of the “revising the 1980s” in contemporary Chinese intellectual world, for the purpose of providing a background knowledge about the starting point of this research.

1.2 “Revisiting the 1980s,” a Revolution of Worldview

Now, I will start to introduce the "Revisiting the 1980s" (“chongfan bashiniandai”重返八十年代) movement, a movement launched almost ten years before, which has become one of the most popular topics in the field of literary studies in mainland China. However, the importance of this revisiting comes not only from its importance and popularity as “a revolution in worldview,” as noted by a Japanese observer, but is also because of its critical power—the old worldview it attacks which dominated the field of Chinese literature studies both inside China and outside China.¹ In the English-speaking world, in fact, the arrival of Chinese dissenters since the early 1980s has fundamentally shaped the worldview of the field of contemporary Chinese literature. *Today* (*Jintian*, 今天) has been resurrected in the early 1990s and has a huge influence not only on the dissent artists but also upon the researchers both inside and outside China. What could be easily detected in North American scholarship on Chinese literature of the 1980s,² for example, is also an outline of “Pure Literature” (“chun wenxue”

¹ See, Miyuki Kato, “Revisiting the Literature of the 1980s: Revisiting the Historical Site” (“Chongfan bashi niandai wenxue: yi chongfan bashi niandai wenxue xianchang wei genju” 重返八十年代文学：以重返八十年代文学现场为根据) *Dangdai zuojia pinglun* (当代作家评论), No.1 (2010), 198-199.

² I need only mention Jing Wang’s *High Culture Fever: Politics, Aesthetics, and Ideology in Deng’s China* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1996); Xudong Zhang’s *Chinese Modernism in the Era of Reforms: Cultural Fever, Avant-Garde Fiction, and the New Chinese Cinema* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1997) and Xiaobin Yang’s *The Chinese Postmodern: Trauma and Irony in Chinese Avant-Garde Fiction* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2002) as three famous cases. Indeed, it is a little surprising that although these books have strikingly different arguments, they share a quite similar picture of the literature of the 1980s. About literary historiography in mainland China, see, Li, Yang and Hong, Zicheng “Letters on the Writing of the History of Contemporary Chinese Literature” (“Dangdai wenxueshi xiezuo ji xiangguan wenti detongxin” 当代

纯文学) from the “Misty Poetry” (“menglong shi” 朦胧诗) toward the “Root-Seeking Literature” (“xungen wenxue” 寻根文学) and “Avant-Garde Fictions” (“xianfeng xiaoshuo” 先锋小说) which is also the mainstream narrative of Chinese literary historiography in mainland China nowadays. Another correlation between earlier overseas observers in the West¹ and some mainland Chinese literary scholars regarding post-Mao literature is their shared liberal ideology, such as the antagonistic relationship between individual and state, the view of Chinese post-Mao literature as “Thaw Literature,” and the view of Mao’s China as “Oriental despotism.”² Indeed, it is precisely these discourses of the “pure literature,” the dramatic discontinuity between Mao and post-Mao, the enlightenment, the autonomous subject, that constitute the targets of the “revisiting” of the 1980s, which consider such discourses as ideological straitjackets that need to be peeled off immediately.

The Internal Rebels

文学史写作及相关问题的通信), *Wenxue pinglun* (文学评论), No.3 (2002), 21-33

¹ Perry Link in his book *The Uses of Literature: Life in the Socialist Chinese Literature System* gives a thoughtful review of these early studies, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000, 3-12. See also, Kam Louie’s *Between Fact and Fiction: Essays on Post-Mao Chinese Literature and Society*, Sydney: Wild Peony, 1989; Michael S. Duke’s *Blooming and Contending: Chinese Literature in the Post-Mao Era*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985; and the collection edited by C.Jeffrey Kinkley, *After Mao: Chinese Literature and Society 1978-1981*, Cambridge and London: The Harvard University Press, 1985; etc.

² Although such ideological cliché is lifeless, it is too early to look down on it as a dead dog. In mainland China, for example, a textbook with such platitudes was published in 2005 and reprinted in 2011, see Dong Jian, Ding Fan, Wang Binbin, *New History of Contemporary Chinese Literature (Zhongguo dangdai wenxueshi xingao 中国当代文学史新稿)* Beijing: Beijing shifan daxue press, 2011. In North America, although Haiyan Lee’s recent book *The Stranger and the Chinese Moral Imagination* (2014) is camouflaged with a wide variety of critical theories, we can still detect such an old framework.

“Revisiting the 1980s” is a slogan first put forward by two Beijing-based scholars, Li Yang and Chen Guangwei in 2005. In 2009, a series of three books were already published that concerned the topic of “revisiting the 1980s,”¹ from which we can find the leading proponents of the “revisiting” movement. This project gathers a group of the most active and influential scholars in the field of contemporary Chinese literature studies: Chen Guangwei at People’s University and his doctoral students, the forthcoming junior scholars that would later become the main force of the campaign; Hong Zicheng, He Guimei, Li Yang at Peking University; Kuang Xinnian, a famous New Leftist scholar representative of the critical atmosphere at Tsinghua University; and Luo Gang at East China Normal University, who with another Shanghai scholar Cai Xiang facilitate the trend of “revisiting” in Shanghai academia.

All of them are indeed already at the center of Chinese humanities. But how could a revolutionary movement come from the center rather than the periphery? To answer this question, we should understand the internal tension and hierarchy between the so-called “Modern Literature” (“xiandai wenxue” 现代文学, 1919-1949, the literature of Republic China) and “Contemporary Literature (“dangdai wenxue” 当代文学, literature dated from 1949, the literature of PRC period)” in Chinese literature studies. Since the 1980s, for many Chinese literature scholars, “modern literature” is considered as the classic and the standard while the

¹ These three books are: Cheng Guangwei, ed. *Revisiting the 1980s* (*Chongfan bashi niandai* 重返八十年代) Beijing: Peking University Press, 2009; Cheng Guangwei, ed. *Several Faces of Literary History: Re-discussing the Events in the 1980s* (*Wenxueshi de duochong miankong: bashi niandai wenxue shijian zai taolun* 文学史的多重面孔：八十年代文学史事件再讨论) Beijing: Peking University Press, 2009; Cheng Guangwei, *Lectures on Literature: the 1980s as a Method* (*Wenxue jianggao: “Bashi niandai” zuowei fangfa* 文学讲稿：“八十年代”作为方法) Beijing: Peking University Press, 2009.

authors of “contemporary literature” are merely thought of as either deviations or followers. Such a hierarchy is buttressed by the new established historiography of 20th century Chinese history and literature. “Talks on 20th Century Chinese Literature” (“ershi shiji zhongguo wenxue sanren tan” 二十世纪中国文学三人谈)¹ is just such a monumental manifesto, in which a link was established between the “late Qing literature,” “modern literature” and the post-Mao New Era literature under the title of “world literature” and literary modernity. By establishing “coherence” and “continuity” between the pre-Mao and post-Mao period, such historiography treats the left-wing literature which burgeoned in late 1920 and was full-blown in Mao’s China as “deviation” and removes them out of the genealogy of “Chinese literature.” As a dominant discourse, it implies a huge discursive discontinuity and rupture between Mao’s era and post-Mao era in establishing the “coherent” history of “20th Century Chinese literature.”

Therefore, the establishment of such historiography is not without disciplinary violence. Hong Zicheng, who has been teaching contemporary Chinese literature since the 1960s and has written the *A History of Contemporary Chinese Literature*,² an established professor in the field of contemporary Chinese literature, expresses his mixed feelings of humiliation and anxiety

¹ See Huang Ziping, Chen Pingyuan, Qian Liqun “Talks on 20th Century Chinese Literature,” (“Ershi shiji zhongguo wenxue sanrentan” 二十世纪中国文学三人谈) Beijing: Renmin wenxue Press, 1988. Before being printed in book form in 1988, these talks had already been published in journals and earned widespread influence as early as 1985.

² Hong Zicheng, *A History of Contemporary Chinese Literature*, (*Zhongguo dangdai wenxueshi* 中国当代文学史) Beijing: Peking University Press, 1999. Since this book has been published in 1999, it has soon be accepted as an authoritative work on the literary history of PRC. It has already been translated and introduced into the English-speaking world (*A History of Contemporary Chinese Literature* Leiden and Boston: Brill Press, 2007).

when facing “modern literature” scholars.¹ Indeed, both Hong Zicheng and Li Yang are experts of the socialist realist literature, or the so-called “Seventeen Years Literature” (1949-1966), and they had a few correspondences in discussing how to study socialist literature in the late 1990s.² In hindsight, we can understand that their anxiety comes from the awkward position of socialist realism in particular and Mao’s socialist China in general. Although Hong’s critical attitude toward the totalitarian control of literature in Mao’s period is evident, Hong, as an experienced researcher of socialist realism, feels reluctant to excise entirely the “socialist realism” from history of modern Chinese literature as a tumor. Besides, as a historian equipped with theories of hermeneutics, he is cautious about any “objective” claim of the history of “modernization” of Chinese literature, or any “universal” claim about the standard of “world literature.” Instead, his own historical investigation of socialist realism in Mao’s era is sophisticated enough to understand and evaluate literature in its own historical context. His “history of contemporary Chinese literature” could therefore be considered as a combination of archaeological survey and a sociological study infused with his attitude of ambivalence and hesitation.

Li Yang shares with Hong some kind of ambivalence and hesitation toward socialist realism, which partly derives from his theoretical standpoint, a deconstructive attitude. For him, neither left-wing literature nor enlightenment literature nor pure literature in the 1980s could

¹ See, Hong Zicheng, *Questions and Methods*, (*Wenti yu fangfa* 问题与方法) Beijing: Sanlian shudian press, 2002, 3-15.

² Li Yang and Hong Zicheng, “Letters on the Writing of the History of Contemporary Chinese Literature,” 21-33.

get rid of politics and ideology; they are rather produced discourses, claimed truths, and therefore they exhibit the different aesthetic stages along which the modernity of 20th century of China unfolds. In this sense, Li will not disagree with Hong's critique of totalitarian control in socialist cultural production, but he wants more to emphasize that such a critical attitude toward social control should be applied to any kind of knowledge production, including the production of "New Enlightenment" ("xin qimeng" 新启蒙) discourse in the 1980s.¹ Unlike the supporters of "pure literature" and "20th Century Chinese Literature," he argues that socialist aesthetics should be taken seriously and is worth a sophisticated study. He published a book on socialist realism as early as 1993. His second book came out a decade later, titled *Re-reading of Chinese Literary Classics Between the 1950s and 1970s* (*wushi zhi qishi niandai zhongguo wenxue jingdian zuopin zaijiedu* 50-70 年代中国文学经典作品再解读), which was obviously influenced by another book published oversea, *Re-reading* (再解读).² Li also coauthored another book with an American visiting scholar Peter Button in 1993.³ Indeed, if

¹ Ibid.

² See Li Yang *Resisting Fate: Socialist Realism* (*Kangzheng sumin zhilu: shehuizhuyi xianshizhuyi* 抗争宿命之路: 社会主义现实主义)(Changchun, Shidai wenyi press, 1993), and *50-70 Rereading of Chinese Literary Classics between the 1950s and 1970s* (*Wushi zhi qishi niandai zhongguo wenxue jingdian zai jiedu* 50-70 年代中国文学经典再解读), Jinan: Shandong jiaoyu press, 2006. Methodologically, Li Yang's "Re-reading" is close to another *Re-reading*, a book edited by Xiaobing Tang and written by a group of oversea scholars who have interests to revisit the "left-wing Chinese literature" with their newly-learned critical methods—feminism, post-colonialism, post-structuralism, etc. This book is first published in Hong Kong in 1993 and is widely circulated among Chinese literature researchers in and outside China. I notice that in the second edition of this book, Li Yang's studies has already been included in. See Tang Xiaobing ed. *Re-reading: The people's literature and art movement and its ideology* (*Zaijiedu: dazhongwenyi yu yishixingtai*, 再解读: 大众文艺与意识形态), HK: Oxford University Press, 1993; expanded edition, Beijing: Peking University Press, 2007.

³ Li Yang and Peter Button, *Culture and Literature: a Gaze at the Turn of the Century*, (*Wenhua yu*

we count in another Beijing-based scholar Han Yuhai's research,¹ we may find that by the middle of the 1990s, a small group of "socialist literature" researchers had already gathered together as "internal rebels" and launched a counter-attack on the hegemony of "modern literature." The "revisiting" of the 1980s, therefore, is inseparable from the "re-reading" of socialist realism - for these "rebels," socialist culture should not be abandoned hastily, and Mao's China should be revisited and reconsidered carefully.

Under such a perspective, Li Yang's two leading articles, "The Importance of Revisiting 'New Era Literature'" and "Revisiting the 1980s: Why and How,"² can be treated as the guiding statements for this movement. The target of this campaign is two dominant discourses produced in the 1980s, the "Pure Literature" discourse and the "New Enlightenment" discourse. The "Pure Literature" discourse stresses the autonomy of literature and suggests that any literature concerned with politics, like the "Left-wing Literature," ("zuoyi wenxue" 左翼文学) the "Nationalist Literature," ("minzuzhuyi wenxue" 民族主义文学) the "Worker, peasant and soldier's Literature," ("gong nong bing wenxue" 工农兵文学) or even the "Scar Literature"

wenxue: shijizhijiao de ningwang 文化与文学：世纪之交的凝望) Beijing: Guoji wenhua press, 1993. In 2009, Button finally published his own study on socialist realism and Chinese aesthetic modernity. However, in North America, this ambitious book seems not as fortunate as his comrades' in China. See, Peter Button, *Configurations of the Real in Chinese Literary and Aesthetic Modernity*, Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2009.

¹ See Han Yuhai, *From Red Rose to Red Flag*, (Cong "hongmeigui" dao "hongqi" 从“红玫瑰”到“红旗”) Shanghai: Shanghai yuandong press, 1998.

² See Li Yang, "The Importance of Revisiting 'New Era Literature'," ("Chongfan 'xinshiqi wenxue' de yiyi 重返“新时期”文学的意义) *Wenyi yanjiu*(文艺研究), No.1 (2005), 5-11; and "Revisiting the 1980s: Why and How?" ("Chongfan bashi niandai: weihe chongfan yiji ruhe chongfan" 重返八十年代：为何重返以及如何重返) *Dangdai zuojia pinglun*(当代作家评论), No.1 (2007), 45-54.

and “Reform Literature” “gaige wenxue” 改革文学) in the late 1970s and early 1980s, must be disparaged as impure or simply non-literature. Following this logic, to find the “Pure Literature” or the “genuine” literature in the 1980s, we have to follow the outline mentioned at the beginning, that is, the modernist literature from “Menglong Poetry” to the “Root-Seeking Literature” and the Chinese Avant-Garde fictions. However, under the historical picture of such a discourse of “Pure Literature,” the status of late 1970s and early 1980s literature seems a little bit ambivalent. While this period is considered as a start, or as a second “enlightenment” epoch following the first “enlightenment” in the May Fourth period, in contrast to which the Mao’s time is viewed as an ominous revival of the “pre-modern,” “traditional,” and “feudal” China.¹ However, it is also regarded as a nascent period, reaching its full-fledge only around the year 1985 when another rupture is supposed to take place with the arriving of Avant-Garde literature.

Restrained by such straitjackets as well as the historiography of “twentieth-century Chinese literature” with its emphasis on continuity and discontinuity, Li Yang argues, not only in-depth explorations of socialist aesthetics and culture become impossible, but a much more complicated, vivid, and heterogeneous picture of the literature of the late 1970s and early 1980s is obscured. Li Yang even argues that the “rupture” between Mao and the post-Mao period is a

¹ However, according to He Guimei’s analysis, to disparage Mao’s China as “feudal” China and to disparage it as “traditional” have different political implications. “Feudalism” is still a Marxist jargon and thus assumes the Marxist linear history (from a feudal society to a capitalist society to a socialist society), while the term “tradition” betrays the infiltration of modernization paradigm which became dominant in the middle of the 1980s. See *The Archival Knowledge of New Enlightenment: Culture Studies of China’ 1980s*, (*“Xin qimeng” zhishi dang’an: bashi niandai zhongguo wenhua yanjiu* “新启蒙” 知识档案：八十年代中国文化研究) Beijing: Beijing University Press, 2010. 14-21.

discourse forged by the “New Enlightenment.” He asks, “if there are no ‘the Seventeen Years Literature (1949-1966)’ and the literature of the Cultural Revolution, where could the 1980s’ literature come from?”¹

This question indeed becomes the starting point of various kinds of revisiting in the last decade in China and Li’s polemical question has already been partly answered by numerous later studies. But I need to also point out that such a bold challenge itself is preconditioned by its own historical context, or in other words, conditioned by its own ideological investment, and supported by its own collective and political (un)consciousness. Just as a critic points out, precisely because serious examinations of the legacies and debts of “left-wing literature” were avoided in the 1980s, today, under the new situation of global capitalism, the repressed question has reemerged.²

Left-leaning: the Context

Li Yang repeats Croce’s saying that “all history is contemporary history” in his leading articles, but he and his comrades Chen Guangwei both seem to fail to elaborate the disconcerting contemporary situation which has indeed backed up their campaign. About such a situation, perhaps Wang Hui’s critique of “New Enlightenment” discourse in the late 1990s is an eye-catching beginning. According to Wang, the heroism of the “New Enlightenment”

¹ Li Yang, “The Importance of Revisiting ‘New Era Literature,’” 5.

² Wang Yao, “Revisiting the 1980s and the Narrative of Contemporary Chinese Literary History,” (“Chongfan bashiniandai’ yu dangdai wenxueshi lunshu” “重返八十年代” 与当代文学史论述) *Jianghai xuekan* (江汉学刊), No.5 (2007), 191-195.

intellectuals suffered a severe setback when facing the arriving of the global market in the early 1990s. In the “Debate on Humanism,” (“renwen zhuyi lunzheng”人文主义论争) several New Enlightenment intellectuals experienced a sense of “guilt” because of their impotence in resisting the rampage of the global market. Indeed, such a guilty feeling also appears in Wang Hui’s own response to the dramatic marketization and privatization in the 1990s. In the 1980s, the intellectuals embraced and dreamt about the arriving of the market, but in the 1990s, they found that the marketization and privatization came along with the pauperization and subalternization of the Chinese working class.¹ This is the reason why Wang launched his fierce critique of Neoliberalism and the “New Enlightenment” discourse in his two famous articles, “Contemporary Chinese Thought and the Question of Modernity (“dangdai zhongguo de sixiang zhuangkuang yu xiandaixing wenti,” 当代中国的思想状况与现代性问题) and “Roots of China’s Neoliberalism.” (“zhongguo ‘xinziyou zhuyi’ de lishi qiyuan” 中国“新自由主义”的历史起源)² Two critical issues are raised: the necessity to criticize modernization and global capitalism, and the need to reconsider Mao’s socialism as “anti-modern modernity.” Anti-modern for Wang implies the refusal of capitalist modernization and a desire for socialist

¹ See Wang Hui, “Restructuring and the Historical Fate of China’s Working Class,”(*Critical Asian Studies* Volume 40, No.2(2008),163-209), see also Rebecca Karl and Cui Zhiyuan’s introduction of this article. To understand the “fate” of China’s working class more visually, Zhang Meng’s film, *The Piano in a Factory* (2010) and another 9 hours long documentary film by Wang Bing, *Tie Xi Qu: West of the Tracks* (2007) will be helpful.

² See in Wang Hui, *China’s New Order: Society, Politics and Economy in Transition*,(Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2006) “Contemporary Chinese Thought and the Question of Modernity” first published in Korea in 1994 and then arrived in China in 1997. The article raised a heated debate between the so-called Chinese “New Left” and the “liberals” in the late 1990s.

utopia characterized by radical egalitarianism, mass democracy, and the passion for anti-bureaucratization. Modernity references to the modernization agenda in Mao's China, industrialization, bureaucratization, capital accumulation, etc. At this moment Wang was far from an ardent defender of Maoism, rather, he insisted that the critique of Mao's China should focus on the socialist practice of modernization rather than its anti-modern projects. However, the post-Mao New Enlightenment discourse criticizes the feudalism in Mao's period and endorses the modernization agenda and thus "consciously or unconsciously, New Enlightenment thinking pursued Western capitalist modernity."¹ Therefore Wang argues that the New Enlightenment discourse is the root of Neoliberalism, and this explains why the New Enlightenment intellectuals found themselves powerless in front of the rampaging power of marketization and subalternization of the working class.

Such a generalization may seem to be a little hasty, particularly when Wang tries to connect the New Enlightenment and its scientificism in the 1980s with the scientific worldview that lasted through the whole of 20th century China and that served for the Hayek's market theory in the late 1980s in his other writings.² Wang does not pay much attention to the truth or *Raison D'etre* of the "New Enlightenment" discourse. For example, Pi Kyunghoon in his recent article "Science and the Rebuilding of the "Rational Subject" in 1980s China"³ targets such a New

¹ Wang Hui, *China's New Order: Society, Politics and Economy in Transition*, 156, 157.

² Wang Hui, "The Fate of 'Mr. Science' in China: The Concept of Science and Its Application in Modern Chinese Thought," *Positions*, 1995 (Spring), 1-68.

³ Pi Kyunghoon, "Science and the Rebuilding of the "Rational Subject" in 1980s China," in *Frontier of Literary Studies in China* No4.(2016).

Left over generalization and sets out to investigate what Chinese intellectuals were actually resisting at this particular historical moment around 1980. With a sophisticated investigation, he finally finds that “Scientific Marxism” in Mao’s China was the main target of the scientific discourse in the early 1980s. This is to say scientific discourse in early 1980s dealt with his/her own problem rather than a preparation for the arriving of the market and global capitalism. This and other studies remind me of the necessity to distinguish the New Enlightenment as a real political practice in its own historical context from the New Enlightenment as an ideology appropriated by the neoliberal politics whose blindness has been amplified in the context of 1990s. If we observe from the former sense, then we will find the seemingly coherent discourse of “New Enlightenment” is itself composed of a series of discontinuous, intermittent moments each with its own *Raison D’etre*.

However, in the latter sense, I think Wang’s excoriation of New Enlightenment discourse is timely and far-reaching. Actually, in many aspects, He Guimei’s new influential book¹ could be considered as an improvement and to some extent a correction of Wang Hui’s general critique of the New Enlightenment discourse, providing us with a comprehensive understanding of this discourse and its effects on the 1990s. For example, she points out the humanist discourse prevalent in the 1980s obstructed the understanding of the “human” in a socio-economic sense. And the ideological conception of the human as an “autonomous” individual in effect facilitated the process of privatization and resulted in unequal redistribution

¹ He Guimei, *The archival knowledge of new enlightenment: cultural studies of China’s 1980s*.

of social wealth in the 1990s. Here the influence of Wang's analysis on He's book is apparent and we can even argue that Wang's early critique of the New Enlightenment discourse is the precedent of the "revisiting the 1980s" and it reminds us of the "left-leaning" background of this "revisiting."

But I think it is too hasty to classify the "revisiting" movement as a cultural practice of the New Leftist politics.¹ Cheng Guangwei, for instance, takes care to distance himself from the leftist standpoint, and Hong explicitly expresses his misgivings on some uncritical reactivation of Maoist discourse.² Nonetheless, all these proponents share a critical attitude toward the discourse and worldview inherited from the late 1980s. What is more important, the nationwide acceptance of "revisiting" indicates a silent paradigmatic transformation in Chinese humanities. I think it is safe to say that a "left-leaning" cultural atmosphere has already emerged in Chinese humanities in the past ten years, in particular among the younger generation. The proofs are varied. A revealing case is a favorite book written by Yang Qingxiang, a student of Cheng Guangwei and an active participant in the "revisiting movement" and now a junior scholar at Renmin University of China. The title of the book is "The post-80s generation, what is to be done?" ("baling hou zenmeban" 80 后, 怎么办?)³ The slogan "What is to be done?"

¹ Zhang Shen, "'New Left' Standpoint and its Problem in 'Revisiting the 1980s,'" ("Chongfan bashiniandai' de 'xinzuoyi' lichang jiqi wenti" "重返八十年代"的"新左翼"立场及其问题) *Dangdai zuojia pinglun*(当代作家评论), No.4(2015), 28-34.

² See, "Letters on the Writing of the History of Contemporary Chinese Literature," 21-33.

³ Yang Qingxiang, *The post-80s generation, what is to be done?* (*baling hou, zenmeban?* 80 后, 怎么办?) Beijing, Shiyue wenyi press, 2015. This book was published in June of 2015 and soon became one of the bestsellers of the summer.

comes from the saying of previous revolutionaries Nikolai Chernyshevsky and Vladimir Lenin. By using the rhetorical technique of apostrophe, the Althusserian interpellation of generational identity is provoked with this title. Unlike He Guimei's book which provides numerous theoretical reflections and historical investigation, as a poet himself, Yang's collection of essays expresses his individual feelings and personal experience directly. But the "affect" expressed is contagious, and hence it is also collective. This collective group of the post-1980s generation include the petty bourgeois intellectuals like Yang himself and migrant workers who are his childhood friends. Or, to borrow the analysis of Wang Hui's recent article, they are the "new poor" and the "new workers."¹ What is worth our attention in this book is the desire of the unification of these two groups. Such a "downward" identification of the cultural critics with the grass-root class forms a sharp contrast to the cosmopolitan imaginaries and "upward" orientation of cultural elites in the 1980s.

Another reason that contributes to the formation of "left-leaning" atmosphere comes from the nationwide spread of critical theories from the West. Indeed, *Reading (dushu 读书) Magazine*, the most famous and influential magazine in Chinese humanities, where Wang Hui served as the chief editor through 1998 to 2008, became an important site for the introduction and dissemination of critical theories. Indeed, for the last ten or fifteen years, in contrast to the modernization theories prevalent in the 1980s, a large number of critical theories have been

¹ See Wang Hui, "Two Kinds of New Poor and Their Future: The Decline and Reconfiguration of Class Politics and the Politics of the New Poor," in *China's Twentieth Century*, (London and New York: Verso, 2016), 179-221.

translated, published and widely circulated among students of Chinese humanities. Take He Guimei's book for example, the author identifies two groups of western critical theories upon which she develops her argument. One group is the critical readers of global capitalism, with an extensive list of names including Arif Dirlik, Fredric Jameson, Karatani Kojin, Giovanni Arrighi, Marshall Berman, Partha Chatterjee, David Harvey, E. J. Hobsbawm, Michael E. Latham, Maurice Meisner and Immanuel Wallerstein. The second group of authors is (post)structuralist philosophers, among which are Louis Althusser, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, etc. He Guimei uses the perspective of the global capitalism to criticize the statements of the 1980s as well as the New Enlightenment discourse, which are now recognized to be limited, local, and particular knowledge. Using Karl Mannheim's language, He Guimei likens her and Chinese intellectuals' experience to the experience of a village boy: once he settles down in a big city, he will no longer consider his old knowledge to be natural and unalterable.¹

Discourse, Text and History: Toward the Future

“Some white-haired chambermaids at leisure / Talk of the late emperor's pleasure.” (“baitou gongnv zai, xianzuo shuo xuanzong” 白头宫女在，闲坐说玄宗) These two lines of poetry come from a classic Chinese poem written in the 8th century and were once used by the “new critics” (“xinchao pipingjia” 新潮批评家) in the 1980s to deride the outdated Marxist theorists who refused to accept any new wave of knowledge, such as the theory of

¹ See He Guimei, *The archival knowledge of new enlightenment: cultural studies of China's 1980s*, 1-13, 360-367.

“Literature Subjectivity” (“wenxue zhutixing” 文学主体性) invented by Liu Zaifu in 1985.¹ Ironically, armed with the newer wave of critical knowledge, some students of Chinese humanities nowadays can throw the same lines of poem back to the outdated “new critics,” to deride them as outdated humanist or modernist theorists. But does it not mean that we are still trapped in the same logic of modernity? “Always new!” He Guimei in her conclusion notably gives us her self-criticism of her critique of the “New Enlightenment.” It is a serious problem my research will cope with. Nonetheless, the success of her book does mark the crucial victory for the “revisiting” campaign. It also shows that the reexamination and criticism of “the 1980s” have already been institutionalized in the field of humanities in Chinese top universities.

But the campaign is far from completion. Coming back to the “revisiting” in Li Yang’s initial two articles, the “revisiting” for him include two tasks. First, to find ways to reveal the political unconscious beneath the literary texts in the 1980s; second, to explore the obscured territory between Mao and Post-Mao. Regarding the first task, in a recent interview,² Xudong Zhang points out that the purpose of “revisiting” nowadays should not merely look to its “false” but needs to seek toward its “truth.” On one hand, there is the “false”, the ideology, that is, the strategies of containment imposed upon any texts;³ on the other hand, there is the “truth”, the

¹ Cheng Ma, “The end of a Type of Literary Criticism: Debate with Chen Yong”(“Yizhong wenyi piping moshi de zhongjie: yu chenyong tongzhi shangque” 一种文艺批评模式的终结——与陈涌同志商榷), *Wenyibao*(文艺报), July 21st, 1985.

² See Zhang, Xudong and Xu, Yong, “Limits and Possibilities of ‘Revisiting the 1980s’”(“Chongfan bashiniandai’ de xiandu jiqi keneng” “重返八十年代”的限度及其可能) *Wenyi zhengming*(文艺争鸣), No.1 (2012), 97-102.

³ Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a socially symbolic act*, 53-54.

Utopia, or the Utopian gratification, an aesthetic evocation which dreams to resolve the real historical contradiction. Besides the negative hermeneutics conducted by Wang Hui, He Guimei and others, the task of interpretation should necessarily include the positive hermeneutics, that is, to interpret this Utopian power as a “symbolic affirmation of a specific historical and class form of collective unity.”¹ But either ideology or Utopia requires the concentration on text, with a sophisticated analysis of the aesthetic form of the text, the technique, the narrative power, the intensity of affect, etc. With such a perspective, we have to admit that rather than doing immanent criticism, most of the efforts of “revisiting” stay outside the “text.” I mean that literary “texts” in these revisits are always interpreted from outside at the sociological level – ideological manipulation, institutional production, political influence and so on, rather than at the “formal” level and to penetrate into the aestheticisation of politics.

The “textual” problem is connected with the “historical” problem. The ambiguity of literature texts need to be explored to understand the ambiguity of history. What constitutes the real rupture between Mao and post-Mao? How could the “revisiting of the 1980s” help us resolve the continuity/discontinuity aporia mentioned above? Cheng Guangwei says that “the 1980s is a method” because the 1980s is a watershed;² Xudong Zhang reminds us the border between socialism and capitalism is indistinct in the 1980s;³ He Guimei also points out that the unclear space of the 1980s reveals the ambiguous position of China, which is at once inside

¹ *Ibid.* 291.

² See Cheng Guangwei, *Lectures on Literature: the 1980s as a Method*.

³ See Zhang, Xudong and Xu, Yong, “Limits and Possibilities of ‘Revisiting the 1980s’” 101-102.

and outside of global capitalism.¹ But what kind of “watershed”? What is the 1980s? Perhaps once the straitjacket of “New Enlightenment” is peeled off and the discursive discontinuity between Mao and post-Mao is blurred, what draws most of our (revisiting scholars’) attention should be the ambiguity, “contingency” and openness of “the 1980s.” We need to reopen the 1980s. And if “all history is contemporary history,” it is evident that for all of us, to reopen the 1980s and to revisit the uncharted territory between Mao and post-Mao era, are to find the alternative temporality beyond the socialism/capitalism division.

However, nowadays most of the revisits remain “external” studies, and hence have failed to reach the aesthetic depth of the text and the period. The problem is partly due to the methodological limits. The dominating method of most “revisiting” research is what Robert Escarpit calls “sociology of literature,” which informs both Hong Zicheng’s research on socialist realism and Cheng Guangwei’s and his students’ “revisiting” efforts. Understanding the “social facts” and “political influence” about literature production can effectively clear away the “Pure Literature” illusion of the literary criticism in “the 1980s.” However, Escarpit’s concerns himself only with the external facts of literature, which could possibly block any internal intervention of the aesthetics of the text. Besides, following the Durkheimian fashion, Escarpit’s sociology is weakened by his obstinate positivism, whose investigation, according to the analysis of Jurgen Habermas, is always restricted by the predesigned concepts and frames.² Therefore, if the purpose of revisiting is to survey the social facts of literature

¹ He Guimei, *The Archival Knowledge of New Enlightenment: Culture Studies of China’ 1980s*, 368-373.

² A sophisticated discussion on the limits of positivism, see Jurgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human*

production and discourse formation, i.e. how the socialist cultural institution functioned in the early 1980s, then the method of “sociology of literature” is useful. However, if the purpose is to interpret the aesthetic power of the texts, to find the “openness” and “defectiveness” of the concepts and frames, and to explore the affect, desire, and utopian impulse expressed in the depth of the text with its apparent strategy of containment, then a different theoretically and aesthetically equipped method is required.

Another impediment to our understanding of the discontinuity/continuity between Mao and post-Mao period is that the study of the aesthetics of socialist realism has long been ignored. Compared to the numerous aesthetic studies on modernist literature or the Avant-Garde literature both in China and in the West, the territory of socialist aesthetics is still scarcely furrowed. Even Li Yang’s “rereading” of the 1950s-1970s and Xiaobing Tang “rereading” of “the left-wing literature” can hardly be considered as positive engagement with socialist aesthetics. But if the merits and problems of socialist aesthetics remain unknown, it will be difficult to anchor the departure point of post-Mao literature and aesthetics, let alone to rethink it and reevaluate it.

In such a circumstance, I think Cai Xiang’s new book *Revolution and its Narratives* (geming/xushi 革命 / 叙述)¹ is especially worth noting. This book engages the problematic of socialist literature and aesthetics positively. For example, after a systematic reading of a

Interests(Boston: Beacon Press, 1971).

¹ The Chinese edition was published in 2010, and the English translation came out very soon. See, Cai Xiang, *Revolution and Its Narratives: China's Socialist Literary and Cultural Imaginaries, 1949-1966*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2016.

large number of socialist rural fictions, Cai argues, “the defiance of the weak” constitutes the aesthetic core of the whole socialist tradition. Cai points out that socialist novels aesthetically created an “imagined community” known as the “people’s commune,” a regime of social equality and participatory democracy, an economic model based on mutual assistance and cooperation, and an ethical world built upon the small producer’s dignity. We know that the aesthetic and philosophical meaning of “individual” in the West is based upon wealth and capability to process wealth. It is the great contribution of 19th-century European realism that creates such an image of a bourgeois way of life. Apparently, Cai’s reading of the rural novels exhibits another way of life, a world that belongs to the laborers. Then what is the influence of such a world of laborers on the post-Mao problem of individual subject? Here Cai provides us with a point to start. On the other hand, Cai also shows us the crisis of socialist utopia, in which “alienation” is a keyword of the dark side. The alienation of workers emanates partly from the modern rational institution, the Taylor system, and the bureaucratic administration, and partly from the inequality and social stratification produced by the actually existing socialist practices apart from the ideal ones. Cai Xiang points out, the alienation reflected in these literatures expresses itself as an anxiety towards everyday life and one way to overcome such anxiety is to retreat into the sphere of private life. This is why the realm of individual life became a hard nut in lots of socialist literary representation and took its revenge in the early 1980s once the ideological interpellation of a socialist subject was abandoned.

These discoveries contribute to this book’s huge success and great popularity. Perhaps we

could say this book lays the foundation for future “revisiting” as it starts to answer the question about the aesthetic passageway between Mao and post-Mao. Besides, this book also echoes with both the internal revolt launched by a group of socialist literature researchers in the late 1990s and the “left-leaning” atmosphere taken shape in the last ten years. Therefore its success is symptomatic for current Chinese humanity—from here we can conclude that the “revisiting” has already cleared away the old conceptual restraints, and is marching stably toward the future.

1.3 An Outline

My study could be considered as another attempt to revisit the 1980s. But my discussion will mainly focus on the late 1970s and the early 1980s. And the method I use is thick interpretation and thus the target needs to be literary texts themselves. I will discuss another seven texts in total in the following three chapters. All of them are important ones—important in the sense that either they were highly praised or were severely criticized in the period. They are the symptomatic ones or in Barthes's term the potentially writerly ones. Once again, all of these analyses could be regarded as political interpretations. I will utilize several critical theories to engage the theoretical problem of the period, but what concerns me is not the pure theory but the aesthetic effect of these works and the political unconscious beneath these texts.

The question I want to discuss in the whole dissertation is the problem of the “individual subject” in the period. I will discuss the rising of individual(s) in this transitional period. It is not new to argue that the politics of post-Mao era is to bid farewell to the Mao's idealism, socialism and collectivism. Yet the traditional liberal approach to understand the “individual” or “subject” limits our perspective. The writers of the period need to deal with the debts and legacies of Chinese revolution and I will argue the individual is wilder and the problem of the “individual subject” is extremely intricate.

To be specific, my discussions are grouped in three parts. The first one is the enlightenment discourse. “New Enlightenment” is the slogan of the period. The intellectuals in

the 1980s would tend to connect the post-Mao period with the May Fourth period and therefore excise Mao's period as a period of obscurantism. However, in my discussion of *The Class Master* (*banzhuren* 班主任), I will try to show such an enlightening posture is no more than the wish-fulfillment of the rising intellectuals. In other words, in order to resolve their problem of subjectivity, they need to silence the proletariat, and use the discourse of civilization/barbarism to defuse the threat of Mao's radical politics. Another group of "new enlightenment" intellectuals were the younger generation; the most famous of them in the western world is the *Today*-school or Misty Poets. They wrote modernist poems and fiction secretly in the late period of the Cultural Revolution and expressed strong independent self-consciousness in their writings. Therefore, they have been apotheosized as torchbearers. In my interpretation of Beidao's *Waves* (*bodong* 波动), however, I will focus more on their collective experience and discuss their aesthetics in the historical context. I will analyze the affects revealed in *Waves*, and discuss its hostility toward the officially determined "emotion" system and its resistance against the aesthetics of the sublime. At the end, I will argue the limits of this kind of elitist enlightening perspective and its social ground. But both *The Class Master* and *Waves* share a kind of monotheistic enlightenment which betrays their theological remains. In my discussion of the controversial novella written by a Red Guard, *When the Sunset Disappears* (*wanxia xiaoshi de shihou* 晚霞消失的时候), I will show another atheist enlightenment. I will decode it by placing it within the consequence and effect of Mao's radical individualism during the Cultural Revolution and I will argue how the novella tries to resolve

the real contradiction caused by the wild individuals in the aesthetics of sunset light.

Chapter Two studies the concepts of “human” in the period. The central text for discussion is Dai Houying’s *Human, Ah, Human!* (*ren’a,ren* 人啊人). Within the few years of its first publication in 1980, this most popular and controversial novel of Dai Houying drew significant attention from literary scholars throughout China and English world and was often interpreted by the liberal humanist discourse as the representative work of the “thaw literature” or as the plea to revive the “human.” Recently, such appropriations of the notions of “the human” have raised suspicions among some critics both from the Beijing-based “revisiting the 1980s group” and some western critical scholars, who begin to reevaluate Marxist humanism in the post-socialist China. This chapter, however, attempts to utilize several post-humanist critical theories that have been persistently on guard against the theoretical limits of both liberal and Marxist humanism to reinterpret this novel. Here, the novel *Human, Ah! Human*, is able to encompass both the contradiction and reconciliation of various kinds of “human” voices. This paper will revisit its theatrical setting in which the newborn “human” figures encounter and contend with one another. Rather than the sudden emergence of a humanist hero, or a Marxist humanist hero, what we see is the encounter of the Machiavellian wild individual, the philistines who pursue earthly happiness, and the romantics, that offer the untrodden path to approach the historical Real. Among these figures, the wild Machiavellian individual is the most remarkable one. I will explore its political energy and its power of radical evil via the reading of another novella, *Moving Back to the City* (*diaodong* 调动). Finally, this paper will

exhibit different humans' combinations, permutation, and rehearsal in the fictional structures.

Chapter Four discusses the defective figure(s) of “productive-possessive individual” in the early 1980s. I will focus on the post-Mao reform in China and the “reform literature” in this discussion. “Productive-possessive individual” is a term I create to approach the western concept of *homo economicus*. In this period I cannot find the *homo economicus* per se, but can only find various kinds of figures of “productive-possessive individuals.” Here the use of the “-” indicates the “defectiveness” of this figure(s), which not only indexes the historical conjuncture among the different figures in the liminal period of post-Cultural-Revolution years, but also exhibits a crucial element of Marxist aesthetics, that is, how it puts in its place what Jacques Lezra terms as the “weakly systematic field of defective figures.” That is to say, how it demonstrates the irreducible gap between the abstract name of *homo economicus*, and the untamed things in their historical factuality. That’s why there are various kinds of “productive-possessive individuals” rather than the conceptual *homo economicus*. This chapter will discuss the theoretic problem and then elaborate two figures in their situations. The first figure is a young girl “carrying a load,” a figure silhouetted by *A Tale of Big Nur* (*danao jishi* 大淖记事) which presents a utopian laborer figure of the lower-class. Secondly, I will discuss the capitalist spirit of the Little Carpenter in *Descendants of Lu Ban* (*Luban de zisun* 鲁班的子孙) and explain how possessive individualism caused the crisis of ethics among small-producers in the Chinese context.

2.1 Silence the Hooligan! The Class Master and His Desire

Desire and Collective Allegory

There is no better work than *The Class Master* (*Ban zhuren* 班主任, 1978) to illustrate the enlightenment desire at the turning point of the 1970s and 80s of Chinese intellectuals. It is not only because of its officially authorized status as the first classic of “New Era Literature,” (“xin shiqi wenxue” 新时期文学), its popularity and enormous influence in the early days of post-Mao period, but also, I will argue, because of its narrative as a symbolic act and its allegorical structure. At first glance, this novel reads like a log of a middle school teacher Zhang (Zhang Junshi), keeping records of how he visits a hooligan child Song (Song Baoqi) that recently joined his class, how he drops in a well-behaved child Shi (Shi Hong), and how he plans to educate and transform a weird child that is innocent in nature but is possessed by communist orthodoxy. This is the whole plot of the story, similar to a case study material of elementary pedagogy, yet it triggered national sensation: thousands of intellectuals wrote letters to support this novel; it was awarded the highest prize from the official and was promoted as the flag of cultural consciousness of Deng Xiaoping era. It could be said that this novel witnessed the honeymoon of intelligentsia and CCP in the post-Mao era. The intelligentsia around that time related well to the protagonist Teacher Zhang regarding their proud sense of being a “master”:

He thought of his responsibilities as a teacher of his class. He was not just

teaching students, he was nurturing China's future, so that the Chinese people could live in prosperity among the nations of the world. ¹

This paragraph makes me think of the Cormon townhouse under Balzac's exposition and Jameson's interpretation, the object of the narrative desire, or "authorial wish-fulfillment, a form of symbolic satisfaction,²" and makes me rethink the "notorious" statement of Jameson – "All third-world texts are necessary, I want to argue, allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I will call national allegories."³ The validity of this declaration might stand upon with some defensive concession, for example, we say "most" instead of "all," we say "collective allegory" instead of "national allegory." More importantly, however, we need to clarify Jameson's concept of "allegory," which emphasizes the "totality" instead of "homogeneity." Hence, Jameson's "national allegory" cares rarely about the homogeneous nationalist discourse; and in this light, a large number of criticisms from post-colonialists have missed the point. They failed to understand what Jameson had tried to remind us: the collectivity of society. Jameson reminds us, different times have different ways of literary imagination. In Enlightenment period when the novel was born, and the bourgeoisie was on the rising, such imagination retained the explicit character of collective allegory - the market has not yet given birth to the atomized individual, and modernism has not yet created aesthetic

¹ Liu Xinwu, *The Teacher*, in Liu Xinwu, Wang Meng and Others, *Prize-Winning Stories From China 1978-1979*, Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 19. I don't agree to translate "Banzhuren" simply as "teacher," "ban" is class and "zhuren" means the people who are in charge of the class, thus I translate the title as "The Class Master."

² Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981, 155.

³ Fredric Jameson, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text* No.15 (Autumn, 1986), 69.

interiority. Therefore, the problem of the subject in the first half of 19th- century is different from the problem in advanced capitalism. Similarly, Jameson understands the “third-world literature” from the viewpoint of historical modes of production. His purpose is to use the “third-world literature” to reflect on the limits of “first-world literature” in separating private from the public. “Third World” is a defective concept that is too abstract, but if we understand it as the world outside “First World” and “Second World,” that is, outside the advanced capitalism and advanced socialism, then it does answer the particular post-socialist situation of China around the turning of the 1970s and 1980s, and I believe it is basically correct to say that many literary works in this period have demonstrated the characteristic of “collective allegory,” such as *The Class Master*.

But this collective is by no means a homogenous one. I am going to illustrate the confrontational relationship between the class master and his three students. The enlightenment posture, typical of Teacher Zhang, allegorically represents a new tendency of the entire Enlightenment Discourse in the 1980s. But the word “allegory” should be understood from a deconstructionist point of view, that is, the unreliability of “allegory” as a medium, the reversibility of interpretation, or the failure of Teacher Zhang’s “libidinal fulfillment.” In fact, I will try to demonstrate that there is not just one allegory, but three or more allegories inside and outside the story. The second section of this chapter will focus on another famous novella of the time, Bei Dao’s *Waves* (*Bodong* 波动) which, in a confronting way, supplements Teacher Zhang’s enlightenment posture in regards to Student Shi. The enlightenment posture in *Waves*

adds a viewpoint of interiority but does not correct the arbitrariness of the enlightening perspective. To deal with this problem, in my third section I will introduce a third type of enlightenment through a literary work which caused a stir yet was not recognized at that time, a novella written by a Student Xie, or a “Red Guard,” *When the Sunset Disappears* (*Wanxia xiaoshi de shihou* 晚霞消失的时候).

Enlightenment and Mass Enlightenment

Let’s start from Teacher Zhang, the new class master. But to understand the collective unconsciousness behind this image I want first to address another revolutionary schoolmaster, who provided the historical and theoretical condition for our understanding of Teacher Zhang. In 1917, a student of Hunan First Normal School, Mao Zedong, posted an ad of workers’ night school on a street of Changsha. The ad began with:

Gather round, all of you, and listen to me say a few words in the spoken language: What is the greatest source of inconvenience from which you all suffer? Do you all know what it is? As the popular saying goes, you can’t write what is said, you can’t read what is written, and you can’t do figures. All of you are men, and yet from this perspective, aren’t you just like sticks or stones? So all of you demand a bit of knowledge; you want to be able to write a few characters, recognize a few characters, and do a bit of arithmetic.

¹

Two things arouse my interests here. First, in this period when the New Cultural Movement (*xin wenhua yundong* 新文化运动) calling for the emancipation of individual was rising to its climate, we find the question of “mass enlightenment” had already drawn the attention of this young student and his friends. However, there is always a tricky correlation between

¹ Mao, Zedong, *Mao’s Road to Power: Revolutionary Writings 1912-1949 (Volume I)*, Armonk and London: M.E.Sharpe, Inc. 1992, 143.

“enlightenment” and “mass enlightenment.” When Liang Qichao drafted the *New People* (*Xinmin shuo* 新民说) ten years before, his proposal of “enlightening the people” had already shown some characteristics of “Enlightened Despotism,” which is, the people should become new national citizens under the guidance of an enlightened monarch and the educated intellectual class. In this light, the rhetoric and strategy of “mass enlightenment” in Mao’s Hunan province, can be read in reference to Jonathan B. Knudsen’s summary of Germany’s “*Volksaufklärung*” after 1750 in *On Enlightenment for the Common Man*.¹ It is a kind of enlightenment blended with elitism and paternalism. In this ad, we find provocative sentences such as “all of you are men, and yet from this perspective, aren’t you just like sticks or stones?” “Sticks or stones” implies the benighted masses who need to be enlightened; if so, then the workers who receive education and intellectuals who give the knowledge are placed in an unequal relationship. This picture of worried intellectuals faced with inert masses, along with his lofty position as an enlightener, becomes a repeating theme throughout the twentieth century China. The most famous example is the figure of Runtu, an inert peasant, in Lu Xun’s novel. In *The Class Master*, once again, Teacher Zhang sees a Song Baoqi like “wood and stone,” “the vacant, numbed expression in his eyes were evidence of a perverse and twisted youth.”² Such has become a thesis of enlightenment, that we could name it “enlightening the ignorant mass.”

¹ See in Schmidt, James ed. *What Is Enlightenment?*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1996, 270-90.

² *The Class Master*, 16.

But this ad betrays another message, a friendly attitude derived from an equal footing, an amiable dialoging posture, predicated on the position that “all of you are men.” From this we see the cultural politics of the early years of Republic of China – these youths are willing to open a night school for workers because they want to launch a social revolution, to make “The Republic of China” a real “country of the people.” I will address this “Republican ideal” by discussing Zhang Taiyan and Lu Xun at the end of this chapter. Here it suffices to say that Mao Zedong’s friendliness towards night class workers is not unique but is shared by his comrades. One or two years later, his friends and comrades in Beijing proposed the radical idea of “mass’ self-enlightenment.” Qu Qiubai, who later became the founding leader of CCP, voiced the statement “Knowledge is theft” with anarchist coloring, using Peter Kropotkin’s theory to talk about how knowledge as cultural capital brings about class oppression.¹ Another friend that opts for anarchism, Zhu Qianzhi, who raises the question of “being equal in emotion,” saying that each and every person becomes a human just by his/her own inner feelings.² Due to the different schools of thoughts that poured into China from the West, and also the rapid expansion of New Cultural Movement, it is not surprising that by the time of the founding of CCP, a “self-enlightenment” or radical enlightenment was taken shape. Hence, it is not surprising that when this schoolmaster, Mao Zedong, later threw himself into the proletarian movement and became a leader, the party master, would give the famous 1942 talk at the Yanan

¹ Qu, Qiubai, “Knowledge is Stolen Goods”, (“zhishi shi zangwu”, 智识是赃物), on *New Society (xin shehui, 新社会)*, volume (6), Dec 21st, 1919.

² See Zhu, Qianzhi, “Anti-intellectualism on Education” (“Jiaoyu shang de fanzhi zhuyi,” 教育上的反智主义), on *Peking Gazette (Jing Bao, 京报)*, May 19th, 1921.

Forum, in which he said intellectuals should learn from workers and peasants and become their pupil.¹

Merely a year after Mao's death and the most radical experiments in Cultural Revolution ended, our Teacher Zhang in *The Class Master* unswervingly returned to the elite position of enlightenment, which was the main reason why it was so applauded by the intelligentsia. It is not hard to discover that in the novel the two silly pupils that need to be enlightened by Teacher Zhang are of a humble upbringing. Song Baoqi's mother was "a shop assistant" and father is "a worker in a tree nursery;" Xie Huimin was a "daughter of worker," and that it was the "ignorance" of "working class" and their harmful hobby of "playing cards" that resulted in their inability to educate their children. Two lower-class students hence became a code for "immaturity and barbarism," which need to be salvaged by Teacher Zhang, a representative of the intelligentsia class, as the saying goes "save the children." The fourth character in the novel, a good student who helped Teacher Zhang, Shi Hong, symbolized the alliance of cadre and intelligentsia, with her father working in the government and her mother teaching in a primary school. Hence, if we outline the main plot of the story using Vladimir Propp's scheme, it would be like below:

Teacher Zhang (Hero, enlightened teacher) → Defeat Song Baoqi (the easy enemy, a barbaric hooligan) → with the help of Shi Hong (helper, student with

¹ Mao, Zedong, "Talks at the Yanan [Yan'an] Forum on Literature and Art," in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung* (vol. 3), Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1965, 69-98.

culture) → triumph over Xie Huimin, (the most obstinate enemy, a dupe or a faithful disciple of Gang of Four).

If the ideology of medieval Romance is explicit - Christian hero triumphs over the heretic devil, then the ideological message conveyed in *The Class Master* is clear too – civilization triumphs over barbarism, and intelligentsia discipline the masses. The explicit ideological statement does not mean that the cultural struggle is easy, however. On the contrary, the establishment of a clear coded expression is precisely because of the horrifying barbaric force behind the civilized order. In this sense, the narrative that *The Class Master* establishes here is a powerful mechanism of revenge and oblivion, which I call “enlightenment as the supplement of the scar.”

Post-Mao era witnessed the surge of massive works of “Scar Literature,” (“shanghen wenxue” 伤痕文学) most of which were historical novels that dealt with the protagonist’s unsettling experience in the Cultural Revolution. Hence, the prevailing opinion that likens “Scar Literature” to the Soviet “Thaw literature” is problematic so long as one finds that it was not the Soviet model of bureaucracy, but the anti-bureaucratic Cultural Revolution was the cause of the “scar” and target of “scar literature.”¹ The desire of “Scar Literature” was to reestablish the order rather than to “thaw” it out. Or, the politics of “Returning”(“guilai” 归

¹ “‘Scar literature’ resembled the ‘thaw literature’ in the Soviet Union” is the basic premise of Perry Link’s otherwise detailed and comprehensive study on “scar literature.” I will argue such an inappropriate framement limits Link’s understanding of the late 1970s and early 1980s literature. See, Link, Perry *The Uses of Literature: Life in the Socialist Chinese Literature System*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 3-55, 4, 2000.

来)。It is not hard for researchers familiar with works of that time to notice that Teacher Zhang, the central actant of the text, was an image of the “returned intellectual;” and at the same time, because he was a “class master,” he was also a “returned leader,” thus combining together the two kinds of heroes in “Scar Literature.” In “Scar Literature,” on the one hand, old cadres who had been struck down in Cultural Revolution are restored after Cultural Revolution and returned to leadership. Literary representations of such change of power can be seen in Wang Yaping’s *Sublime Mission* (*shensheng de shiming* 神圣的使命), Wang Meng’s *Butterfly* (*fudie* 蝴蝶), *Bolshevik Salute* (*buli* 布礼), Lu Yanzhou’s *Legend of Tianyun Mountain* (*tianyunshan chuanqi* 天云山传奇), Zhang Jie’s *Heavy Wings* (*chenzhong de chibang* 沉重的翅膀), Li Guowen’s *Number Five Garden Street* (*huayuanjie wuhao* 花园街五号), etc. On the other hand, intellectuals who had been struck down in Anti-Rightist Movement and the Cultural Revolution, returned from the periphery to the central stage, became in charge of education, academic and research institutions. Hence there were also numerous literary works that featured intellectuals as the hero, such as Xu Chi’s reportage literature *Goldbach’s Conjecture* (*gedebahe caixiang* 哥德巴赫猜想), Zhang Xianliang’s *Mimosa* (*lühuashu* 绿化树), *Half of Man is Woman* (*nanren de yiban shi nüren* 男人的一半是女人), Chen Rong’s *At Middle Age* (*ren dao zhongnian* 人到中年), etc. Most of these works will feature the protagonist as a hero, sanctifying their sufferings in the Cultural Revolution; their returning is politically sanctioned and endorsed by the new regime as pioneers of reform. Perhaps we can therefore conclude that “Scar Literature,” as a political literature, played the role of forming a class alliance in the

process of ending anarchy and returning to technocracy and meritocracy; and such a high demand for the class alliance between political elites and cultural elites was a natural response to Mao's radical cultural experiment in Cultural Revolution.

That is to say, "New Enlightenment" is a reaction against the radical "mass self-enlightenment" of Mao. Based on his careful case study, Joel Andreas, in his recent work *Rise of the Red Engineers: The Cultural Revolution and the Origins of China's New Class*, makes an impressive argument about the cultural politics since the founding of PRC. According to Andreas, by the time of 1966, the ruling class in China was actually an alliance of the red political elite and cultural elite. There were struggles between them – for instance, the battle between "Theory of Bloodline" ("xuetong lun" 血统论) and "Theory of Family Background" ("chushen lun" 出身论)¹ at the beginning stage of Cultural Revolution was mainly a struggle between them. But as the progress of Cultural Revolution showed Mao's intent was "eliminating the distinction between mental and manual labor," and have the rebelling proletariat reconstruct a new society, the two classes felt the strong need to ally together. Indeed, Mao's radical politics didn't work in practice, as working class and rebelling groups proved incapable of taking over the power and showed serious problems of corruption. This then caused the restoration of old political power at the ending stage of Cultural Revolution. Nonetheless, at the time the Cultural Revolution had already caused a great shock to the entire social structure, especially to cultural elites and the intelligentsia. First, mass education was

¹ See, Andreas, Joel, *Rise of the Red Engineers: The Cultural Revolution and the Origins of China's New Class*, Chapter Four, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 87-104, 2009.

promoted institutionally on a massive scale. “The proletarian revolution in education” (“wuchan jieji jiaoyu geming” 无产阶级教育革命) shortened the length of studying period, stressed practical knowledge, and supported self-education of workers and peasants. What is worse, Mao and radicals abolished the examination system and thus blocked the normal path for the rising upward of the intelligentsia. Second, Cultural Revolution was initiated through furious “rebellion,” and the ways which early rebels humiliated intellectuals caused great trauma. Third, the sending of intellectuals and rightist to the countryside, especially the policy of “down to the countryside movement” (“shangshan xiexiang” 上山下乡) for educated youths, which was driven by both ideological purposes and politico-economic purposes, had the practical effect of substantially disrupting the traditional class composition of Chinese society; and the direct contact of intelligentsia with urban underclasses and the countryside caused intense shock to them, both physically and psychologically, which manifest in “inter-class resentment.”¹

¹ In *Radicalism and Education Reform in 20th Century China*, Suzanne Peppe raises a question that perplexes her and other observers. To many overseas researchers who sympathize with the “education revolution,” the education revolution in socialist period and in the Cultural Revolution is a great achievement of popularizing education among the masses and promoting equality in backward countries. However, why Chinese government entirely denied this policy in 1980? And why do the interviewees who contributed substantially to the education reform in the countryside demonstrate a uniform attitude of denying, and even made some racist comments on the class question in an explicit way, such as the labor work in the countryside is unbearable for humans, the living conditions were unfit for human being, peasants are silly and selfish, and they are just like animals, without spiritual world, etc. Here we again see the discriminative description seen in Mao’s poster, “like stick and wood.” But this time, what Suzanne feels from his interviewees is a strong feeling of *ressentiment*. But something worth reflection here is that, the “education revolution” that Suzanne has in mind is an idea, while what his interviewees has expressed are human feelings in real history. See, Peppe, Suzanne, *Radicalism and Education Reform in 20th Century China*, Chapter 14-16, New York: Cambridge

I have discussed the “ideological strategies of containment” in Chapter One. Marx argued that the petty-bourgeois intellectuals could not go beyond the limits driven by their material interests and social positions,¹ and Jameson explains it turns to be the “containment” of narrative apparatus of certain kind of collective “wish-fulfillment.” However, the expression of “material interests and social positions” require some Freudian displacement. Even in post-Mao China, even with the death of Mao and the end of the Cultural Revolution, bare interests and bald-faced hatred still can not be expressed publicly and thus ultimately denied the rationality of Mao’s radical politics such as “elimination of three differences.” Therefore the Nietzschean *ressentiment*, which is in the “dark workshop” or on the psychological level, simply could not surface to the apparent narrative level. The traditional mechanism as “good vs. bad”, “loyal vs. betrayal” that were frequently used in “Scar Literature” actually avoided the resolution of real social contradictions. However, to cure the “scar,” one must return to the question of “power,” and in this sense, *The Class Master* touches on the repressed unconscious and offers an imaginary solution, that is, enlightenment. The reason that this novel triumphed over all other works is that it no longer makes accusations of past crimes and sufferings, but opens toward the future - it offers intelligentsia (who have now restored their politico-economic status) a central subject position, a typical posture to be an “enlightener,” and of “man in power” who can allegorically claim to “save the children” and to nurture China’s future. The novel

University Press, 352-465.

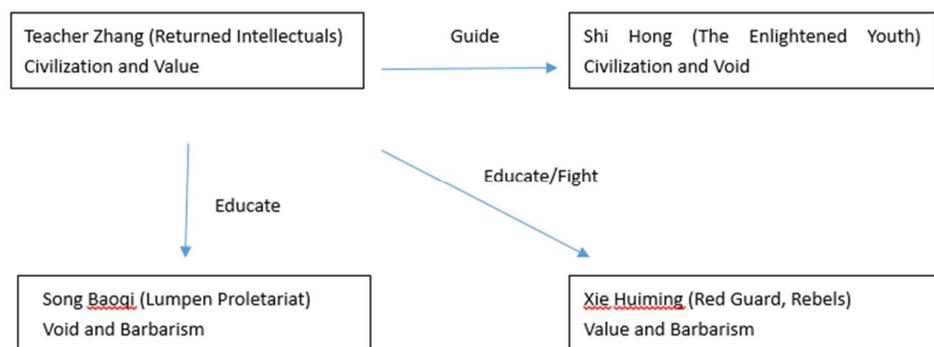
¹ Jameson, Frederic *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 52, 1981.

hence makes a break which buries the intelligentsia's nightmare of falling into the underclass. In their biographical lives, with the "rehabilitation campaign" ("pingfan yundong" 平反运动), and with their returning to the city, they have finally got away from the barbarian, the oppressing life in the countryside and the cruelty of class struggle, just as Odysseus finally gets rid of the cave of one-eyed giant. Then, in the world of literary representation, it is at this moment that the subject of intellectual is able to stabilize and to talk about the question of reason and enlightenment. But what is enlightenment? Why "enlightenment" is utilized by the narrative apparatus to access to the political unconsciousness of the period?

What is Enlightenment I: Allotted Enlightenment

I think a more sophisticated analysis of the narrative mechanism is necessary. It is useful for a kind of allegorical reading to elaborate the ideological connotation of the narrative as a symbolic act. But there is also the danger of simplifying the realist representation into a sort of "reflection theory" and hence reducing its nuances and complexity, in other words, the necessary distortion and displacement for any imaginary resolution. Actually, it goes without saying that *The Class Master* was claiming a victory over the radical education revolution of Gang of Four, and it is evident that it helped Reformist politicians and intellectuals reclaim their stage of history. but this is only the surface of the narrative as the tip of the iceberg. To put it in another way, I will argue the novel indeed witnesses the difficulty of the narrating, or the uncertainty about the "enlightenment," and precisely this "uncertainty" have a more

profound connection between *The Class Master* and the political unconscious of the whole society. *The Class Master*, as the title shows, underlines a central problem of enlightenment: power. In this light, enlightenment is not just about acquiring knowledge and reason, but also about how to distribute enlightenment rationality in a collective community. For example, in *The Class Master*, Teacher Zhang is the holder of knowledge and reason, and Shi Hong is assigned the position of an assistant. As for Xie Huimin, she is the object of education who is thought of not only as being ignorant, but also ideologically dangerous. Finally, Song Baoqi is not expected to appreciate beauty or to acquire political belief; he is only accorded a low-level instrumental reason, a little practical knowledge and necessary discipline, so as to turn him into a useful person for the society, a question of class domestication. Hence, if we do not concentrate on the apparent narrative of *The Class Master*, but look more carefully at the structural system of its character system, then the following diagram might help us more to understand Teacher Zhang's power allotment of enlightenment:



Hence we need to talk about enlightenment regarding the “distribution of reason,” in a way that Felix Mendelssohn talks about. What is enlightenment? We know that Kant has the saying that “Enlightenment is mankind’s exit from its self-incurred immaturity” and he raises “Have the courage to use your own understanding!”¹, to which almost no one will object. But contemporary people often rashly ignore the predicament in which Kant proposed these sayings. Why you need “courage” to “use your own understanding”? Isn’t it natural to use your own understanding? To this Kant answers frankly – because there are some guardians that “take up the oversight.” “After they have first made their domestic animals stupid and carefully prevented these placid creatures from daring to take even one step out of the leading strings of the cart to which they are tethered, they show them the danger that threatens them if they attempt to proceed on their own.”² These people are the ones who set up the rules and formulas, the “old masters” that the Enlightenment generation wants to demolish. But the question is more than just coping with “old masters” - to Kant, it also involved Frederick II, King of Prussia. From 1740 until 1786, involved the underground enlightenment groups at that time as well as the internal debates within these groups, involved the priests of conservative religious groups, and the religious masses universally holding religious beliefs. These sections of individuals composed a social structure in the concrete history of Prussia, in which man was constrained by “self-incurred immaturity.” Therefore, we see that Kant’s notion of enlightenment has a strong German color. He is looking for the “exit” under the historical limit, against the

¹ *What Is Enlightenment?* 58.

² *Ibid.*, 58-59.

background of enlightened despotism. Hence, “it is thus difficult for any individual man to work himself out of an immaturity that has become almost natural to him.”¹ Thus Kant proposes his “two caps” theory. One cap, we are as men in society, we live as citizens, as citizens, we must carry out our duty; the other cap, we are as men in the idea, as men we must courageously pursue reason. We should not take this attitude of Kant to be a gesture of giving in to the monarchy. Indeed, almost all of the enlightened class then in Prussia universally held a rather discreet notion of enlightenment. Actually, Moses Mendelssohn, who discusses enlightenment with Kant raises an even more conservative opinion – he allows a paternalistic government, and proposed for “allotted enlightenment.” He said:

Each Individual also requires, according to his status and vocation, different theoretical insights and different skills to attain them – a different degree of enlightenment. The enlightenment that is concerned with man as man is universal, without distinction of status; the enlightenment of man as citizen changes according to the status and vocation. ²

Mendelssohn’s proposition here intends to solve the difficulty of the enlightenment of man as citizen. Kant also proposed a limit on “man as man” from a similar position. Even their enemy, for example, Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, also debates under the same problematic. For Jacobi, the simple notion of every person is “man as man” would lead to the unfortunate scenario of “limitless enlightenment.” “Man as man” is an abstraction, while “man as citizen” is the reality; abstract “man” is thought to have “reason,” but concrete “man” has his own “faith” to resolve his problems. What Jacobi criticizes is the new “despotism” brought by the abstract

¹ *Ibid.*, 59.

² *Ibid.*, 55.

enlightenment, especially it denies the concrete “faith” of individuals, therefore rejects the possibility of the limited freedom of the individual.¹ There is no room to unfold the analysis of the complexity of the German Enlightenment thoughts, but I believe in the discussions of that time, scientific spirit, abstract reason, and the notion that everybody should “to use his own understanding,” was not in a harmonious relationship with the limits of concrete social organization as asserted by some simple understandings. Despite the grave difference, to me Mendelssohn, Kant, and Jacobi share a sensible and realistic attitude on the question of enlightenment, that is, to fully recognize the fragmentation, hierarchy, and mutual constraints of the real society. Hence the question of enlightenment should have related to the question of the distribution of power. It is in this broad sense that such thinking are related to Liu Xinwu and his Teacher Zhang’s thinking in the post-Cultural-Revolution period. To Liu’s enlightened teacher, nihilism or anarchism is unacceptable while idealism must be refuted. His primary task in this novel is to re-establish a rational order, in which members of the class can diminish their hatred; this is precisely the ideological mission of the story at its time – to re-assign enlightenment, re-build a rational order, that is, to tame his obstinate disciples who are with a strong will to power so as to establish a paternalistic government. However, Liu, or Teacher Zhang, fully recognizes the arduousness of this project, and hence this novel retains some internal tension of founding such an order.

¹ See Dale E. Snow, “Jacobi’s Critique of the Enlightenment,” in *What Is Enlightenment?* 306-316.

What is Enlightenment II: *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*

One important reason that causes this tension is that each student of Teacher Zhang is already an obstinate, self-enlightened individual, which is the consequence of the radical Cultural Revolution. To these self-enlightened students, the order that Teacher Zhang is going to distribute is nothing but disguised power. The disillusion comes from the influence of another kind of enlightenment. Hence I think it is necessary to introduce another schoolmaster to illustrate the stark reality that Teacher Zhang faces, Joseph Jacotot who Jacques Rancière introduces to us via his *Ignorant Schoolmaster*. It is not surprising that we may need such an ignorant schoolmaster, because Rancière himself might very well be one of Teacher Zhang's rebellious students; the "students" of Zhang are the ardent pursuers of French Revolution too, and hence we see the inherent connection of French Revolution, Chinese Cultural Revolution and the radical thoughts that emerged after the French social revolution of 1968. Hence, Rancière's "ignorant schoolmaster" apparently stands opposite to Teacher Zhang, the enlightened schoolmaster.¹ Rancière uses the pedagogy of the educator in French Revolution to illustrate the degree of the relativism that a radical enlightenment could possibly reach, which manifests in the final summary of the book:

¹ But I think I need to add some historical understanding of the seemingly naïve idealism of Rancière. If Kristin Ross is right, it was in the context of France's education reform in the 1970s that Rancière raised the figure of "ignorant student." He targets the seemingly sharp yet in fact cynical sociological criticism of Bourdieu (including Althusser, who has the same problem). To him, Bourdieu's criticism in effect theoretically verifies the order, and thus shows pessimistic passiveness when faced with the oppressive force of ideology. See, Rancière, Jacques, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, Translator's Introduction, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991, vii-xxiii.

I BELIEVE THAT GOD CREATED THE HUMAN SOUL CAPABLE
OF TEACHING ITSELF BY ITSELF, AND WITHOUT A MASTER. ¹

There is a reason to explain why Rancière uses capital letters - this sentence is engraved on the tombstone of Joseph Jacotot. Joseph Jacotot, our ignorant schoolmaster, was ignored in his time, but he still wants future generations to remember this doctrine. However, Rancière soon states an ironical fact, that “a few months later, the inscription was desecrated.” Such a story already tells us the sharp conflict between ideal and reality. The real world has limits, the citizen is man fallen into the land of inequality, man’s intellect is not free. But to Jacotot, this limit does not influence man’s inherent limitlessness. God creates man. Hence man is born with equal intelligence. Note that the famous formula of Decartes is reversed – “The reversal: I am a man, therefore I think.”² It is not that you have first to acquire the ability to reason before you turn from the state of “stick” and “stone” into a man. Rather it is the reverse – the radical enlightenment is not to impose “rationality” to a man from outside, but to have courage for oneself to know the world. This theory explains Jacotot’s reform on pedagogy.

Teacher Jacotot proposes a universal teaching. This pedagogy may have begun as an expediency,³ but this philosophical experiment in teaching succeeds. In this experiment, the teacher does not do explanation and can remain as an ignorant teacher. For example, the ignorant father of Song Baoqi could be such an ignorant teacher. The teacher does not impose

¹ *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 139.

² *Ibid.*, 36.

³ Incidentally, when he was exiled to Louvai he was asked to give lectures. But, he knew no Flemish and his student knew no French, thus, he could only use a bilingual edition of *Télémaque* to let the students learn French by themselves.

some “correct” answer onto students, but only offers a book for the student to notice; the ignorant parents of peasants and workers need only stand by and supervise. “the master is he who keeps the researcher on his own route, the one that the alone is following and keeps following.”¹ Such supervising makes the student could get rid of the state of timid and lazy which will cause the student to listen to others rather than to know the world actively and reflectively, based on one’s own lifeworld and experience. Rancière has made rather clear his notion of pedagogy; what I want to add is, this pedagogy is not an abstract theory and irrelevant to the actual history of Mao and post-Mao. It is not only because Mao Zedong in his own education reform also talked about “self-learning, learn by themselves You should talk less!”² or because self-learning became the most common form of self-education during the Cultural Revolution, but more importantly, with the popularizing of education to the grassroots level, and with the growing confidence and courage of peasantry and working class as well as the widening of their path for rising into the upper strata of society, many parents of the peasant and working class families have intentionally taken up the function of “ignorant teachers.”

Now we can clearly recognize the intensity of the struggle between Teacher Zhang and his students. Rancière tells us, universal teaching could not be recognized, and Joseph Jacotot’s tombstone was destroyed in a few months’ time, due to the existence of its enemy, the “pedagogy of enlightenment,” as well as the existence of order everywhere. Therefore, on the

¹ *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 33.

² *Chairman Mao on Education Revolution*, (*Maozhuxi lun jiaoyu geming* 毛主席论教育革命), Beijing: People’s Press, 21, 1967.

one hand, this ignorant teacher, Mao, or Rancière, stresses “everything in everything, man as man,” - every man has the right to understand his world by himself, to get rid of the status of “ignorance.” On the other hand, the enlightenment education is bound to oppress universal teaching, and it requires to obtain the authority status in education, makes sure that students follow the standard answers and social rules. This is not because they don’t think their students can know for themselves (a question of ability or intellect), but because enlightenment is forever a power-seeking project, or, to use the language of Althusser, because the order needs reproduction of the relations of production, and hence it needs the teacher to take up his duty, to explicate. In this light, Rancière has reason to say that the so-called “enlightenment” is “fooling the people,” an enforced stultification, which is precisely the mechanism that the society produces its subjects. But meanwhile, we find the will-fulfillment of Teacher Zhang in performing such enforced stultification. In educating and domesticating the sons of working class through instructions, in the hope of saving the children from the ignorance of their father’s generation, Teacher Zhang thought “he was nurturing China’s future.” The desire, silence the Hooligan!

Silence the Hooligan: A Symbolic Act

Therefore, naturally, we see the symbolic scene of “enlightening/stultifying” confrontation between Teacher Zhang and Student Song:

Zhang took out the worn novel from his bag. “Do you remember the title of this book?” he inquired.

The sympathetic question of this teacher was much better than those posed by the Public Security Bureau. Song replied meekly, “It’s Gad... something.”

“The Gadfly. Do you know what that means?”

Staring at a butterfly, **the boy frankly said he did not.**

“Have you read it?”

“Oh, I probably flipped through it before, but **I’m sure I didn’t understand it.**”

We know Song Baoqi had read this book and left many marks on the book. The story continues:

Fingering the book, Zhang demanded, “Why did you draw a mustache on all the pictures with a woman in them? What was the point?”

Ashamed, Song **lowered his eyes and replied**, “It was a competition. We each took a book and drew a mustache on every woman in the pictures. The one who drew the most was to have good luck...”

Zhang was outraged and speechless. Song **stole a glance at him. Ashamed, he quickly added, “I know it was wrong.** We shouldn’t have read those pornographic books... We were just trying to find out who would be the first to get a girl friend. ...I...I won’t do it again.” He thought of the Public Security Bureau and his mother’s tearful eyes, showing a mixture of love and hate, as she took him home. ¹

Teacher Zhang’s gazing in this sense is like Bentham’s panopticon that Foucault talks about. His sharp stare makes Song “lower his eyes and reply.” Such staring not only captures Song’s each facial expression, but also looks into Song’s mind. Here Teacher Zhang’s stare is not a stare of a teacher as individual, but a stare that represented the enlightening Subject; under this stare, Song has no choice but be a submissive subject, which in turn establishes the Subject position of Teacher Zhang. After his “interrogation,” Zhang acquires the symbolic gesture typical of the 1980s – “Zhang almost cried out in despair: How to save the children ruined by

¹ *Prize-Winning Stories From China 1978-1979*, 17-18. The emphases are added by me.

the Gang of Four?”¹ As such, between Teacher Zhang and Song forms what Althusser calls “specular relation.”²

But this is by no means all of the dramatic center suggests. A reader of Rancière will easily find such a process of “enlightening/stultifying” upsetting and self-betrayal. And the reason we – the readers - recognize this quickly is due to the self-reflectiveness of narrative technique. It leaks the message that his Song is not really a subordinated subject. This paragraph has left enough room for Song’s perspective, we see his facial expression, as well as his stuttering; what we see is a subject that is in the process of being “stultified” - “replied meekly” “star(red) at a butterfly,” “frankly said,” “lowered his eyes and replied,” “ashamed”, “quickly added” ... In this paragraph, Song undoubtedly acquires more visual emphasis than Zhang, which brings out the ironic effect of the narrative.³ From the ironic viewpoint, we find that this ignorant student was smart enough; he performed “foolishness” so as to cater to the authoritative teacher

¹ *Prize-Winning Stories From China 1978-1979*, 18.

² See Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971, 127-186.

³ The “irony” here is not used by the author deliberately, but I think it comes from the realist method that Liu Xinwu adopts. Because Liu’s realism intends to reveal multiple perspectives in the whole world, then according to Henry James’s theory, it necessary leads to irony. Indeed, Liu’s realism soon turned toward naturalism after his first group of ideological writings. Gradually, he has loosened the unifying power of his hero’s viewpoint, and made even more manifest the irreconcilability of reality. For example, in *Qiao Sha* (乔莎), he mocks at the “love” discourse as the cultural symbol of the elite class, in *The Overpass* (*liti jiaocha qiao*, 立体交叉桥), a perspective of underclass youth which was at first mocked at turns out to have, among all the characters, the most positive energy in the end. From this view, Liu has consciously kept the narrative device of irony. Therefore, while Liu is the most powerful propagator of enlightenment discourse as well as intellectual’s enlightening posture and will to power, but at the same time he is also the one who reveals the futility of enlightening posture, which has become even more obvious in his later works. This incipency of irony has already shown up in the early work of *The Class Master*.

while trying to conceal his real intent. This makes us realize, although Song's viewpoint has been remarkably suppressed, there still emerges the possibility for the dramatic interaction between an implied minor character and the heroic protagonist. As we read on, we also find the "character space"¹ of Teacher Zhang's two other students, Xie Huimin and Shi Hong. Xie Huimin's psychology has been depicted in the story, which shows deep doubts and annoying provocativeness to Teacher Zhang. Whereas, Shi Hong's compliance is the illusion of Teacher Zhang; in fact, she always makes her own decision, and her behavior is completely out of Teacher Zhang's control. Comparatively speaking, Song is the easiest one to be tamed and silenced, but it only seems to be so. The key point in my reading here is not to show the deconstructiveness of the text, but the complexity of enlightenment and interpellation of the subject. Compared to this, Althusser's drama of "interpellation" is somewhat abstract and reduced.

In this passage, though the author assumes a character that is most "ignorant" and "like stick and stone," but actually we see Song's "cunning." He says "I am sure I didn't understand it," which seems to be an oxymoron; and the words "probably flipped through it" are actually intends to conceal his real reading experience; and the question and answer immediately following it reveals the existence of such "real experience."² Actually, if we follow Jacotot or

¹ About "character space," see, Alex Woloch, *The One vs. the Many*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 12-14, 2009.

² In his autobiographical work *The Confession of a Red Guard*, Liang Xiaosheng frankly talks about his experience. While he was doing intimate things with a girl, he thought of the scene in *The Gadfly*; he admits that *The Gadfly* was his introductory work to sex in his teenage years. That "Song draw mustache on the woman face", wanting to find a girlfriend after reading this book, and treating this

Rancière's explanation that "HUMAN SOUL CAPABLE OF TEACHING ITSELF BY ITSELF," then Song, in those free days of the Cultural Revolution, must get the courage to read this world in his own way. But Jacotot and Rancière talks about equality and limitlessness in abstract, and their anarchist tendency shows no regard for the ideology mechanism or language order that has already been founded. But for Lacan, the formation of the subject has to enter into a symbolic order. Therefore, in this interrogation, Song comes to realize that he should give up his old thoughts; he detects that Teacher Zhang "makes its goal the others' silence,"¹ and he also realizes that by now in Teacher Zhang converges three types of "Ideological State Apparatuses" – family, school, and Public Security Bureau. Therefore, his compliant gesture comes from interrogation rather than communication. The inequality here is overdetermined by social relations. Teacher Zhang is by no means communicating from an equal position, but is issuing a statement from the post of the Subject. And he is not simply "interpellating," he is silencing, hence, he "fingered the book, demanded, inquired, to be outraged and speechless." This gesture makes Song panic, so he first "replied meekly", and then felt "ashamed" and "lowered his eyes", and finally "stole a glance at him," as if found

book as a "pornography," already implies the possibility of such reading experience. Besides, the "brotherhood" that Song adores also comes from *The Gadfly*, which as a heroic story, has the color of early years guerrilla.

¹ In his autobiographical novel, *The Confession of a Red Guard* (yige hongweibing de zibai, 一个红卫兵的自白), Liang Xiaosheng frankly talks about his experience. While he was doing intimate things with a girl, he thought of the scene in *The Gadfly*; he admits that *The Gadfly* was his introductory work to sex in his teenage years. That "Song draw mustache on the woman face," wanting to find a girlfriend after reading this book, and treating this book as a "pornography," already implies the possibility of such reading experience. Besides, the "brotherhood" that Song adores also comes from *The Gadfly*, which as a heroic story, has the color of early years guerrilla.

himself guilty, hence he no longer has the courage to propagate his own understanding based on his own concrete situation - "I am sure I didn't understand it." Here he chose to give up, and cynically retreats to the "self-incurred immaturity"; he identifies with the order. And the narrator of this novel/Teacher Zhang re-enacts this scene so as to aesthetically reinforce the newly established social discourse as well as the power configuration behind this language order.

Voices About the Barbarian

However, to fulfill the secret desire of the intelligentsia need more than political sanction. I have already pointed out, the historical trauma, terror, and resentment of Teacher Zhang came from the confrontation between the master of "allotted enlightenment"(Deng's elitism) and student of the "ignorant scholarmaster,"(Mao's populism), or, symbolically, from Teacher Zhang's reform proposition and Xie Huiming's radical politics. However, as a kind of imaginary resolution, the narrative apparatus dodges the political confrontation between Zhang and Xie but uses the cultural battle between Zhang and Song (Xie) instead. What's more, the cultural confrontation is represented not as different class cultures or opposition between bourgeoisie culture and socialist culture, but as the antagonism between a literate enlightener and a barbarous ignoramus. Under the binary opposition of civilization and barbarism, teacher Zhang is apotheosized as the master of knowledge whereby Song and Xie are defused and

domesticated, “this poor boy was rejecting knowledge and culture,” “save the children!”¹ Then, so far as “save the children” reminds the readers of May Fourth writer Lu Xun’s famous saying in *A Manman’s Diary*, a new strategy is implied for historical displacement. That is, to link post-Mao period directly with May Fourth Movement and to make the denial of feudalism by civilization as a rhetorical device for denying Mao’s time, which was newly regarded as a product of “feudalism” and “peasant culture. Finally, the New Enlightenment discourse was established which enabled intellectuals to get rid of the reliance on political endorsement as a source of legitimacy and therefore acquired the new energy for their own subject formation, hence the rising of the discourse of “subjectivity” later in the mid-1980s.

Perhaps we can temporarily conclude that it is the discursive mechanism of “civilization vs. barbarianism” that underpinned the secret will-fulfillment of “silencing the proletariat” of the intellectual readership and authorship in the late 1970s and the early 1980s’ China. *The Class Master* initiated such a narrative mechanism which I believe contributed a lot to its artistic success. “He was nurturing China’s future.” It will not be difficult for us today to image the agitation and excitement of *The Class Master*’s readers in 1977, who suddenly read out a new subject position waiting for themselves, no longer the “pupil of workers and peasants,” but the master of the whole class (whole country). Obviously, it is not only a position for an autonomous subject, the emergence of self-conscious individual that “uses his own understanding” in his passive breaking away from the repressive state, but also a position for

¹ *Prize-Winning Stories From China 1978-1979*, 18.

the wish-fulfillment of the intelligentsia's restoration and their aggressive political desire to become the new educator and master of the post-Mao society, with their demand of a new-authoritarian regime to quell the perpetual war of class struggle caused by Mao's radical politics, or we can say the radical enlightenment that is "everyone is able to enlighten themselves." In this light, "nurturing China's future" at the same time means "saving the children," or more explicitly, "silencing the proletariat." Enlightening at once means the stultifying, and the conscious aspect of the subject position turns into the unconscious – unconscious not only in the sense of Freudian hermeneutic about individual psychobiography, such as Teacher Zhang or the intellectuals' repressed traumatic experience, their secret hatred, resentment and revenge, but moreover in the sense of Lacan's famous saying, "the unconscious is the discourse of other," of how the newborn individual subject positions himself/herself in the symbolic language of the total social structure. That is, how do the intelligentsia deal with the class antagonism and resolve the social contradiction in their ideological imagination of the vibrant figure, "The Class Master."

However, it does not mean the aesthetic tension and political anxiety between the enlightened schoolmaster and the ignorant low-class student had been settled down once and for all. On the contrary, the confrontation is evoked with various repetitions. In chapter one we have discussed in *Hibiscus Town* the antagonism between Qin Shutian and Wang Qiuhe, and in the next section we will continue to address the hostility between Lady Xiao and a worker with the nickname "Fire-cracker." By now, I want to add in other two extreme cases in dealing

with the specular relation between the intelligentsia and the proletariat to exhibit perhaps the apogees of this narrative mechanism. And from these apogees, we can also find its internal crisis.

Actually, *The Class Master* deals it in a rather moderate way by infantilizing the “lumpen proletariat” and by restraining the narrative intervention. One immoderate case is Yu Luojin’s autobiographical novella *A Winter Fairy Tale* (yige dongtian de tonghua 一个冬天的童话)¹ where the deliberate defaming of workers and peasants works as a revenge mechanism. Yu Luojin is the younger sister of Yu Luhoke, the famous victim of the Cultural Revolution who was executed for attacking the Cultural Revolution by his radical egalitarian “Theory of Family Background.”² Ironically, although Yu Luoke is eulogized as a cultural hero in the sister’s narrative, in recalling her own miserable countryside life as well as the painful marriage with a coarse husband of humble birth, the autobiographical writer gives a full vent of her discrimination and resentment. In their wedding night, in face of her husband’s animal-like undressed body, the novel does an impressive job of describing the psychological and bodily repulsion from a civilized female subject. However, now that the husband is also betrayed as kind-hearted and caring, the unrestrained defamation meanwhile generates disturbing feelings regarding morality. Such candor generated tremendous social effects, though for many readers the novella was far from a sophisticatedly coded representation.

¹ Yu Luojin, *A Winter Fairy Tale*, published on *Dangdai* (当代), 1980(3).

² About Yu Luoke’s story, Mou Zhijing in his memoirs “youth passes as a fleeting wave” (“sishui liunian,” 似水流年), gives us a detailed description, see *Memory of the Tempests* (*baofengyu de jiyi*, 暴风雨的记忆), Beidao, Cao Yifan, Weiyi, ed. Beijing: Sanlian Press, 2012, 1-52.

Unlike Yu's defaming of her "barbarian" husband, Zhang Xiangliang in his stories (*Mimosa* and *Half of Man is Woman*) extolls the protagonists' "barbarian" wife or lover with an inflated tone. The most notorious sentences perhaps were:

"It is them, the ordinary laborers, that give me material and spiritual strength, enabling me to seek the truth in the books of Marxism and regain my faith in our nation and party in the most difficult time of the People's Republic; it is them who handed me to walk on the red carpet of political arena again."¹

Then with such a Hegelian logic, the returned "rightist" intellectual could dump his country lovers with an easy heart, just as Faust needs necessary to seduce and abandon Gretchen for his *Bildung*. The lower peasant class in Zhang's novel, often in the image of an innocent girl, exists to serve the male intellectual's *Bildung*. His male protagonist finally sublates his countryside life together with his women, who fed him with food and sex in the most difficult time, and walks on the red carpet of political arena once again. It is a painful but sublime *Aufhebung*, and evidently, the aesthetic power of such sublimation fit into the secret desire of the intelligentsia – "silence the proletariat!" – once again. However, it is also disquieting, particularly female readers and writers would feel uncomfortable if not offended. Besides, critic Huang Ziping at the time alerted us, can the hardship, trauma, and interclass conflicts be really "sublated" through the sublime aestheticization? Would the tendency of unceasing sublimation and unceasing purification leave an ominous mark on the fate of newly formed subject of the New Era?² Indeed, in the early 1990s, Wang Anyi's novella *Our Uncle's*

¹ See, *Controversial Fictions in the New Era: The Descendants of Lu Ban and Other Stories*, (*xinshiqi zhengming zuopin congshu: luban de zisun*, 新时期争鸣作品丛书: 鲁班的子孙), Changchun: shidai wenyi press, 175, 1986. The translation is mine.

² *Ibid*, 217-19.

Story (*shushu de gushi*, 叔叔的故事),¹ using as material the stories of Zhang Xianliang and other rightists, raises this question again. To Wang, the biggest problem of the rightist “uncle” lies perhaps in his detest and rejection of his “dark” period of life. Zhang’s male protagonist’s praise of the hero’s suffering and the dedication of the underclass women are actually the displacement of Yu Luojin’s loath; through this displacement or purification of real life, he completely silences the barbarism of the lower class and his own. This is an allegorical summary of the subject problem of intellectuals of the 1980s, which is established by constant purging of its past and the voices of the lower classes which already shown in *The Class Master*.

But as I have pointed out above, the “barbarousness” of Song is the result of the illuminating light of enlightenment from the self-righteous schoolmaster. I will discuss in Chapter Four that others writers of “Street Fictions” (“shijing xiaoshuo,” 市井小说) at the time, such as Wang Zengqi, Lu, Wenfu and Wang Anyi, already seek different representations or voices of the commoners. The reflection on the enlightening posture of the intelligentsia could be also found in Wang Shuo’s stories in the late 1980s, for example in his *Wild Animals* (*dongwu xiongmeng*, 动物凶猛) and its famous film adaptation, *In the Heat of the Sun* (*yangguang canlan de rizi*, 阳光灿烂的日子). It was the wild teenage boys and girls with the look of hooligans who carried the meaning of hot-blooded heroism and idealism. This is a belated resistance of Song Baoqi’s which only suggests that Teacher Zhang’s project of silencing Song never triumphs completely.

¹ Wang Anyi, *Our Uncle’s Story*, published on *The Harvest* (*shouhuo*, 收获), 1990(6).

2.2 *Waves and the Modernist Perspective*

Crash! The idol lies on the floor !

Our discussion of *The Class Master* is not over yet. We have discussed Teacher Zhang's secret desire, his enlightening-stultification act, the specular relation between Zhang and Song, and the discursive mechanism of civilization vs. barbarism. Such tactical ideology is the part that *The Class Master* explicates to the finest detail. But we also know the narrative apparatus dodges the political debate between Zhang and Xie entirely. Xie in this story is a much more obstinate student; to her, Teacher Zhang is carrying out a revisionist education line, while Shi Hong's cultural taste and dressing style are nothing but petty bourgeois, and her struggle with Song is a struggle between the real proletariat and the lumpen proletariat. Such an ideological coding could not be more familiar to readers of that time. In fact, readers familiar with Liu Xinwu's work will find that just two years before Liu had written a novel titled *Open Your Eyes Wide* (*zhengda nide yanjing* 睁大你的眼睛).¹ In this novel, the hero Fang Qi is another Xie, both sharing entirely political position and combatting attitude. But at that time, the narrator unfolds his narrative firmly around Fang's ideological stance and present Fang as a heroic figure. The entire story politicizes the daily life of a small local community in an exaggerating way, exaggerating the petty sabotage – dampening the slides of overhead projector – which is done by a neighborhood resident due to his grudge against the neighborhood committee into a

¹ Liu Xinwu, *Open Your Eyes Wide* (*zhengda nide yanjing* 睁大你的眼睛), Beijing: Beijing renmin chubanshe, 1975.

class revenge of the bourgeoisie. Such exaggeration exists not only on the level of the plot but also on its style of language. Roland Barthes has a incisive critique of such revolutionary style.¹ Now, the problem is, merely in two years, why would Liu readily accept a different coding system; now the coding of civilization-barbarism replaces the original coding, and won widespread success. I do not mean to dwell on the question of the transformation of the author's attitude in so far as both of the two codes were mainstream ideologies, but instead I want to ask: why such a dramatic transcoding? The political turning from Mao to the post-Mao regime is one important reason, but it is not a simple causal relationship from politics to culture, as the political orientation at that time is still vague, and actually it is Liu's work that amounted to a breaking out in both the intellectual and cultural realm. Are there other reasons? Hegel has commented on the victory of Enlightenment over faith, using the language of Diderot – “then ‘one fine morning it gives its comrade a shove with the elbow, and bang! Crash! The idol lies on the floor.’”² What Hegel is saying is, enlightenment has already infused into the civil life; though the old system of codes is still a stable system, it has already eroded away, therefore “with the elbow, and bang! Crash! The idol lies on the floor.” Then, could there be a similar situation for the post-Cultural Revolution period?

This then concerns me with the cultural-political crisis of socialism, which I will address in this section, from the angle of the personal feeling and taste of the petty bourgeoisie in the

¹ Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, Beacon Paperback, 1970, 67-73.

² G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Oxford, New York, Toronto, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1977, 332.

(post-)socialist period. This question was raised in the form of struggling of “cultural hegemony” in the 1950s and 60s, which Xiaobing Tang and Cai Xiang have discussed,¹ for example, the famous battle between sack cloth (symbolizing proletarian culture) and the leather jacket (symbolizing bourgeois culture). But the question now became the struggle between civilization and barbarism. Teacher Zhang talked to Xie in a tone of criticism: “why are you wearing a long-sleeved blouse in this hot weather? ... You girls should all be wearing skirts.”² Here, the “skirt” is a recurring icon frequently used in many literary texts of that time; it served as the symbol of female beauty, modern civilization, and individual freedom. Opposed to this are the peasant’s poor taste, barbarism, and asceticism which are regarded as characteristic of Mao’s time. The fact that skirt or piano became popular icons for a civilized way of life implies another “cultural revolution”³ has taken place with the degeneration of Mao’s Cultural

¹ About the crisis of the Cultural Revolution and Chinese Socialism, Cai Xiang points out, on the one hand, by the first half of the 1960s, there already formed an urban middle class (the countryside is completely excluded from this sphere). They advocated daily life and opposed political life, and there arose their needs for consumption and private life. On the other hand, within socialism there rose the bureaucratic class, and “Three Distinctions” (between workers and peasants, country and city, mental labor and manual labor). These have led to the formation of a hierarchical, solidified, and alienated society within socialist China. Mao’s Cultural Revolution was intended to target the two aspects, but despite the fierce rebellions in the first stage of Cultural Revolution, the society did not get rid of bureaucratic rule; rather, the institutionalized collectivism based on socialized production made the individual’s rebelling desire even stronger. As a result, the beginning of the 1970s somewhat resembled the atmosphere of the beginning of 1960s, in which the political discourse of class struggle make people weary, while the desire for daily life grew stronger. See, Cai, Xiang, *Revolution and Its Narratives: China’s Socialist Literary and Cultural Imaginaries, 1949-1966*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2016, 403-432.

² *Prize-Winning Stories From China 1978-1979*, 8.

³ About Jameson’s definition of “cultural revolution,” “the reconstruction of the materials of cultural and literary history in the form of new “text,” see, *The Political Unconscious*, 96, 95-97.

Revolution. And the beautiful, cultured Shi Hong with her family is exactly the leading force of this new cultural revolution.

This observation reminds us of the seemingly insignificant figure of Shi Hong in *The Class Master*. I will analyze the enlightening energy hidden in the picture of Shi Hong, which is a diffusive sentiment, a Hegelian affection, or the “affect” in term of today’s affect theory. But for the moment I want to say a little more about student Xie and her radical political thoughts. As the object of the oppressive coding of *The Class Master*, the political passion in Xie is undermined, rendering her into a weakened Red Guard. However, among the historical documents we find the strong face of Xie. Xie or those Beijing young activists demonstrated political passion and energy in the cultural and political atmosphere of the middle and late 1970s. And their thoughts, of course, are far from being “young and inexperienced,” or “had become narrow-minded and confused under the influence and restrictions of the “Gang of Four.”¹ On the contrary, they are rather aggressive, adventurous yet muddleheaded. Yan Zuolei in his article “Social Thoughts at the Historical Turning Point,” by examining 33 kinds of underground political journals developed from the “Xidan democracy wall” (“xidan minzhu qiang” 西单民主墙) during 1978-1980, shows that among the youths there are proponents of Yugoslavia democratic reform, favorers of Paris Commune, radical Marxists who proposed to replace state ownership with public ownership, admirers American democracy, supporters of Soviet’s “thaw” trend, dead-ended Maoists, etc. To the article author, such various activities of

¹ *Prize-Winning Stories From China 1978-1979*, 12.

political thought is nothing but the consequence of the “four great freedoms” (freedom of speech, freedom of critique, freedom to paste the “big character posters” and freedom to debate) of the Cultural Revolution.”¹

As a middle-school student, Xie perhaps lacks mature political thinking because of her age, but this is a coding tactic of “infantilizing.” Liu Xinwu silences the multiple political voices of Red Guards in his *The Class Teacher* but a few of others does not. We find other marginal voices from Red Guards in the period. There are writings by educated youth with Red Guard experiences about their own experience. However, such writings can only be expressed through strict official censorship and self-censorship. As far as official discourse thoroughly denies the Cultural Revolution, to express some sympathy toward the Cultural Revolution will run a risk. And meanwhile, there is the self-censorship. How to deal with the violence in the early stage? How to get through the trauma of the armed struggle? How to describe the experience of educated youths in the countryside and their encounter with the peasants? All these concerns require delicate narrative apparatus and the unavoidable displacements and distortions. For example, we have works which deal with the armed struggles, such as Zheng Yi’s *Maple* (*feng feng*), Jin He’s *Reunion* (*chongfeng* 重逢), and Lu Yao’s *A Tensional Moment* (*jingxin dongpo de yike* 惊心动魄的一刻), works that deal with idealism of Red Guards and educated youths such as Zhang Chengzhi’s *Why the Rider Sings about Mother* (*qishou weishenme gechang*

¹ Yan Zuolei, “Social Thoughts in the Historical Transition: a Study on Underground journal and Campus Election in Beijing” (“lishi zhuangui shiqi de shehui sichao: yi minban banwu yu Beijing gaoxiao xuesheng jingxuan yundong wei zhongxin.” 历史转轨时期的社会思潮——以民办刊物与北京高校学生竞选运动为中心), *Yuehaifeng* (粤海风), No.6(2015), 61-73.

muqin 骑手为什么歌唱母亲), and *The Black Horse* (*hei junma* 黑骏马), *The River in the North* (*beifang de he* 北方的河), Liang Xiaosheng's *There is a Storm Tonight* (*jinye you baofengxue* 今夜有暴风雪), *Confession of a Red Guard* (*yige hongweibin de zibai* 一个红卫兵的自白), Lao Gui's *Blood Dusk* (*xuese huanghun* 血色黄昏). These works have different aesthetic and political positions. In the third section of the chapter, I will discuss one influential work of *When the Sunset Cloud Disappears* (*wanxia xiaoshi de shihou* 晚霞消失的时候) by the former Red Guard Li Ping, where we will re-visit these works. But for now, let's focus on Shi Hong.

The Enlightened Youths as Torchbearer

Let's return once again to *The Class Master*, whose detail is amazingly symptomatic. For example, after his visit to Song's family, Zhang hears about the fight between Shi and Xie, and decides to visit Shi's family. He considers Shi as his assistant, yet when he enters Shi's room, we find:

Shi sat in the middle of the room at the table, reading a book. Five of her classmates were listening.¹

Such a scene of the underground reading group has often appeared in the memoirs in recent years.² This unnoticeable scene thus reveals another implicit thread of enlightenment.

¹ *Prize-Winning Stories From China 1978-1979*, 23.

² See, Lao Yiwu ed. *The Lost Temple* (*chenlun de shengdian*, 沉沦的圣殿), Wulumuqi: Xinjiang qingshaonian chubanshe, 1999; Beidao and Li, Tuo ed. *1970s* (*qishi niandai* 七十年代), Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 2008; Liu, Lydia H. ed. *Torchbearer*, (*chideng de shizhe*, 持灯的使者), Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2009; *Memory of the Tempests*, 2012. All these memoirs are relevant to the *Today*-school.

To Teacher Zhang, such a view is satisfactory, as it seems to him Shi is helping with his work of “enlightening.” But such thought is a kind of wishful thinking; Shi is, in fact, leading an enlightenment on her own; besides, “Shi was so absorbed in her book, she was oblivious to Zhang’s presence.” If the “returned intellectuals” like Teacher Zhang obtained their “subject” position mainly by joining the official “Thought Liberation Movement” (“sixiang jiefang yundong” 思想解放运动), then the elite circles of the younger generation have already secretly started their self-enlightenment on their own secret gatherings and collective readings.

In discussing Bei Dao’s *Waves*, Li Tuo talks about a similar distinction between “Thought Liberation” and “New Enlightenment” in the early 1980s. To him, “Thought Liberation” is an official ideology reform movement. But Li Tuo alerts us, as early as the late 60’s and early 70’s, intellectuals (especially the younger generations) has already shed their illusion of official ideology, and the elite ones of these youths formed new and independent thoughts about individuality and society, which for Li Tuo constitutes the “New Enlightenment.” In talking about *Waves*, Li Tuo analyzes, this “New Enlightenment” is new at least from two aspects: on the one hand there is in the writings of “Today-School” (“jintian pai” 《今天》派) the manifest resources of Western Modernism, the influence of symbolism, absurdism, the “beatniks”, rock music, expressionism in drawings, etc.¹ On the other hand, these writings betray the existentialist consciousness of modern individuals which has got rid of the official ideology of

¹ Li Tuo, “‘New Petty Bourgeoisie’ and the Transfer of Cultural Hegemony” (“xin xiaozi’ he wenhua lingdaoquan de zhuan yi,” “新小资”和文化领导权的转移, *Journal of Modern Chinese Studies*(*Xiandai zhongwen xuekan*, 现代中文学刊), No.4(2012).

modernization, and forms into a more radical gesture of individual emancipation. Such trend, we can argue, continued into the writings of modernists and avant-garde fiction of the late 1980's. To speak more specifically, Li Tuo discovers a bourgeois nihilistic sentiment in Xiao Ling, the heroine of *Waves*, an individual consciousness which is nihilistic and radically denies everything. Such feelings are together with the narrative mechanism which diffuses such feelings, a kind of writing technique similar to indirect speech style. And the appearance of latter is a rebellion in language to Lydia H. Liu, especially as it takes as its target the old narrative mode of socialist realism. In her edited volume of *Torchbearer*, the collected memoir of *Today* literary journal, she treats the writings of *Today*-School poets as "diasporic writing" (游离写作), treats their vanguard language as rebellion in symbols, addresses their memory as involuntary memory outside the history. She treats *Today*-School as "aestheticized political dissidence," which is similar to Li Tuo's managing this trend of modernism as the "New Enlightenment" that stands opposite to "Thought Emancipation Movement." When this essay collection takes the name of "Torchbearer," it turns to be a sharp contrast to "the class master" of Liu Xinwu's story.

From the stance of the sympathizers of *Today*-School, Liu and Li's interpretations are insightful and compelling. But from the stance of researchers of *Today*-School, their interpretations have its limits. When talking about modernist literature and the official literature confrontation, Xudong Zhang makes such a comment, "for many modernists during this period, the official literature was a corrupted, lifeless state organ: its aesthetics was a reflection theory

out of touch with its reality.¹” Here we can read out a tone which resembles that of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. On the one hand, Zhang implies that modernism, as the negative supplement of the official realism, as a new moment, negates the previous moment; on the other hand, using a Hegelian way, Zhang is aware of the limitation of this subject, which cannot recognize the overall tendency of the spiritual movement and its particular historical moment in the movement of spirit. They call themselves “torchbearer” and indulges in the figure of cultural hero shaped by a kind of enlightenment discourse. We can find such a self-obsession of *Today-School*, or of underground literature, or of “Misty poem” blinds them to reveal their own historicity as well as their limits.² Therefore one should not indulge in treating them as “torchbearers” who stole the enlightening light of modernism from the West³ but instead should see that modernism is a way of writing about the Chinese collective experience, the Cultural Revolution experience by this generation. To me, the historicity of *Today-School* is also related to their unique subject gesture at the turn of 70’s and 80’s. Therefore, rather than

¹ Xudong Zhang, *Chinese Modernism in the Era of Reforms*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997, 123.

² Ever since the commentary of “misty poetry” (“menglong shi” 朦胧诗), this has been the standard rhetoric for poets and their commentators. And when *Today* journal began to publish oversea after the 1989 Tian’anmen Incident, such gesture further took on the explicit meaning of political resistance, like Huang Ziping remarks, “even under the total proletarian dictatorship, individuals could, through a ‘writing on the margin,’ preserve life experience, emotion and memory, express anxiety and hope, and resist the violence of language.” See, “The Meaning of Today” (“jintian de yiyi,” 《今天》的意义), *Jintian*(今天), No.1(1990), 71.

³ He Guimei has conducted a very thorough analysis of this rhetoric of “official vs. individual” and “tradition vs. modern” in her study. See, He, Guimei, *The Archival Knowledge of New Enlightenment: Culture Studies of China’s 1980s*, (“Xin qimeng” zhishi dang ’ an: bashi niandai zhongguo wenhua yanjiu,”新启蒙”知识档案: 八十年代中国文学研究), Chapter 2, Beijing: Beijing University Press, 2010, 115-163.

indulging in the myth of self-consciousness, researchers of *Today-School* should do a more historical analysis of the figure of “torchbearer.”

Historically speaking, although modernism is something that official socialist culture resisted, within the inner circle of cultural elites, even in Mao’s China, modernism is without question still an available resource.¹ Hence there is no surprising to find that these young people wrote modernist poetry to express their historical experience in a relatively free environment of the late stage of the Cultural Revolution. It is only through elevating this phenomenon in an ideological way, for example, for treating modernism as the origin of individualism and the bed rock of anti-despotism, while treating Mao’s China as a premodern world of oriental despotism that these poets will be adored as “fire-stealer,” or “torchbearer.” But the “ignorant schoolmaster” teaches us, that every human soul, Song Baoqi(s), Xie Huimin(s), Teacher Zhang(s), could enlighten themselves. They do not need the “fire” or “torch” from the outside.

Therefore the question about enlightenment is not about capability but about the attitude. The self-consciousness as enlightener - although everyone is able to enlighten himself, not all people can acquire the consciousness of enlightener, and to occupy the position of Subject. Or, there is always a group of individuals at a particular moment thinks to “do with the social-

¹ Besides the literary tradition of modernism inherited from the pre-PRC period, there are also guidance from poets like Guo Moruo and He Qifang to the new generation, such as He Qifang’s influence on Guo Lusheng, and Guo Moruo’s indirect influence on “Sun Society”(taiyang shishe, 太阳诗社), and especially because of the dissemination and circulation of the “internal publications” such as “yellow-covered books” during the Cultural Revolution, the existentialism and modernism in literary arts is not unfamiliar to the elite cultural circle such as “Misty poetry” group.

ideological need at the moment to rebuild ‘value,’ ‘meaning,’ and a ‘world picture.’”¹ Now, “enlightenment” means a specific moment, “the moment” when the old ideological world encounters crisis, and the contemporary meaning needs to be reestablished, a Nietzschean (or Heideggerian) nihilistic moment, or Foucauldian modern moment. For *Waves*, it is the reflection on “today” as difference in history and as motive for a particular philosophical task that the novelty of this text appears to me to lie. In the moment of Kant, he realizes “a reflection on today equates to a critique on today, rethinking any determinant elements of today in order to emancipate today, find a way ‘out.’”² Similarly, at the moment when *Today-School* is editing *Today*, they also obtain an attitude, a conscious reflection; to them, the old way of imagining Subject/subject is problematized, and they want to rebuild another one. At this moment, they indeed have a stronger attitude of enlightenment than Teacher Zhang. In *The Class Master*, the understanding of “the new” not yet gets rid of the dependence on the past, hoping that the pre-Cultural Revolution socialist temporality could be restored in the New Era. But *Today* holds a different attitude; they think everything should begin anew, and here an attitude of radical rupture is apparent. “The past has passed, the future is still far away, for our generation, it is only today, today!”³ Nonetheless, this attitude is not unique to “Today School”; in Jingfan’s (the pen name for the couple of Jin Guantao and Liu Qingfeng, who played an important role in the cultural construction of the 1980s’ China) work *Public Love Letters*

¹ *Chinese Modernism in the Era of Reforms*, 128.

² Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?” See, Foucault, Michel, *The Foucault Reader*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1984, 38.

³ “To Our Readers” (“zhi duzhe,” 致读者), *Today*, (*Jintian*, 今天) Vol.1.

(*gongkai de qingshu* 公开的情书), published on the “democracy wall,” we also see such an attitude toward the future at the end of the novella, “friends, our letters to you have not yet finished, because the road of life is long. Let us return your trust with the creation of the past, present, and future.”¹ “Us and Future,” such is the enlightenment attitude of this younger generation of elite intellectuals.

Certainly, such attitude of enlightenment also has to do with power configuration. Between the two generations of intellectuals, between Teacher Zhang and the enlightened student Shi, there is a struggle over the leadership of enlightenment; but this struggle for hegemony does not belong to the underclass of Song, nor does it belong to the old ideology follower Xie. Then the “today”, the “publicity” of “public love letters”, and the “democracy” of the “Democracy Wall” all belong to the intelligentsia class. We know for Kant, as explicated by John Christian Laursen, the publicity that realized the reason of enlightenment is the unique intellectual readership of that time. In this environment full of enlightenment atmosphere, Kant and other enlightenment intellectual seek for alternative way out, to rebuild “value,” “meaning,” and a “world picture.” While Kant uses this platform to confront the royalty and feudal forces, he also uses this platform to suppress the disrupting voices of superstitious masses.² In the late 1970s and early 1980s, because of the failure of Mao’s radical political experiment, the recently restored bureaucracy class has to rely on the old pre-Cultural Revolution ideology, the peasants

¹ *Controversial Works in the New Era: The Public Letters (xinshiqi zhengming zuopin congshu: gongkai de qingshu*, 新时期争鸣作品丛书：公开的情书), Changchun: Shidai wenyi press, 1986, 332.

² See John Christian Laursen, “The Subversive Kant: The Vocabulary of ‘Public’ and ‘Publicity,’” in *What Is Enlightenment?*, 253-269.

and workers are silenced, and because there is no bourgeoisie in the Western sense, hence at this critical moment of cultural crisis, intellectuals has gained their influential publicity. In Beijing region, for example, such publicity of intellectuals' "New Enlightenment," at first starts from the Democracy Wall, and then expands to the underground political journals, the university classes, and slowly seeps into official cultural institutions. It is in such environment that literature or aesthetics play an active political function. Such enthusiasm for the new possibility and for creating value, and the thoroughness of spiritual rebellion, though is the continuation of the Cultural Revolution, seems to exceed its early stage in the Cultural Revolution. Comparing to the overall depoliticized situation of the 1990s' China, the 1980s is the golden age of the intelligentsia.

The Hypocritical or the Authentic: Rebellious Affects

Then, what is the difference between *Today-School* and the so-called official enlightenment intellectuals regarding aesthetics and politics? I will use Beidao's novella *The Waves* for illustration.

I choose this text for several reasons. First, writers of *Today-School* are famous for their achievement in poetry writing while their attainment in narrative literature is comparatively weak, and *The Waves* perhaps is the only influential one. Second, unlike *The Class Teacher's* success in obtaining official recognition, *Wavers* is welcomed and accepted primarily as underground literature. Beidao wrote the novella clandestinely in 1973, and the script was

circulated among educated youths in the form of hand-written copies for years. Then Beidao with his friends founded the magazine *Today* in 1978 which was banned two years later. The novel was revised and published on this widely circulated magazine and at the same time, it was posted on the famous Democracy Wall in the form of big-character poster, hence, as “political novel” and “enlightenment story”, it becomes part of the “Thought Liberation Movement” and “Democratization Movement,” and thus takes on the dissident, non-official posture.

Third, this piece is closely related to the fundamental literary proposition of *Today*-School. Speaking of their criticism towards the officially recognized “Scar Literature,” two articles on *Today* need to be noticed. Zhao Zhenxian’s “On Social Significance of *Scar*,” (“ping shanghen de shehui yiyi” 评《伤痕》的社会意义) (*Today*, issue 4) and Lin Dazhong’s “On *Wake Up, Brother*” (“ping xinlaiba, didi” 评《醒来吧，弟弟》) (*Today*, issue 1). Zhao Zhenxian is the younger brother of Beidao and *Scar* is the representative work of “Scar Literature,” and is also the officially endorsed paradigmatic work about writing the Cultural Revolution experience for the younger generation. On the same issue of this critical article, *Today* began to publish *Waves*, apparently intending to make *Waves* into a new paradigmatic work. *Wake Up, Brother* is another influential work by Liu Xinwu after *The Class Master*. Lin’s article harshly criticized Liu Xinwu’s identity as a spokesman for the official policy, and the article’s most famous sentence “Wake up, Liu Xinwu” was widely circulated at that time. But what challenge in aesthetics does *Today* pose to the aesthetic tradition of socialist realism?

Zhao Zhenxian's criticism of *Scar* focuses on two aspects. One is about the "representativeness" of this representation. It is not merely a political, but more an aesthetic question. Does realism represent reality, or does it forge and control life via certain representation? Zhao raises this tricky question, and proceeds, under what circumstances the individual experience of a specific class can pass as the experience of the entire society? Whose scar? Zhao explicitly points out that in *Scar*, Xiaohua's "scar, from its cutting open to healing, is completed within the consciousness of the special social class of the cadre's children."¹ The falling of sons and daughters of privileged class into the civilian level is, of course, a traumatic experience, plus the psychological trauma of children caused by their "black" parents as "traitors," constitutes excellent materials for literary creation. However, the problem is, for *Scar* and its supporting ideology system, such perspective becomes the only "correct" way of writing about the Cultural Revolution. I have explicated theoretically about the problem of ideological investment in realist representation in Chapter One, which concerns the relationship between realist aesthetics and cultural politics. Zhao raised this question because in the arena of literature production at the moment there was still an intense struggle over "representation." In one footnote of his *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus*, Althusser almost overthrows his argument, as he finds that his way of talking about ideological reproduction of subject is abstract, and ignores the class struggle behind the concrete process of the reproduction or

¹ Zhao Zhenxian, "About the Social Implications of *Scar*" ("ping shenghen de shehui yiyi," 评《伤痕》的社会意义), *Today, (Jintian, 今天)* Vol.4.

interpellation.¹ This problem is worth our attention. Zhao's fury might have to do with direct political factors, as the family background of the members of *Today-School* is mostly cultural elites. They are not born of the "red family," and thus were bullied at the beginning stage of the Cultural Revolution, and after the Cultural Revolution they are not able to be immediately absorbed into the ruling class, hence they feel that their own experience and emotions are at odds with the the "experiences" and "feelings" promoted by *Scar*. Therefore, to *Today-school*, *Scar* has a serious problem of representativeness.

But the question is not merely an issue of a power struggle on representation. Zhao has a quite profound understanding of realistic aesthetics. He immediately realizes that talking solely about class representation has limits, because the "typifying" ("dianxing hua" 典型化) or "totalizing" demand of realism would always break the isolated perspective of a particular class, and would demonstrate the contradictions of the entire society with a viewpoint of totality; we could typify the protagonist, i.e. putting the protagonist at the center of contradictions and conflicts. In this way, the conflict within the novel, including the conflict on individual's psychological level, would develop into the multiple dimensions of collective unconsciousness. But Zhao points out, *Scar* fails as a hypocritical work of official realism. It avoids the real problem, not the avoidance in terms of the plotline, but avoidance of the psychological conflicts

¹ The note reads "But this point of view is still an abstract one. For in a class society the relations of production are relations of exploitation, and therefore relations between antagonistic classes. The reproduction of the relations of production, the ultimate aim of the ruling class, cannot therefore be a merely technical operation training and distributing individuals for the different posts in a 'technical division' of labour." However, Althusser's this famous article is always technically and abstractly used. See, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, 183, 183-186.

– avoiding the authentic feelings and replace with official “hypocritical emotion,” hence precluding the work from touching the core of social contradiction and depth of emotions. Zhao gives an illuminating example of “hypocritical emotion.” In *Scar*, the protagonist Wang Xiaohua felt “humiliated” because her mother was “revealed” to be a “traitor,” which made her feel that “an ugly scar stretches across her white clean face.”¹ Wang hence chose to break away from her mother and left home. Zhao points out many young persons have made such choice, what he wants to criticize is the “infantilizing” representation used for addressing this psychological theatre. To make sure the purity of Xiaohua’s thoughts and emotions, the work suppresses any unseemly sentiments of the individual, while claiming Xiaohua “criticizes her own petty bourgeois emotions according to the voice from within her heart as well as from outside, drawing a clear line between her and her mother.” To Zhao, such narrative is extremely hypocritical.

Zhao’s fury is understandable. We may say, what Zhao feels like missing is something like “authentic resentment.” We might imagine a psychological drama like the Nietzschean “dark workshop.” Imagine an ambitious young man or woman with revolutionary ideal, who has been living a privileged life, when he or she is suddenly told that parents are traitors and is therefore deprived of privileges, derided by his or her fellows, what kind of psychological reaction or thoughts would he or she have? We could try giving some inference according to the historical and literary materials at hand. I could guess, at first, the shock may lead to fury and

¹ Zhao Zhenxian, “About the Social Implications of *Scar*.”

confrontation. We know by the end of 1966, when Mao's intention of overthrowing veteran cadres in power became more revealing, the Red Guards from cadre's families felt increasingly disappointed with Mao, with fiercer emotional confrontation, to the point of establishing the notorious "Allied Action" ("liandong" 联动) in order to defend their parents against the Central Cultural Revolution Group (zhongyang wenge 中央文革).¹ Nevertheless, for most of them who has grown up in heroic education and has identified with Mao's ideal of the Cultural Revolution, the initial shock may develop into some spiritual mysophobia,² which makes them unable to tolerate acts of "betrayal" that most often did happen on their close ones. If her mother is proved of being "traitor" with clear supporting evidence, Xiaohua might demonstrate her rejection and loathe even harsher than others. Such attitude of denial perhaps may also be added with the resentment, which may come from the discontent in the past, or from the misgivings for the dim future, as well as the hatred derived from humiliation suffered in real life. Hence, "breaking with parents and leaving the family" could be either a self-presentation for political purpose, or could be an escape of the annoyance of the past, or could be a kind of self-torturing,

¹ The issues about "Allied Actions" (联动) and the "Western District Picket Corps" (西纠) are very complicated, and there is not sufficient history study of this problem. Still, we could get some perceptions from the study of literature. For example, the description of "Allied Actions" in *When the Sunset Cloud Disappears* by "old red guards" is vastly different from the descriptions by the "non-old-red-guards." In *Confessions of a Red Guard*, from the perspective of an ordinary Red Guard from outside, Liang Xiaosheng makes piquant satires about the political privilege, the sense of superiority by virtue of the political privilege, the unbridled will to power, as well as the sexual desire, of "Allied Actions."

² The profound understanding of mysophobia can be seen in Nanchang's attitude towards his father in Wang Anyi's *Age of Enlightenment* (*qimeng shidai* 启蒙时代).

heroic posture for the future. ¹

These are just a few speculations, there are necessary other possibilities as emotion is always individualistic, diverse, arbitrary and thus hard to rationalize and hence difficult to represent. Yet, such a tension or difficulty in representing feelings is precisely where the aesthetic power of literature lies. Writers of *Today-School* are not unfamiliar with the modernist and existentialist way of expressing feelings. Hence it is natural that they ask for the Sartrean writing style with the intensity of individual existentialist feeling about “scar,” which was exactly the direction that *Waves* took. But *Scar* seems to be feeble in dealing with such existentialist affects. *Scar* deliberately avoids the intensity of affects or “dark workshop” – Xiaohua forever remains innocent; first she innocently break with her family, and as soon as her romantic love is strangled she instantly “purified” the mood, “devoted her emotions to school children,” and the pain caused by her mother’s death is immediately recovered and contributes to the determination to devote herself to the Party. Nowadays it may seem shocking to see such “purifying” attempts, but this must be understood in the aesthetic formula of “neo-classicism” which had been cultivated in socialist realism and reached its peak during the Cultural Revolution. It is not that Xiaohua has no other feelings (all the author does not know), but that those feelings have no way to enter the aesthetic coding system of socialist realism,

¹ Lao Gui gives us an intricate case about such a “breaking with family” in his *Blood Red Dusk* (*xuese huanghun* 血色黄昏). The protagonist’s mother broke with her son when she heard her son had committed a crime. But at the same time, she used her social connection to rescue her son from prison. Meanwhile, the son also broke with his mother several times, each time for different psychological reasons.

hence the author of *Scar* can only look for the naming of such feelings in this given ethical formula – innocence, enthusiasm, pain, determination – each has unequivocal moral meaning, and even “pain” is the preparation for the sublime devotion.¹ Hence *Scar* completely loses the rebellious destructing power that could possibly gain from the protagonist’s trauma experience. Therefore, to Zhao, such representation that purifies emotions and infantilizes characters reflects “how low-quality and sterile our time’s works are.”² While *Waves* does not differ much from *Scar* in terms of plotline, its main breakthrough is on revealing the “affects.” The affects in *Waves* has gotten rid of the old socialist order of emotions, and has captured the waves of feelings that is intimately related to individual experience, which is similar to Benjamin’s Baudelairean “Erlebnis.”

Today-School writers call for writing own experience (Erlebnis) and do not trust the mode of feelings provided by *The Class Master* and *Scar*. They experience Cultural Revolution on their own. We must not think that it is after reading these modernist texts that they have acquired these feelings, on the contrary, such modernist mode of feelings is considered to be useful in possessing rebellious power, capable of addressing new things that could not be represented in the old official order of feelings. It is in this light that Xudong Zhang points out that *Today School* and “Misty Poetry” are addressing their own collective experience in a certain modernist way.³ It is here that the question of new affect and their value is brought up

¹ I use Jameson’s distinctions of “emotion (named feeling)” and “affect (unnamed feeling)” here. See, Frederic Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism*, Chapter Two, London and New York: Verso, 2013, 27-44.

² Zhao Zhenxian, “About the Social Implications of *Scar*.”

³ *Chinese Modernism in the Era of Reforms*, 126-137.

again. Expressing Erlebnis in a new way is the next generation's mode of enlightenment consciousness. I agree with Li Tuo that this affect is oriented by the nihilistic-existentialist individual emotional experience. From this angle, we can understand *Today's* fury with Liu Xinwu's *Wake Up, Brother*. In *Wake Up, Brother*, the complicated structure of the relationship among character system in *The Class Master* turns into the confrontational structure between an older brother and a younger brother, and the tension in the narrative is significantly undermined. Now, this younger brother symbolically represents the negative emotions of youths, while older brother identifies himself with the old cadres, trying to counter the nihilistic feelings of youths with a positive mood endorsed by the ideology of Deng's new regime. We must admit that Liu's observation of "nihilistic" sentiments is accurate, but for *Today*-School writers, the biggest mistake of Liu is that he chooses the wrong side. He stands on the side of the mainstream ideology, trying to correct authentic nihilism with a hypocritical, bright-color literature, trying to restore the social emotions before Cultural Revolution. Such subject attitude, to *Today*, is "rigid," and "cowardly." Liu's work fails due to his underestimation of the trend of nihilism, and another symptomatic failure is the failure of creating "new person" ("xinren" 新人) in Jiang Zilong's novella *Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Verdant, Blue, and Purple* (*chi cheng huang lv qing lan zi* 赤橙黄绿青蓝紫). A young cadre of the party, the simple girl Xie Jing, tries to enlighten another young worker Liu Sijia who is infected with nihilism but meanwhile has a kind of captivating personality. But in the end, not only Xie Jing is dismissed by Liu and his friend as overly pure, monotonous and banal, but also Xie Jing herself ends up

being attracted by Liu's charisma. In other words, the educator ends up as the one to be educated, and the narrative slides to the opposite side, to the extent that the author has to add in Xie's heroic action in fire-fighting to reinforce its power in the narrative apparatus. But such *deus ex machina* precisely illustrates the victory of centrifugal affects - the surface of narrative cannot conceal the uneasy affects that overflows out of the narrative.¹

It is in contrast with the "authentic" affects that the emotions of "innocence, enthusiasm, pain, determination" in *Scar* are viewed as "hypocritical emotions." And the erupted affects may fit what Hegel comments about the contagious affection of "enlightenment" – "one fine morning it gives its comrade a shove with the elbow, and bang! Crash! The idol lies on the floor."

Waves and Aesthetic Anti-sublimation

Then, how do this invisible diffusive affects disintegrate the old mode of emotions? I would like to provide an answer by discussing *Waves*.

For me, using "affect" to discuss *Waves* seems to be a viable approach; otherwise it would be difficult to explain this work, as it is mediocre in plotline – a boy of cadre family meets a girl of cultural elite family in the Cultural Revolution and falls in love together, but ultimately they have to break up due to the chasm between their class and the intervention of patriarchal

¹ Indeed, this is the overall tendency of Jiang Zilong's fiction writing. We do not have space to discuss Jiang's stories in detail here. But I think it is necessary to point out such a tension or contradiction between the centripetal force of narrative and the centrifugal force of description in most of his stories.

system. This plotline is almost identical to the short story of *Scar* that *Today* criticizes. What is different in narrating is, as Li Tuo points out, from the first sentence, the novel has adopted a brand new narrative style, monologue of changing perspectives which I think is a variation of “free indirect style” in terms of aesthetic effect – the whole story can be seen as a patch-together of monologues of different characters without quotation marks. Through this mechanism, the contagious rebellious affects are released.

I say it is the variation of the free indirect style, so first, let’s find out what aesthetic effect the mechanism of free indirect style could create. In his recent book, Fredric Jameson treats free indirect style as the style of a “swollen third person.” It is “swollen” because the perspective now combines both the observers/narrator’s and the actants/narrative object’s point of view. In other words, the view point of one particular character, one “I,” steals into the bird’s view of the Balzacian “He.” So when Flaubert does this, it is to get rid of the author’s control over the “He” as a narrative object. Now each “He” contains a particular “I,” a unique perspective, a subjective, momentary psychology. In Flaubert’s work, the rebellious voice of the character always forms an ironical relationship with the narrator’s voice which tries to control the overall story. Such “irony” precisely made its appearance in works of this period such as *Waves*.¹ The revolution in narrative can actually be compared to Flaubert’s revolution on Balzac. We know in socialist realism, except for some lyrical novels which use first person voice, most stories adopt a third-person omniscient point view, and such narrative voice

¹ In Chapter Three, we will find a similar narrative apparatus in Dai Houying’s *Human, Ah, Human!*

commands a strict control over the different interior monologues, thoughts, and sentiments of the characters in the novel. The negative emotions are defined as either the emotions of the negative characters, or as a temporary psychological activity that needs to be corrected very soon. In such an artistic style, we see the confidence in the implied author's ability to control over all the characters' feelings and to ensure the negative emotions will not impact on the readers. However, in "Scar Literature," negative and traumatic sentiments flood in these novels, making it difficult for the narrative to contain such feelings. The rigid way of addressing feelings in *Scar* fails. In Wang Meng's *Bolshevik Salute* and *Butterfly*, various subjective viewpoints with schizophrenia appear, which enable the unspeakable pain of the protagonist to be expressed. In Zhang Xianliang's stories, the unhealthy psychology and negative emotions of the hero are further intensified; on the one hand, it generated great sentimental shock, on the other hand, it results in the difficulty for "heroizing" the hero. Nonetheless, Wang Meng and Zhang Xianliang's works are able to overcome the negative emotions by using the Hegelian "aufhebung" and sublime aesthetics. In *Waves*, we will see that such mechanism of aufhebung/sublime aesthetics has been abandoned, and the character is no longer the heroic figure of returned intellectual, and thus it feels the stronger need to get rid of the control of the centralized third-person narrative. Therefore, Beidao makes each character do an interior monologue in each passage. Therefore, in each narrative passage, the narrating person not only can express his/her own thoughts, but also can observe the world from his/her point of view. Indeed, in their own visual world and emotional world, the line between subjective and objective is

blurred. The world expressed by such affects is then no longer the stable world firmly controlled by the outside. In *Waves*, finally, the entire story disintegrates and liberates itself to several subjective worlds, with their psychological moments and unique perspectives directly accessed by readers.

By using free indirect style, Flaubert enables Madame Bouvary's affects to break through the framework of moral emotions of the 19th century. Since such affects come from a "swollen She," it cannot be bound by the collective moral system, which for Jameson amounts to affect's revolution against emotion. Emotion for Jameson means the named feeling, a system of institutionalized names, while affect is the rebelling force, an untamed feeling. This affect, to Jameson, is not some unnamable power that comes from the body, as most affect theory asserts, but is actually the historical collective feeling; such feeling presents a rebelling power in that unique historical moment which cannot be named, just like the unnamable feelings initially conveyed by Baudelaire's poetry. In this novel, such waves of affects concentrate on the heroine's uncontrollable psychological moments:

The light was flickering in a battered green enamel bowl on the toolbox. What did he really mean by what he said? Perhaps it was just another kind of deception. The country, **huh**, none of these ultimate playthings exists, it's just those yesmen pretending to be emotional; they need a cheap conscience to real a cheap equilibrium... but why be so **fierce**? Surely you don't really **detest** him? But don't forget, you were with him for a whole evening, a **misty** evening, and besides, you're so **excited**, like a girl on her first date. My head aches, I'm **drunk**. The little coach in the music box (when I was little I often broke off the wheels) speeds out into the distance, toward the end of the earth, loaded with my **anguished** dreams. And what is there out there? I'm afraid there's nothing, only a continuation of here...¹

¹ Beidao, *Waves*, New York: New Direction Publishing Corporation, 1990, 97-98.

We see some words related to the waves of feelings - huh, fierce, detest, misty, excited, drunk, anguished. Such feelings are obviously affects rather than emotions so long as such feelings have no clear meaning. I am not saying that some new affects appeared in 1974 - if “affects” are some material movement, some physiological reactions for instance, in a word, some “things,” then they are off the table. I am discussing the representation of affects here. Therefore, new affects mean new ways to represent/record the “affects.” Such affects are new, because, in the language order of 1974, some new symbols appear. With the appearance of the newly captured feelings, there hence appear new literary representations and aesthetic rules distinguishing from the mainstream artistic forms. These affects are unruly feelings that got rid of the moral rules (not happiness, sadness, envy); the affects of “huh, fierce, detest, anguished” are gloomy, while feelings like “excited, drunk, misty” are seductive; besides such feelings are momentary. Hence they strike against the old mode of moral feelings in the way of guerrilla warfare. Now, through the narrative mode of free indirect style, these feelings strike into readers’ heart and escape the narrator’s moral censorship, and hence is more contagious and more intense. Such emancipating and liberating effect, as far as I concern, is the most important aesthetic function of *Waves*. In fact, this passage is exemplary of the whole novella.

But such feelings and affects must be interpreted in the historical context. The Avant-Guard movement from the mid-1980s onward brought the great transformation of narrative forms and emotional formula of Chinese language; as Li Tuo points out, such free indirect style and self-indulged psychological “waves” soon become a platitude in the 1990s. Therefore

readers today may find it hard to resonate with the Beidao's works or Misty Poetry like readers of the 1980s. On the other hand, in English world, a Western reader familiar with modernism would probably see these psychological waves as the modernist individual affects. These are the two misunderstandings I want to preclude. I do not think *Waves* merely means that modernism appears in China. Admittedly, Beidao's language is directly linked to some modernist texts, but we know that Beidao's poetic language is also influenced by German romanticism, political lyrical tradition, and others. And for those who knew nothing about modernism, these readers can equally feel the strength of these rebellious affects. Discussion a style in its abstract form therefore is proved to be futile. The meaning of the "form" is determined by its concrete historical context.

From the real context, then we find the rebellion of *Waves* has a clear target - besides the "official emotions," it targets the sublime aesthetics that centers around the "country." Xiao Ling is impressed by Yang Xun precisely because Yang has another kind of passion. This yesman's strong emotion is attractive. The "misty, drunk, excited" and at once "detest, fierce, anguished" affects are a reaction to the "serious" emotion for the country. A few pages before, Yang Xun expresses his emotions for motherland in the following words:

I thought for a moment. "Our country, for example."

"Ha, that's an outdated tune."

"No, I don't mean some hackneyed political cliché, I mean our common suffering, our common way of life, our common cultural heritage, our common yearning... all of these make up our indivisible fate; we have a duty to our country..."

"Duty?" she cut me off coldly. "What duty are you talking about? The duty to be an offering after having been slaughtered, or what?"

“Yes, if necessary, that kind of duty.”¹

Was it true that this common feeling really outdated? It does not seem so. Otherwise, Xiao Ling would not get drunk and excited about these big words. In fact, Yang Xun’s these common feelings are more strongly expressed in Beidao’s poems. *The Answer*, for example, starts with a hopeless disillusion about the baseness of the reality:

Debasement is the password of the base,
Nobility the epitaph of the noble
See how the gilded sky is covered
With the drifting twisted shadows of the dead.²

However, the poem continues to carry out “the duty to be an offering after having been slaughtered,” rather than lead to the gloomy nihilistic sentiment of Xiao Ling. At the end of the poem, the negative sentiments are negated once again, while the sense of responsibility for the collective and for the future is called forth. In the end, pain is turned into a solemn gesture, a sublimated and purified emotion:

If the sea is destined to breach the dikes
Let all the brackish water pour into my heart;
If the land is destined to rise
Let humanity choose a peak for existence again.

A new conjunction and glimmering stars
Adorn the unobstructed sky now;
They are the pictographs from five thousand years.
They are the watchful eyes of future generations.³

Therefore, what the character Yang Xun or the author of Beidao has expressed is not only a disillusion, but also the enthusiasm to reconstruct a utopian community. Most importantly, here it still retains the basic characteristic of sublime aesthetics – the sacrifice of the individual, from which the aesthetic pleasure is generated. Wang Ban has used Mao’s poem *Reply to*

¹ *Waves*, 93.

² Bei Dao, *The August Sleepwalker*, translated by Bonnie McDougall (London, 1988), p.33

³ *Ibid.*

Comrade Li Shuyi (da li shuyi 答李淑一) to illustrate the dominating power of such sublime aesthetics in socialist China. This poem, through which Mao commemorated his late wife Yang Kaihui, is widely read during the Cultural Revolution. In the first part of the poem, Mao imagines his young wife goes up to the moon with another martyr, and is treated by the mythical characters of Wu Gang and Chang Er. However, drinking and dancing is merely happiness on the surface; we know this is pretended happiness, not only because Mao uses the word “lonely”, but also because of the imagery summoned by the word “Cold Palace” (*guanghangong* 广寒宫). Therefore, it conveys Mao’s profound missing of his wife. However, as Wang points out, the charm of the poem lies in the last lines, which takes a sudden turn;

Suddenly news of the tigers’ capture reached
Their celestial abode,
Thereupon they burst out crying
And down came a deluge of joyful tears!¹

Wang Ban points out, with such a leap, individual libidinal impulses or emotions are transformed into a higher, purer aim, “a ceremonial atmosphere that sanctifies the martyrs and re-channels the feelings of mourning into respect and worship.”² Wang argues that “it is a miniature of the psycho-cultural operation of the official aesthetic mode in Maoist China.”³ I agree with this conclusion, which I think is an important aesthetic observation. But there is one thing worth noting here, that the aesthetic tension comes from the tension between individual value and the significance of its sacrifice; to a certain extent, the more a person’s value is

¹ The translation comes from Wang Ban’s book. See Wang, Ban, *The Sublime Figure of History: Aesthetics and Politics in Twentieth-Century China*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997, 113.

² *Ibid.*, 113.

³ *Ibid.*, 114.

affirmed, and the more the value of sacrifices is uncertain, the greater the tension. The great aesthetic power of Mao's this poem partly comes from the intense sadness that Mao expresses in the first half of the poem and partly from the great achievement described in the second one. But in some works in the Cultural Revolution, or works like *Scar*, since individual's negative feeling is restrained and the pain of sacrifice is lightly mentioned, the aesthetic power of these works is easily lost. In Beidao's poem, the individual value and affects are reemphasized, but the end is far from a joyful atmosphere, and therefore the significance of the sacrifice is uncertain. A perhaps meaningless sacrifice? Such a kind of sublimity of religious sacrifice is what Xiao Ling satirized. But we should take note that such a "religious sacrifice" became notable among the writings of Red Guards in the late stage of the Cultural Revolution, which might have to do with the collective unconsciousness of the whole generation. After the Cultural Revolution, Red Guards and intellectual youths think of themselves as the sacrifice of the time. Between the fire-like rebellion and the degenerated countryside, between the sincere revolutionary passion and the melancholic nihilistic attitude, generates the powerful tension; here, the tension between individual and the collective is stretched to the extreme, and the sublime tragic power gains its power from meaningless death. In Zheng Yi's *Maple*, a female Red Guard, in face of the attack of the rivals to take the building, and also in face of the gaze of her lover (who is in the rival's camp), resolutely jumps off the building. Such meaningless destruction in the red clouds of the dusk generates shocking power. In another novel *There is Storm Tonight* by Liang Xiaosheng, the last idealist person, the heroine stands guard on a night

of snow storm, confronting the nihilism and cynicism of her companions in a lonely gesture, and she freezes to death on this night when thousands of educated youth flees the Great Northern Wilderness ravished with joy. The chaotic retreat contrasts with the sublime monument figure of her frozen body standing in the snow storm. We cannot treat such works merely as a mere criticism of the Cultural Revolution. Liberal criticisms fail to understand the immense aesthetic power of such a mechanism of the sublime in the post-Mao period, especially in the 1980s. The Tian'anmen Incident would not have been such a great tragedy without the operation of such aesthetic power.

From the Mao's era to the post-Mao era, the aesthetic mechanism of sublime changed a lot. Nonetheless, the final act of "overcoming" and "sublimation" was still necessary. It is against such aesthetic background that we can perceive the uniqueness of *Waves*. Though in *Waves* there is still a space to place such sublime consciousness of sacrifice, it is suppressed by more thorough apathy and nihilism; though the tension still exists, it develops toward another anti-sublime direction. *Waves* is dominated by Xiao Ling's nihilistic sentiment. It is not "the sublime" but the "melancholy" that has become the core of its aesthetic power. Such melancholy, in Benjamin's *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, stems from the cruelty of seventy years of war which results in the collapse of totality and the complete loss of meaning, in which sacrifice becomes sheer sacrifice without meaning, and violence leaves nothing but pain. In *Waves*, such gloomy feeling betrays Xiao Ling and her class's melancholy. The reason that Xiao Ling refuses the "country" is not that the state represses her personal momentary

feeling (which is the precondition of sublime aesthetics); it derives from her profound doubts for the homogeneous community, doubts for the “common.” Xiao satirizes Yang’s grand words:

“Forget it. I can just see you sitting in a spacious drawing room discussing the subject like this. What right have you to say ‘we,’ what right?” She was becoming more and more agitated, her face growing flushed, tears filling her eyes. “No thanks, this country’s not mine! I don’t have a country, I don’t have one...” She turned away.¹

Why does she become “more and more agitated,” with “her face growing flushed, tears filling her eyes” when talking about “country” and “we”? We know that in the 1950s and the 1960s, Chinese society was co-dominated by cultural elites and political elites. As soon as Cultural Revolution started, the “family origin theory” came into a trend, and the political elite soon deprived the descendants of cultural elites of the qualification for “rebellious.” Although political elites later are also overthrown and banished, like Xiao condemns, they could still sit in the spacious drawing room discussing the subjects like country or revolution, with a protector always at their back. Whereas these cultural elites with the cultivated taste and sense of superiority who have received Westernized education since childhood, are entirely excluded from the ruling class and is sent down the countryside to receive “re-education” from the peasants. Although they are self-critical of their petty bourgeois taste, the pain of finding themselves inferior is intense, and ultimately turns into “ressentiment,” a strong sense of insecurity and confrontational feeling. Li Tuo points out,² such adversary makes them tend to banish themselves from society and to re-establish the interiority and a strong will through reading. Such perseverance and such Stoic abandoning of the world enable them to go through

¹ *Waves*, 93.

² Li Tuo, “‘New Petty Bourgeoisie’ and the Transfer of Cultural Hegemony.”

the process from Nietzschean nihilism to Nietzschean will to power. Society to them is fragmented and repelling; they are satirical of descendants of cadres, while despising and rejecting peasants and workers. Li Tuo accurately points out, by dramatizing such petty-bourgeois self-pitying, their personality often displays an arrogant and ruthless character. In my upcoming analysis of *When the Sunset Cloud Disappears*, Nanshan's grandfather is worried about her such personality, as he knows his granddaughter "felt aggrieved and resentful," and "find the world unfair to her." He "found her strong, but with a little stubbornness":

"I'm really worried about you might be indifferent to others because of your lack of happiness. You bury yourself in books with your whole heart – do you really think that the world is bleak and gloomy? ...But if you learn to look at everything in human life from a rational angle from reading too much and too deeply, undoubtedly you will become a cold person. This type of person tends to put their ideas above everything, regarding their ideas as the God of common people...Being ruthless with oneself is fine, but being ruthless with others will make you guilty."¹

I will soon point out that *When the Sunset Cloud Disappears* has a reflection on and holds a critical opinion on such interiority; the soft light of sunset cloud would dilute the sullen personality of Nanshan. But for Yu Luojin and Xiao Ling, such enlightened individual deem to be the torchbearer increasingly takes on the provincial color, a narrow subjective perspective, which cannot be seen as a good sign.

The Alienated Labor on the Nerve Ending

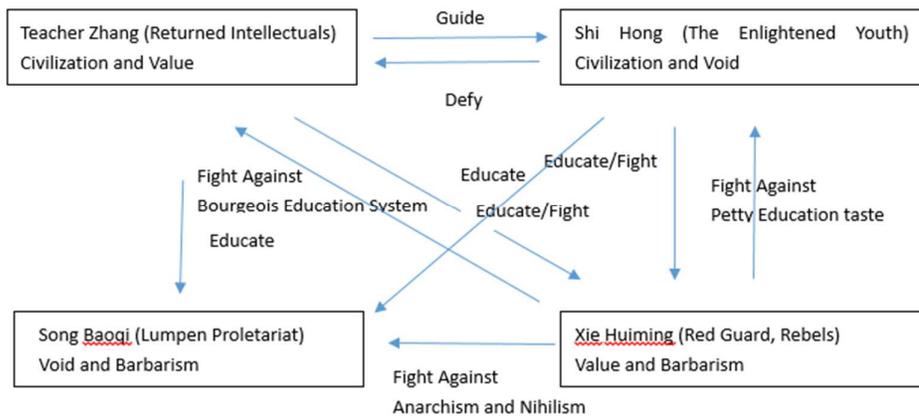
Now we find *Waves* has structural limits. Although it tries to employ multiple perspectives, the protagonist's view point does not have an intersection with the viewpoints of other

¹ Li Ping, *When the Sunset Disappears*, Houston: Demand Global, 2013, 75.

characters with in the plotline. Therefore, it is weak regarding narrative. Beidao seems less capable of constructing a story plot than Liu Xinwu, like *The Class Teacher* where different characters encounter. The characters in *Waves* are not only isolated in terms of affect but also isolated in terms of plotline and characters' fate. Furthermore, some of other narrating perspectives are arranged by Beidao as "fake perspectives" that either implies author's implicit disparaging and discriminating attitude (for example, treating a rebel in the Cultural Revolution as a degenerated opportunist, and treating a worker's mentality as that of a rogue), or is made to reinforce Xiao Ling's viewpoint (such as Yuanyuan's viewpoint, and also Bai Hua's viewpoint). The only viewpoint that could confront Xiao Ling's is Yang Xun's, but Yang's viewpoint does not have the emotional intensity and vehemence as Xiao's. Hence, Xiao's fate is not placed in the middle of the true confrontational social conflicts or psychological conflicts, like Beidao's brother hopes. Such a quasi-modernist poetic narrative enables the psychological depth to be reinforced by monologue, subjective viewpoint, sentiment, making readers overtly indulge in Xiao's inner feelings in aesthetics, hence making readers' view of the world to be confined also in her extremely narrow viewpoint. In his discussion of Dreiser's modernist perspective, Jameson comments, "the Utopian impulse itself, now reified, is driven back inside the monad, where it assumes the status of some merely psychological experience, private feeling, or relativized value."¹ For Jameson, the modernist point of view corresponds to the atomic individual in high capitalism, with the intensity of interiority the collective utopian has

¹ *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, 160.

been gradually dissipated. In *Waves*, aesthetically, we might say China's post-Mao interiority has started from Xiao Ling. We see how the intensity of interiority powerfully criticizes socialist aesthetics, how it releases "nasty" feelings, and how it strongly affirms individuality, but we must also see its inherent limits – the ignorance of the sociality, an arrogant and ruthless posture that overrides other viewpoints. We have said Xiao Ling's inferior point of view would immediately turn into a superior point of view once the social standard has changed, and such a perspective will reveal its intolerance of "others," especially the feelings and life of the lower class. Such problems can also be seen in Yu Luojin's *A Fairy Tale of Winter* and Jin Fan's *Public Love Letters*. Just as how the grandfather in *When the Sunset Cloud Disappears* worries about, "This type of person tends to put their ideas above everything, regarding their ideas as the God of common people." Now this intense light turns into the oppressive light. If we get back to *The Class Master*, we will find that Shi Hong's enlightening gesture shows more intolerance of Song Baoqi and Xie Huimin than Teacher Zhang. In *The Class Master*, we can still discern a social and collective structure as follows:



Therefore going back to the graph of *The Class Master*, we can understand that what Jameson says about the advantage of realism over modernism in narrating collective allegory. In works like *The Class Master*, if Teacher Zhang wants to enlighten his students and establish a social order, he would need to, through his practice, conquer the narrative space of different characters, and thus it will inevitably involve the confrontation of different viewpoints and cultural consciousness, and thus the attempt to establish commonality will inevitably incur necessary resistances. However, In *Waves* and for Xiao Ling, such sociality does not exist. Her view of others is consistent – she fights against them in adverse circumstance and is basically indifferent to them in a favorable situation. Her perspective comes from a stubborn immanent interiority and needs no adjustment. Perhaps due to its modernist style, in *Waves*, there is no narrative drive for the characters or protagonists to re-establish a totality like in *The Class Master*. In *Waves*, even the union of hero and heroine is impossible; all characters are without exception atomic individuals, and the whole society is immersed in the melancholy of

dividedness. Yang Xun is the only person Xiao is interested in communicating with, but such interest is based mainly on personal desire. In Xiao Ling we cannot find Teacher Zhang's responsibility for others and the passion to "nurture China." What is particularly worth noting is, to Xiao, lower class is the horrible "other," and working class, as the abhorrent existence, only flashes across her nerve endings in one or two seconds.

Autumn has come, and the leaves flutter down one by one like the listless flowers of spring. It's an imitation, a clumsy imitation, full of human vulgarity, just like flames in a mirror, an empty fervor that lacks warmth, which will always lack warmth but never fall to set those blood-red haunches swaying... everywhere there are stage props covered in dust, even people become part of the props, the laughing ones laughing forever, the crying ones crying forever...

"Change two six-ring screws... Cat got your tongue?" Fire-cracker stopped work and stuck his head out from under the shadow of the revolving machine. The acne on his face and the scars around his mouth showed up clearly. I turned my head away. Several flies alighted on the light bulb. ¹

The voice of Fire-cracker (ertijiao 二踢脚) interrupts her meditation, and his image – "the acne on his face," "the scars around his mouth" – intrudes in her sight, which she abhors. She "turned her head away" and saw "flies alighted on the light bulb." Like these flies, this worker instantly disappears in Xiao's world of consciousness, as well as in his narrative space in the novella. This passage symptomatically reveals the position of Fire-cracker as a worker in the entire narrative space of the novella. His image is stereotyped and debased, the image of a lumpen proletariat. His existence has no independent meaning, but only serves the narrative function, that is, a potential threat to Xiao Ling, and an instrument for Bai Hua's heroic action. This is not a problem about the lack of narrative space, it is that the novel does not endow Fire-

¹ *Waves*, 98.

cracker with a subjective perspective, and therefore he cannot open up his own interior psychological space. And if the psychological depth in *Waves* means a basic element of individual enlightenment, then it also means Fire-cracker is barbaric, or non-human – the narrative does not give him a human name. According to Alex Woloch in *The One Vs. The Many*, “within the nineteenth-century novel, there are pervasive extremes of minoriness, the worker and the eccentric, “the flat character who is reduced to a single functional use within the narrative.” From here, he talks about the problem of the labor theory of character in European realist literature. “Character on nerve endings” is also an issue raised by Woloch, which concerns the modernist writings in late 19th century, for example, Proust’s writing. Because of the distinct characteristic of Proust’s interior perspective, at the end of his long narrative sentence, often in some minor corners of his unintended memory, there will appear some “minor” things – for example, the ironed clothes, the trimmed grass – it is only through affixed to these “minor” things that the servants and gardeners enter our sight. And “the sentence references the (fictional) writing subject more than the objects that he writes about.”¹ Here we find a similar situation. If *Waves* starts to take on modernist characteristic, and if the narrative passages of the independent subjective perspectives allow the characters to demonstrate their viewpoints, thoughts, and sentiments in an interior way, then the flashing image of Fire-cracker only momentarily flashes across Xiao Ling’s interior world. While digging deep into Xiao Ling’s world, the novel completely alienates Fire-cracker, reducing him

¹ *The One vs. the Many*, 27-28.

to a flat image, and turns Xiao Ling's instinctive abhorrence into an essentialized description of working class, the barbaric, ugly, flies-like image. If we compare the sublime and hypocritical presentation of working class in socialist realism, Xiao Ling's abhorring attitude is astonishing. This of course illustrates Beidao's attempt to eliminate hypocrisy, but if we compare with Mao Zedong's amiable attitude towards working class in the poster for workers' night school, and even Teacher Zhang's concern for Song, we will realize that in Xiao Ling, a new hierarchical order of "civilization vs. barbarism" is firmly established. A strong abhorrence for lower class is co-established together with the rising of the elite cultural consciousness in the 1980s. Now Xiao can become torchbearer again; she is the disseminator of literary and artistic taste and the cultured life style, getting far away from the coarse and barbaric agricultural mode of production, becoming the telos of the progressing Chinese civilization. Under the new illuminating light of enlightenment/civilization, lumpen proletariat like Fire-cracker is like flies on the light bulb. Hence we can see, if the interpellating enlightenment of Teacher Zhang seeks to silence Song Baoqi, then Xiao Ling, the torchbearer's indifferent modernist sight seeks to flatten Fire-cracker.

2. 3 Light of Sunset, Or, the Atheistic Enlightenment

When the Sunset Disappears

Is it possible that there is another type of enlightenment, or another type of “light,” which distinguishes itself from both the stultifying light of Teacher Zhang and the cold light of Lady Xiao? In the last part of this long chapter, I find it is necessary to introduce Li Ping’s sunset glow, in his well-received novella *When the Sunset Disappears* (*wanxia xiaoshi de shihou*, 晚霞消失的时候), that is, the twilight, soft light, or “Guiding Light” (“baoguang” 葆光) in the world of Chinese ancient philosopher Zhuang Zi. It is such a scene and a light:

We silently stared at the fiery-red sun that was sinking, sinking, sinking into the roaring waves of the sea of clouds. I’d never seen a sunset like this – so big, round, and clear. It spread over the blue horizon smoothly, slowly and overwhelmingly, and then lazily laid down its great body and sank into the other side of the universe. Before sinking into the waves of the cloud sea, it cast its glorious rays proudly, making the whole sky shine with dazzling brilliance and illuminating the cloud sea and Dai Ding in a golden color.¹

The sun is sinking, sinking. But what does it mean? What is the connotation of such a scene? Or if we are bored by the endless pursuing of “meaning,” then, what are the feelings provoked by this spectacle? It is a vivid exhibition of the dying of sun, just as the title of novella shows, “When the Sunset Disappears;” and we can feel a sense of melancholy, the sorrow for the loss of something magnificent, like the Sun, or Mao Zedong (we know this novella was written in Mao’s dying months and released immediately after Mao’s death), or the “Great Proletariat Cultural Revolution”(we are aware this novella was written by a once ferocious Red

¹ Li Ping, *When the Sunset Disappears*, Houston: Demand Global, 2013, 130.

Guard at the end of the Cultural Revolution)? Yes, the melancholic sorrow is undeniable – a few paragraphs later, the narrator adds, “a foreign woman dressed in a tight leather jacket and a wide belt seemed to suffer unbearable pain in front of the fading sunset,” “covered her face with her hands,” “whispered bitterly.”¹ But if we are not this sentimental woman, but are contemplators like the hero and heroine, the lovers, who after ten years of separation came across each other on the top of Mount Tai, a symbol of great weight and importance in ancient China, then we will find more than melancholy or sorrow. Another noticeable feeling, if not a dominant one, is a kind of affect generated by the atheistic “ataraxia,” the tranquility and the peace of the dusk, with everything and everyone lined with the “golden color.” The light of the dusk is a soft, gentle but still dazzling bright light, so that people in a golden color can “stand against the backdrop of the sky and make various postures and movement.”² A guiding light, a protective light, or an effulgent light for the growth of everything, as Lucretius sings in the opening of his great song:

“You, goddess, at your coming hush the winds and scatter the clouds; for you the creative earth thrusts up fragrant flowers; for you the smooth stretches of the ocean smile, and the sky, tranquil now, is flooded with effulgent light.”³

Why must I bring in Lucretius? Am I suggesting that the novella is an atheist one, thus the story and the scene of the sunset are full of theological significance? Perhaps. But to avoid any weak analogy, we need to prepare some statements. First, we know that the revival of the debate

¹ Li Ping, *When the Sunset Disappears*, 132.

² *Ibid.*, 133.

³ Lucretius, translated by Martin Ferguson Smith, *On the Nature of Things*, Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2.

on atheism nowadays is primarily a European phenomenon, which has its own regional and historical context, and probably it is relevant to the critical reevaluation of Christian theology in the post-Enlightenment Europe. The late 1970s and early 1980s of China in my discussion, of course, has its own political and aesthetic conditions, but does it also have a theological condition? To what extent could we compare them together? I will argue in the following pages that the reference point of this comparison is the “enlightenment.” To put it simply at this moment, I will explain that the arriving of enlightenment in May-Fourth Era and the coming of Marxism a few years later brought about the teleology, the eschatology, and the Heideggerian onto-theology similar to that of Europe. This is the intellectual condition against which the post-Mao atheist rebel rose. Secondly, this novel is characterized as an “enlightenment novel,” in terms of both form and content. In terms of form, although this novella is pieced together by an unfulfilled romantic story, by four unexpected meetings between the lovers in twelve years, the plotline indeed is penetrated by lengthy discussions on philosophy, aesthetics, religion, science, human nature, war, revolution, and is always distracted by unexpected episodes. Regarding content, this novella was indeed received and criticized for its bold discussion of religion – Christianity and Buddhism – in a so-called atheist socialist China. However, if the alleged atheism is a kind of imitative atheism or parasitic atheism as Christopher Watkin’s summarizes,¹ could we say the secular faith advocated by this novella is in turn an atheist enlightenment? Anyway, the novella caused a seismic turbulence among the young generation

¹ Christopher Watkin, *Difficult Atheism*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011, 2.

in the post-Mao “Thought Liberation Movement.” Besides numerous criticisms from official or even heretical (Wang Ruoshui) Marxist theorists, it also drew the attention of Party’s ideological authorities. Hu Qiaomu, the most authoritative Marxist philosopher and prominent politician of the post-Mao period, for example, invited the author to his home to discuss the novella.¹ “Excellent talent, but fully muddleheaded!” This was the comment made by Feng Mu, the vice chairman of China Writers Association at the time. Why was there so much attention drawn to this controversial work and this muddleheaded mind?

The Cultural Revolutions *De Facto*

When the Sunset Disappears is a story about a Red Guard or a kind of personal Erlebnis of a young guy who went through the Cultural Revolutions *De Facto*. I want to distinguish the Cultural Revolution(s) *De Facto* from Cultural Revolution *De Jure*. The latter, for example, as Alan Badiou indicates in his famous essay *The Cultural Revolution: The Last Revolution?*, understands the Cultural Revolution in terms of “right,” “principle,” “sixteen points,” and “Mao’s saying,” etc. Badiou frankly acknowledges that the reason to discuss the Cultural Revolution is that “it is part of our political history and the basis for the existence of the Maoist current, the only true political creation of the sixties and seventies,” “Mao's Little Red Book has been our guide... in order for us to clarify and invent new ways in all sorts of disparate

¹ About the acceptance of this novella, Li Ping gives some important information in his *What is Left with Me is Only a Deep Sorrow*, see in *When the Sunset Disappears*, 212-263.

situations that were unknown to us.”¹ For Badiou, the “us” are the Europeans, mainly French, militant students and intellectuals in the sixties and seventies. It will be interesting to study the influence of the “idea” or “spirit” of “the Cultural Revolution” or Maoism upon European leftists in the 1960s, as has already been critically investigated by Fredric Jameson in his article “Periodizing the 1960s.”² Here I am not arguing that Badiou’s observation is an idealization or pure illusion, in contrast to which there is a “reality” of “real” revolution, as what we perceive to be the “reality” is always the representation of the Real. Therefore, instead of dwelling on the unproductive binarism of “idea” versus “reality,” I will continue to discuss the power of “idea,” particularly its power in representing the world of things. But what I am about to discuss is not a correct “idea,” the “reason” for instance, but the falsified, distorted, fragmentary view, in Spinoza’s term, the “passion” and the “imagination” of the actors in their historical limits, and in the Chinese Cultural Revolutions *De Facto*. We have to admit, many of Badiou’s observations – such as the understanding of revolution as an anarchistic, rebellious struggle against the party-state and the bureaucratic formalism, the description of the new inventions of multiple political regroupings outside the party, and the interpretation of education revolution and “mass educate(ing) themselves in the movement” – are much closer to the ideal of Mao and the Red Guards in the initial stage of revolution rather than the dominant historiographical version compiled by specialists and sinologists.

¹ Alain Badiou “The Cultural Revolution, the Last Revolution?” in *Position*, V13, No.3 (2005), 481.

² See, Frederic Jameson, “Periodizing 60s,” in *The Ideologies of Theory*, London and New York: Verso, 483-515, 2008.

However, because Badiou obtains his understanding of the event only from Mao's text, and from abstraction as a scientist, not as a novelist, or as Li Huaiping and Nanshan, the hero and heroine of our novella, who have to experience their idealist passion and its traumatic fall in the historical finitude. Badiou simplifies the revolution's failure and refuses to accept that the failure is the failure of "pure reason." Pure reason, if we take Hegel's observation on French Revolution,¹ fails because of its abstraction, because it cannot find the particular agents who can represent the "general will" of French Revolution. Or, "the spirit of the Great Proletariat Revolution" in our case. We will discuss in the following pages and also in Chapter Three that the revolutionary spirit or "general will" collapsed immediately after (or even before) the revolution was launched. An idealist anti-bureaucratic movement at last degenerated into the chaotic struggles of all against all.

For example, Badiou or Mao may not expect that the first agent of the idea of the Revolution, the first branch of Red Guards, the "Old Red Guards" ("lao hongweibing" 老红卫兵), were almost the children of the "Revolutionary Cadres" ("gegan" 革干). They embraced the "Cultural Revolution," considering themselves to be the new leaders or torchbearers of the spirit of Revolution, and hated any old, corrupted, morally depraved things and people; in a word, they thought they were upholding the light and hated the darkness. Therefore, they fiercely attacked their competitors in other classes and their classmates' parents who were always the "high-level intellectuals" ("gaozhi" 高知) of red China. In this novella, Li Huaiping,

¹ G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Oxford, New York, Toronto, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 366-363, 1977.

the son of a general in People's Liberation Army, was an "old red guard"; so was Li Ping, the author of this story. As Li Ping tells us in his memoirs that he created the notorious song "Dad a hero, son a stalwart; dad a reactionary, son a bastard" (*laozi yingxiong er haohan, laozi fandong er hundan* 老子英雄儿好汉，老子反动儿混蛋) to propagate the "theory of family lineage," that is, a kind of "class racism" (to use Barlibar's word) that deprives the children of cultural elites of the rights of revolution.¹ His schoolmates soon fought back; they launched *The Secondary School Cultural Revolutionary Paper* (*zhongxue wenge bao* 中学文革报) and published Yu Luoke's well-received article, "Theories of Class Origin" in order to defend their right to rebel. In the fall and winter of 1966, however, due to Mao's violent attack on the bureaucratic class or capitalist-roader in party, and due to Central Cultural Revolution Group's deliberate suppression of "Older Red Guards," the heated hearts of Li Huaiping and Li Ping quickly cooled down, and they began to feel the bitterness of the loss of their power and privilege.²

In this novella, with the help of the biographical materials, we have presented an imagination of the Cultural Revolution from the perspective of an Old Red Guard, a picture entirely different from Badiou's picture of Cultural Revolution as the last revolution. But this is only "a" Cultural Revolution. There are also other versions of Cultural Revolution, for

¹ Various materials are available now. Li Ping's memoirs in *When the Sunset Disappears* and the memoirs of students of Middle School 4 in Beijing in *Memory of the Tempests* are of particularly relevance.

² Some fictions, such as Lao Gui's *Blood Red Dusk* (*xuese huanghun* 血色黄昏), Wang Anyi's *Age of Enlightenment* (*qimeng shidai* 启蒙时代) also provide us with stories about their bitter experience during the ebbing period of the Cultural Revolution.

example, Yu Luoke's view of Cultural Revolution, which led to his death and to his younger sister Yu Luojin's exile to the countryside as well as her "miserable" marriage. Then Yu Luojin's Cultural Revolution - I have mentioned Yu Luojin's *A Fairy Tale of Winter* in which she eulogizes his brother's integrity and braveness while scolding his lower-class husband's vulgarity and barbarism. But could we suppose that this barbarian, vulgar, lower-class husband may also have his own perspective of the Cultural Revolution? I believe that the novelists are always more sensitive to the plurality and triviality of history in so far as they know the story always originates from the encounters of different individuals with their various fates, passions, and imaginations.

Badiou, however, speculates about the "Cultural Revolution" as a scientist, a philosopher, or, even worse, as a metaphysician. The limits of Badiou's contemplation on the Cultural Revolution, do not derive from his limited empirical knowledge, but from the last onto-theological remains of his otherwise radical atheism. This last remains of theology, as Christopher Watkin has already accurately pointed out, lies not in his usage of certain mystical phrases, the "Event" as a miracle, the arriving of Messiah, etc. Watkin is right to point out that for Badiou, the coming of "event," or the possibility of access to the inaccessible, is a historical demand. From the early Althusser's over-determination and under-determination to late Althusser's philosophy of encounter,¹ or from Gramsci's "situation" in his consideration of

¹ See, Louis Althusser, *Philosophy of the Encounter: Later Writings, 1978-87*, London and New York: Verso, 2006.

“Modern Prince,”¹ or Lenin’s concept of “conjuncture,”² we can find a vibrant materialist tradition to elaborate the theory of contingency. If the Chinese Cultural Revolution could be considered as an “event,” it did not merely come from Mao Zedong’s voluntarism, as if a capricious prince conjured the demon out of nothing. It was because of the overdetermined pre-Cultural Revolution Chinese social structure itself, with the “three differences” between urban and rural, factory workers and peasants, manual and mental labor, the hierarchy created by Soviet model of bureaucracy, the antagonism between political elites and cultural elites, the revolutionary romanticism created by socialist culture, the idealism and radical individualism among the young generation, etc. Various kinds of contradictions, tensions, repressions and negotiations that accumulated beneath the surface of the earth generated the historical demand of the arriving of the event, or in Derrida’s word, the coming of a seismic power.³

However, Watkin finds that Badiou requires more than the materialist historical demand. He finds there is at least one covert precondition, a requirement to his atoms, that is, the atom’s internal desire for freedom. Thus Watkin believes in ancient atheism the ontological condition of Badiou’s atheism: “the Epicurean’s desire to escape the fear of the gods precedes and demands the ontology of multiplicity that Lucretius furnishes in his atomism and that Badiou

¹ See, Antonio Gramsci, *The Modern Prince and Other Writings*, New York : International Publishers, 1959.

² About Lenin’s conjuncture, I learned it primarily from Althusser’s *Lenin and Philosophy*, see *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, 23-70.

³ I refer to Derrida’s *Specters of Marx*, particularly the last chapter, “Apparition of the inapparent: The phenomenological “conjuring trick.” See, Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, New York and London: Routledge, 1994, 156-222.

secures with his axiomatized ZFC set theory.”¹ We know two things are crucial in Lucretius’ atomism – one is the falling of atoms, the falling straight down through the depths of the void, like the drops of rain; the second thing is the “Clinamen,” the slight swerve which might make the time/history happen. The first is the precondition, the void; the second is the event, how the world takes place. The encounter takes place, then the world takes hold, takes form. Such atheist atoms constitute the ontology of multiplicity, which means the multitude of atoms could produce a future without the common measure in the present. “In fact, we have to assume, as did Lucretius, that manifold-unfolding is not constrained by the immanence of a limit.”² I believe Watkin is right to point out the weight of Lucretius’ atomism in Badiou’s thought, but I guess we must also take into consideration the enormous influence of Spinozist Philosophy in the whole Althusser group.³ I will argue Spinoza’s conception of Causa Sui is crucial for atom’s desire for freedom. “We are Spinozists,” Althusser claims.

This is not the place to discuss the materialism or atheism of this group; one reason I want to mention these sources of Badiou’s atheism is that in Mao’s early philosophical and poetic writings, we can also find expressions extremely close to the western atheism which Mao himself considered to be his materialist thinking. I will discuss in detail Mao’s individualism and realism in Chapter Three when we need to interpret the radical wildness and

¹ *Difficult Atheism*, 110.

² *Ibid.*, 128.

³ We know Althusser’s claim “we were Spinozists” in his “Elements of Self-Criticism,” (Louis Althusser, *Essays in Self-Criticism*, Humanities Press, 1976, 132-141). This “we” I guess could include in Gilles Deleuze, Antonio Negri, Pierre Machery, and Etienne Balibar’s individual study on Spinoza.

Machiavellism of Mao's follower, the Red Guards and the rebels. At this point, I just want to mention in passing that in *Marginal Notes to: Friedrich Paulsen's A System of Ethic*, Mao not only endorses Hobbes' self-preservation but also calls for the courageous and militant individuals/atoms to make every effort to actualize their own individual will. Therefore, in Mao's poetic world, we can also find a world very close to the natural world of Lucretius, "eagles flash over clouds/ and fish float near the clear bottom/ In the freezing air of a million creatures compete/ for freedom."¹ I guess such a scene of "a million creatures contend in freedom" in Mao's early poetic world is also the ontological base of Mao's imagination of his Red Guards and the Cultural Revolution. And it is also the imagination of their new world for the Red Guards such as Li Huiping and Li Ping. The famous slogans and Mao's sayings in the Cultural Revolution, such as "to rebel is justified," ("zaofan youli" 造反有理) "to overthrow the Yama, to liberate the imps," ("dadao yanwang jiefang xiaogui" 打倒阎王、解放小鬼) "Kick off the Party, Carry Out Revolution by Ourselves!" ("tikai dangwei nao geming 踢开党委闹革命)" all encouraged the creation of such rebellious subjects.

Therefore, if Watkin's elaboration of Badiou's ontological ground and my observation of Mao's atheism are correct, then perhaps Badiou's enthusiasm for the Cultural Revolution is not only due to the anarchistic, rebellious struggle against the party-state as Badiou has consciously recognized, but also due to their shared atheist atomism, their expectation and demand of the

¹ This famous poem is titled "Changsha," written in 1925, the translation is Willis Barnstone's. See, Mao Zedong, *The Poems of Mao Zedong*, 31.

bravely falling atoms, as well as their fantasy of a brand new world where “a million creatures compete for freedom.” However, it is here that we find the Achilles’ “heel” of both Mao and Badiou’s atheism. Althusser makes it explicitly, it is the aleatory “swerve” rather than the destiny of the “fall” that create the world.¹ Therefore for Althusser, a crazy man, a real materialist world after the first encounter is a diabolical, entirely unknown one. It is not the picture of Badiou’s (Mao’s?) world. Watkin carefully comments on Badiou’s assumption of the death of God, “once more, the necessity of the assumption that there are no limits to infinite multiplicities seems here to be the result of a desire to rest serenely in the primacy of multiplicity over the one.”²“To rest serene in the primacy of multiplicity,” Watkin argues, is the unspoken Good in Badiou’s decision. But who could guarantee that the world with the death of God is a “good serene” after the death of God, and the world of the primacy of multiplicity is a peaceful one? If we look back to Mao’s poem, “in the freezing air of a million creatures compete for freedom,” we can also ask, is it a Good and peaceful world? Is it a harmonious world, or, to the contrary, a conflictual, chaotic, and even catastrophic one? Mao did express explicitly in his *Marginal Notes* that a harmonious society is merely an ideal dream and that “I realize that such a realm cannot exist;”³ however, is this harmonious, utopian future, the

¹ Althusser tells us how this wild materialism is tamed: “if Epicurus’ atoms, raining down parallel to each other in the void, encounter one another, it is in order to bring out, in the guise of the swerve caused by the clinamen, the existence of human freedom even in the world of necessity.” (Louis Althusser, *Philosophy of the Encounter: Later Writings, 1978-87*, New York and London: Verso, 2006, 168)

² *Difficult Atheism*, 110

³ Mao Zedong, *Mao’s Road to Power: Revolutionary Writings 1912-1949 (Volume I)*, Armonk and London: M.E.Sharpe, Inc. 1992, 239.

evolutionary, teleological or theological end not the precondition for the launch of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution? How could a kind of atheism rely on such a Grace in the last analysis?

This weak point is where *When the Sunset Disappears* starts. Li Huiping was once one of the courageous and militant Red Guards. At the beginning of the second part of the novella, he was promoting a ransacking and was addressing to a large group of activists:

I want to say that we Red Guards are rebellious! And for this reason, we should take on a great task during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution: From a tide of revolution surging in all directions with our power! Otherwise, the next high tide of revolution will not occur! And tonight's ransacking is just a huge crest of the tide, which is very important to the formation of a new tide of the Cultural Revolution! I think this is our historical task and the base of our policy. Someone sad just now that we are rude! We will hurt the good! Let me ask this – revolution is a violent action, isn't it?¹

Among these grand words and passionate feelings, we find almost everything points to the arrival of “event.” They want to create a new tide of revolution. Besides, they want to change the world by themselves with no instruction from God or from Mao, as asserted, “I think this is our historical task.” What's more important, these brave Red Guards do not fear the violence, whether it is the violence imposed upon others or upon themselves. Badiou says, “the verb to force indicates that since the power of a truth is that of a break, it is by violating established and circulating knowledge that a truth returns to the immediacy of the situation.”² Yes, revolution is a violent action. Violence for the Truth. But does it mean the ransacking, iconoclasm, persecution could be justified as revolutionary actions? Yes, perhaps, according to

¹ Li Ping, *When the Sunset Disappears*, 28

² Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, London and New York: Verso, 2001, 70.

the logic of this speech. But why this speech and not the speech of “someone’s”? What about other people’s perspectives? Who are the “we”? Clearly, the “we” are the Old Red Guards. But why is it that only the Old Red Guards could be the leader of Revolution and not “someone else,” especially the ones who are ransacked? Because we are revolutionary and they are reactionary. Why? As the author of the novella recalls, once such irritating debate arose, they (the Old Red Guards) immediately sang the song - “Dad a hero, son a stalwart; dad a reactionary, son a bastard!” Now, when the author recollects this memory or when he writes the story, he successfully makes this address tempting and yet ominous, while the scene and situation are extremely disquieting. However, our protagonist Li Huaiping was immersed in his vigorous spirits or imaginations, considering himself as the torchbearer, and decided to enlighten everywhere in the dark. He was standing at the edge of heaven and would fall into the Cultural Revolution *De Facto* very soon.

Enlightenment and Revolutionary Barbarism

Li Huaiping’s revolutionary enthusiasm creates a kind of burning light, and it is this sort of light that is fiercely criticized by the revolutionary philosopher, Zhang Taiyan, in late Qing period. In the year of 1908, Zhang almost finished his reinterpretation of one of the Chinese classical philosophic texts, Zhuang Zi’s “Equality of Everything” (“qiwu lun” 齐物论), where he finds an interesting story about sun, virtue, and war.

“In the olden days Yao said to Shun, ‘I want to attack Tsung, Kuai and Hsu Ao. I have wanted to do this since I became king. What do you think?’

“Shun replied, ‘There three rulers are just primitive living in the back woods, -

why can't you just forget them? In ancient times, ten suns rose and all life was illuminated. But how much more does Virtue illuminate life than even these suns!"¹

It is not easy to interpret this most controversial episode in Zhuang Zi's philosophical system. But with the help of Zhang Taiyan's interpretation, the meaning of this story for Zhang is not difficult to capture. "Ten suns rose, and all life was illuminated." From the myth of Hou Yi (后羿), we know "ten suns" in ancient myth are awful, because not only all life was illuminated, but all life was also dried and burned, and thus the ancient people need the hero Hou Yi to shoot down nine of them. In Zhuang Zi's elaboration, such light of the sun is compared to the virtue or will of the king. It is King Yao's desire to illuminate everything which leads to the dying out of these three small "primitive" or "barbaric" countries. However, now that King Yao is regarded as a sage king, such violence could be justified in the process of civilization.

Zhang Taiyan then finds something extremely disconcerting here. He comments:

However, those who intend to annex other countries appear to reject the label of devouring other people and depend on lofty words. For example, they will say that they are transforming the barbarians into civilized people. Thus the perspective in which the civilized and barbarians are not equal is clearly the whistling arrow that signals the actions of [tyrants like] King Jie and Robber Zhi.²

What disturbed Zhang Taiyan was none other than the late Qing "enlightenment discourse" which came from West and took root in Japan. Evolution theory and Barbarism(east)-Civilization(west) binary were prevailing since Meiji Japan and not a few of late-Qing Reformists (weixinpai 维新派) such as Liang Qichao supported the "enlightenment discourse"

¹ Zhuang Zi, translated by Martin Palmer, *The Book of Chuang Tzu*, New York: Penquin, 2006, 17.

² Zhang, Taiyan, "An Interpretation of 'On the Equalization of Things,'" ("Qiwulun shi," 齐物论释), in *Zhang Taiyan quanji*, vol(6), Shanghai: Shanghai renmin press, 1986, 39. The translation is Viren Murthy's, see his book, *The Political Philosophy of Zhang Taiyan: The Resistance of Consciousness*, Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011, 215.

and created the discourse of “national character criticism” (“guominxing pipan” 国民性批判) to criticize the barbarism of Chinese people. Such lure of “colonial modernity”¹ is the very target of Zhang Taiyang’s fierce attack, “the whistling arrow that signals the actions of [tyrants like] King Jie and Robber Zhi.” Here we’d better carefully distinguish two kinds of barbarisms. The first type of barbarism is the “barbarism” in rhetoric sayings of “transforming the barbarians into civilized people,” or the barbarism of the designated “other” by the complacent torchbearer. And indeed this designating posture is historically adopted by the Christian missionaries, the Western colonists, the Reformist, the May-Fourth enlightened intellectuals, as well as the Marxist revolutionaries such as our hero, the Red Guard Li Huaiping. The second barbarism, however, is the process of enlightenment itself; for Zhang Taiyan, enlightenment or the light of sun only signals the tyranny –“actions of King Jie and Robber Zhi.”

As long as Li Huaiping considers himself as a torchbearer or the leader of the tide of revolution, he will not consider the Red Guards’ ransacking as barbarism in Zhang Taiyan’s sense, but as necessary violence which pushes the progress of history from the reactionary dark into the revolutionary light. In the first part of the novel, Li explains his theory of “necessary violence” to Nanshan (a smart and pretty girl who he comes across at a park in one fresh and lovely spring morning) using the case of the Troy War, “from the most brutal ancient war, the most beautiful ancient myths are created.”² And in the address mentioned above, the same

¹ Shumei Shih, *The Lure of the Modern*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2001.

² Li Ping, *When the Sunset Disappears*, 19.

logic applies. The ransacking is legitimized not only on the ground that the revolution is a violent action but also on the ground that it is a progressive and righteous act. The target of this ransacking is an old general of KMT, a counterrevolutionary who nevertheless still enjoys the cultural superiority and economic privilege in the socialist China. However, as soon as Li and his companions try to make their efforts to actualize their imagination of revolution, what they encounter first is the real perspectives of these reactionaries or barbarians. When he dashes into the house, he notices the nanny “cried out in terror;”¹ and when he strides up the steps and enters the main room, he catches sight of “a little old lady stood up in panic;”² and then he stares intently at the aged general and finds him “looked at me very calmly;” finally, he meets the girl who he came across very recently at the park and exchanged the truth in minds (barbarism and civilization) in a rambling talk, “but now we were meeting again in such a scene: she would be questioned and reprimanded relentlessly while I set in judgment.”³ In idea, the revolution is an abstract struggle between revolutionaries and reactionaries, while in reality, it turns out to be the conflicts of different concrete perspectives and the “fear” caused by our “light.” Therefore, “I was surprised,” “my voice had suddenly become so weak and gentle!”⁴ Here we find an unusual situation, the frustration of “enlightened” light.

“I was surprised,” “I am stunned,” “I am shocked.” Such a unique narrative posture of this novella needs to be paid full attention. At first glance, this novella might be regarded as a kind

¹ *Ibid.*, 30.

² *Ibid.*, 31.

³ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁴ *Ibid.*

of *Bildungsroman*. In fifteen years, our protagonist wanders around China and meets all sorts of people - Nanshan, the general, Tai Shan Older, Captain Posinen– and finally on the last page, he is “calm, serene, and full of strength,” and “turn(s) sights to a more promising future.”¹ As summed up by Alex Woloch about the *Bildungsroman*, “the hero’s progress is facilitated through a series of interactions with delimited minor characters.”² However, none of these minor characters are real “minor” characters. They are not alienated, functional, or distorted characters severing only the development or formation of the protagonist’s interiority; nor are they “ruined” in these interactions and their life did not “dissolve into nothingness” as noted by Lukács in his analysis of *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship*.³ On the contrary, it is our protagonist who is “surprised,” “stunned,” and “shocked” every time in such interaction and every time he is a patient observer and a faithful listener. He never makes a judgment; rather, in front of him the life, mind, and faith of other people are fully exhibited. With the loss of the self – not a Hegelian loss but a loss more close to Zhuang Zi’s self-emptying – a whole new world of multiplicity is unfolded.

I will try to compare this atheistic multiplicity with Badiou’s or Mao’s theological multiplicity. It is not an assumed multiplicity, a multiplicity as a Grace, but a multiplicity as an effect, a result of action and practice in human society. Obviously, the narrative technique and subject position of this novella are a reversal and a critical reflection of Red Guards’ abstract

¹ *Ibid.*, 152.

² Alex Woloch, *The One vs. the Many*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003, 28.

³ Georg Lukács, *Goethe and His Age 1947*, Trans. Robert Anchor. New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1969, 55.

idealism and blind enthusiasm. In our story, Huaiping himself had a few unhappy experiences after this ransacking – his parents were investigated; his militant group was disbanded, with his comrades scattered among the mountainous areas and the countryside; he was wronged and criticized in the army; a few month before his visit of Mount Tai, his mother suddenly passed away and his father collapsed. What’s more important for my discussion is perhaps that our protagonist also experiences the “Unhappy Consciousness” in spiritual life very close to Hegel’s elaboration, after encountering the limited, the changeable, the mortal, the individual, the particular, and the Cultural Revolution(s) *De Facto*, now the “consciousness of life, of its existence and activity, is only an agonizing over this existence and activity, for therein it is conscious that its essence is only its opposite, is conscious only of its own nothingness”¹

However, I don’t think Huaiping’s self-consciousness followed the Hegelian self-negation; rather, I will argue he sticks to the Spinozian self-affirmation while strictly restrains the barbarous enlightenment reason, the light he had held so fast when he was young. He knows now everyone’s life is limited, but such limits have nothing to do with obligation or subordination. The limits are the restrictions in a given situation, that is, one practices his life desire among the various conflicting powers and desires of others. In Balibar’s analysis of Spinoza’ change of political thoughts from *The Tractatus Theological-Politicus* to *The Tractatus Politicus*, the author finds that after the overturning of the Republic’s regents which the philosopher supported and after Spinoza recognized the limits and corruptions of the

¹ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 127.

regents themselves, Spinoza attached more importance to “passion” than to “reason” in his thinking of “sociability.”

What Spinoza demonstrates is that there is another form of the genesis (or “production”) of society, which springs from the passions themselves and which is worked out in them and through them, even if, in this case, the result is not necessarily a harmonious society.¹

I find a similar understanding of sociability in *When the Sunset Disappears*. Sociability rooted in the passions is therefore necessarily conflicting. But it is nevertheless a real sociability. When Teacher Zhang strives to rebuild a harmonious society and when Lady Shao refuses to think about the possibility of sociability, Huaiping is contemplating a more tolerant, heterogeneous society, or, I will argue, a radically materialistic society. Although it seems to be unresolvable, we need to at least practice in real life. We need to admit the passions, affects and fears of multiplicity exist in a real society and acknowledge that these affects of the masses are often drawn in different directions and are in conflict with one another. Therefore, a minimal ethical solution provided by this novella is insinuated in the posture of “empty-self,” “I am stunned.” In contrast to the blazing light of “morning sun” of the young and aggressive Huaiping, the mature Huaiping is a calm and quiet subject, immersed in with the brilliant yet soft golden twilight.

Guiding Light and the Radical Enlightenment

Now I think it is necessary to return to the sunset scene I have rendered at the beginning.

¹ Etienne Balibar, *Spinoza and Politics*, London and New York: Verso, 1998, 85.

I want to connect this “twilight in the sunset” with a light of certain “radical enlightenment.” For “Radical” here, I use Jonathan I. Israel’s huge book *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750* for reference.¹ What arouses my interests in Spinoza or Spinozism is his wild materialism or atheism (I will argue it is not pantheism), particularly his later thoughts. Admittedly, my knowledge of Christian theology and Western intellectual history are inadequate. Hence, I want only to temporarily borrow such a “radical” idea to review Chinese enlightenment after the late 19th-century. Perhaps starting from Heidegger’s criticism on “onto-theological” or “metaphysics,” there are various criticisms of Enlightenment or Cartesian dualism as imitative atheism which merely replaces “God” with a supposedly atheistic placeholder such as “Man” or “Reason.”² I will not discuss all these literature in Western critical tradition here; rather, what concerns me is its applicability to Chinese enlightenment. Not a few students of modern Chinese literature find the permeation of Christian theology, evolution theory, scientism, or colonial modernity into the modern Chinese thoughts. We know in Chinese enlightenment there was no such antagonism and mutual infiltration between “faith” and “knowledge” as in European history, but numerous studies have shown how the Chinese enlightenment discourse rested on a kind of “monotheism,” or on the metaphysical desire to rebuild the “first principle” into “man,” “reason,” “science,” or “scientific Marxism.”³ Under such a light, anything that is dark, abject, negative, irrational, or superstitious needs to be enlightened. Hence we have seen Li Huaiping’s idealism to

¹ Jonathan I. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.

² See, Martin Heidegger, “The Onto-Theo-Logical Constitution of Metaphysics,” in *Identity and Difference*, New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1969.

³ About the monotheism of Chinese scientific Marxism, see, Pi Kyunghoon, *Science and the Rebuilding of the “Rational Subject” in 1980s China*, *Frontiers of Literary Studies in China* No.4(2016).

extinguish anything in the dark – reactionaries, the four “olds,” selfish desire, hooligans.¹ In the furious Red August of 1966, Mao, as the symbolic Sun, led the energetic Red Guards or “morning suns” to destroy the old society for a bright new socialism. It is here that we may find the zenith of the reason of monotheist enlightenment.²

I am presenting in this section another atheist enlightenment that comes after this monotheist enlightenment. It is evident that the “guarding light of the sunset” comes after the “burning light of the morning sun.” For the author Li Ping and his first group of readers, *When the Sunset Disappears* is without question a self-criticism of Red Guard movement, but it is a self-criticism from an “old red guard” - an ardent adherent, a brave practitioner, and a bitter sufferer. “It is a story of a man who can’t bear to think of the past.”³ In such self-criticism, the author does not relieve the protagonist of his responsibility and shift the blame onto Mao or “Gang of Four”(“sirenbang” 四人帮), nor does he utilize a moral system to reduce the intensity of idealist enthusiasm and the severity of social contradiction. What’s more, the

¹ About “beating hooligans,” Li Ping in his memoirs recalls, “the Red Guards suddenly became unprecedentedly vigorous and began to beat the scoundrels massively and organically. And this was the bloodiest moment of the Red Guards movement.” (*When the Sunset Disappears*, 308-309.) And in Liang Xiaosheng’s *Confession of a Red Guard*, the author describes the movement in detail with some psychological depth. (See, Liao, Xiaosheng, *Confession of a Red Guard*, Chapter 11, Beijing: Wenhua yishu press, 2006,) Because the scoundrels are convicted evil, perhaps the Red Guards could relieve their moral burden and commit their violence more fiercely.

² However, I need to be careful to make such an argument. Indeed, in every historical period, the enlightenment reason and its resistance always coexisted. We have mentioned Zhang Taiyan’s critique of Late-Qing enlightenment discourse. And in Lu Xun’s fictions, just as both Lydia Liu and Wang Hui have elaborated, the resistances from individual passion and faith toward the universal enlightenment reason (the discourse of national character, science, etc.) were always detectable. See, Lydia H. Liu *Life as Form: How Biomimesis Encountered Buddhism in Lu Xun*, *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 68, No. 1(2009), pp 21-54; Wang Hui, *Intuition, Repetition, and Revolution: Six Moments in the Life of Ah Q*, in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Chinese Literatures*, chapter 3.6, New York: Oxford University Press: 2016.

³ See Li Ping, *When the Sunset Disappears*,154-7.

novella even defends the idealism of the radical youths and stresses the importance of the Cultural Revolution for their own individual *Bildung* and self-enlightenment which has recently be noticed by some novelists and critics.¹ Then, what is the essence of such self-criticism? I have mentioned in this novella Chu Wuxuan's critique of some people who "tend to put their ideas above everything, regarding their ideas as the God of common people."² It was a warning against Nanshan's indifference and arrogance, but for the protagonist who was eavesdropping on their conversation, it was also a criticism of his own revolutionary violence in the Red August, and the protagonist even found some self-criticism in Chu Wuxuan's remorseful tone about Chu's youthful enthusiasm. Therefore, it is not a particular critique, but a critique of enlightenment *per se*.

Philosophically speaking, I will argue this critique is directed toward the tyranny of enlightenment reason and its inherent barbarism. In Horkheimer and Adorno's analysis, it is a nominalist tendency of enlightenment which starts from the beginning of language or any formation of a symbolic system. If enlightenment or reason is originally an abstract power to distance the subject from its objective environment in order to tame and control the outside world, then such abstract light will immediately be appropriated by the appointed organs of society which, in the name of universal language, ask for the obedience of the others, that is, the subjection of others' wills, desires, and interests. We already have the cases of Teacher

¹ About the close connection between the experience in Cultural Revolution and the *Bildung* of individual, see, Huang Yibing, *Contemporary Chinese Literature: From the Cultural Revolution to the Future*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), particular Huang's study on Duo Duo in Chapter Two. See also the discussion on "1970s' China" in *Open Time (kaifang shidai, 开放时代)*, No.1 (2013). And Zhang Xudong, Wang Anyi, *A Dialogue on the Era of Enlightenment, (duihua qimeng shidai, 对话启蒙时代)*, Beijing: Sanlian press, 2008.

² Li Ping, *When the Sunset Disappears*,

Zhang, Xiao Ling, and young Li Huiping, but we find what they hold are always some universal language such as civilization or revolutionary spirit. It is a kind of instrumental enlightenment, the purpose of which, as Horkheimer and Adorno argue, is to “deprive what was powerless of the strength to make itself heard and merely provided the existing order with a neutral sign for itself.”¹ But here in *When Sunset Disappears*, we find another possibility: with the mature Li Huaiping’s silent listening and his soft eyes, the life-worlds of various other people are heard and felt. And such a “light” is the twilight of the sunset:

At that moment, the whole Moon Viewing Peak became a dark outline in the dazzling bright light. Tourists in the pavilion on the top of the peak and on the mountainside became silhouettes lined with gold. People were standing against the backdrop of the sky and making various postures and movements. ²

In the paragraph preceding Zhuang Zi’s episode of ten suns (from which Zhang Taiyan develops his attack on late Qing enlightenment discourse), Zhuang Zi discusses a kind of “Bao Light, or Guiding Light,” about which he explains, “we do not know where it comes from originally, and this is called our Guiding Light.”³ A light without a source so that no one can take hold of it and claim to be a torchbearer or fire-stealer. For Zhuang Zi, such a light without a holder could avoid the biased opinion and help to lighten up ten-thousands things according to their own nature. Is it not another thinking about radical enlightenment? Let things enlighten themselves with the help of the guiding light. Because the sun is dead, the remaining light is no longer a threatening or scorching light. Therefore in this scene “when sunset disappears,” we find people are more at ease, “making various postures and movements.” But here the light is still necessary. Otherwise, things and people would be caught by the darkness and chaos. Therefore the “guiding light” preserves the “light’s” enlightening power while restraining it in its appropriate boundary. In Horkheimer and Adorno’s contemplation about enlightenment,

¹ Max Horkheimer, and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002, 15-17, 17.

² Li Ping, *When the Sunset Disappears*, 131.

³ Chuang Tzu, *The Book of Chuang Tzu*, 16.

they idealize a moment of nomadic savage, “when a man could still participate in the magic which defined the limits of that world, and could disguise himself as his quarry in order to stalk it.”¹ In such a play or magic, the sorcers have not yet completely controlled the spirit-world and the individual man could still participate in it and use his cunning to disguise himself. I will argue it is this limited enlightening power that is defended by both writers. And I will also argue such an enlightenment reason has the meaning of “guiding light,” a kind of light that helps an individual to enlighten his/her dark life and to give the strength and courage to act and to practice. The God here does not provide “grace,” reason, or the imperative, but supports individual’s courage for imagination, passion, and man-created hope. In the novella, whenever our protagonist contemplates the religion, he interprets it in such a materialist way. When he hears that Nanshan believes, he interprets immediately, “it really shocked me that a kind girl, in order to establish a solid belief in her life and make her heart at peace, created, no, made up the holy palaces and the merciful Lord of eternity for herself at a very young age.”² And the old monk talks about Buddhism in such a way, “whether Buddha exists or not is not so important. As for sutra pillars and pagodas, they are simply to set people’s mind at rest.”³ Finally, Nanshan told Huaiping that her real faith lies in Confucianism, especially “Confucianism’s confidence of knowing the will of Heaven and our open-minded attitude toward life and death.”⁴ It is we who know the “will of Heaven,” and by acknowledging the Heaven, we accept the real (painful) condition in our life and try to improve it with our own practices. From this perspective, I think Li Ping, the author, has the reason to argue that his interpretation of religion is Marxist and materialist, or even atheist, while his opponents, who claim themselves to be real Marxist (official Marxist or humanist Marxist), and who use the teleology of dialectical materialism or Marxist humanism to correct Nanshan’s false philosophy, perhaps cling in the

¹ Max Horkheimer, and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, 15.

² Li Ping, *When the Sunset Disappears*, 85.

³ Li Ping, *When the Sunset Disappears*, 115.

⁴ *When the Sunset Disappears*, 133.

last analysis to the theological foundation of the monotheist enlightenment.¹

Perhaps it is time to wrap up the “enlightenment” once we have arrived at such a radical enlightenment. Here we find a light that distinguishes itself from both the passionate light of Teacher Zhang and the indifferent light of Lady Xiao. Based on the ground of the “Causa Sui” of each individual, protected by the “guiding light,” and aware of the transgression of abstract reason, such a radical enlightenment, as the result of Mao’s Cultural Revolution, contributed substantially to the formation of the post-Mao Chinese subjects and their social imagination together with other two kinds of enlightenment. I will continue to discuss its possibilities and its frustration in constituting a new productive subject and a more tolerant, egalitarian socialist civil society in Chapter Four.

¹ Special attentions need to be paid to the debates between Wang Ruoshui, the theorist of Marxist humanism and Li Ping. See, Wang Ruishui’s “Nanshan’s Philosophy” (Nanshan de zhexue, 南珊的哲学), “Talk Again Nanshan’s Philosophy” (zaitan Nanshan de zhexue, 再谈南珊的哲学), and Li Ping’s “Talk About Nanshan,” (tantan Nanshan, 谈谈南珊). See in *Controversial Works in the New Era: When the Sunset Disappears*, (*xinshiqi zhengming zuopin congshu: wanxia xiaoshi de shihou*, 新时期争鸣作品丛书: 晚霞消失的时候), Changchun: Shidai wenyi press, 1986, 301-347.

Within a few years of its first publication in 1980, Dai Houying's 戴厚英 *Human, Ah! Human* (*Ren a, ren!* 人啊, 人!)¹ went through its tenth printing and various translations abroad as one of the most popular and controversial novels in its time. Most admirers considered the novel an explicit declaration of individual subjectivity and humanistic value. The hero of the novel, He Jingfu 何荆夫, a romanticist and humanist, becomes widely known for the human "writ large." Paralleling the trending topics of the time, including the "Marxism and alienation" debates, "aesthetics fever," and the theory of "literary subjectivity," He's humanist hero arrived full-blown by the mid-1980s. Under the flag of a reconceived "Marxist humanism," the combined discourses packaged and symbolized by Dai's novel overthrew the mainstream Marxism left over from the Mao period. For the human newly conceived, class, collectivity, and the state were newly regarded as oppressive and surveilling forces with which to be reckoned.

Unsurprisingly, the novel provoked a strong reaction from the ideological orthodoxy. Two

¹ The translation of the word "ren" (人) in the title of Dai's novel seems troublesome. Frances Wood in his translation completely changed it into a new name, "Stones of the Wall." In Duke's discussion, in most cases, he leaves it untranslated, "Ren a, ren!" Perry Link puts it as "People, Oh People!" while the version of David Der-wei Wang is "Man, ah! Man" and Shu-mei Shih's is "Human, Ah Human!" For me, the ambiguity of the word "human" is useful to forestall any infiltration of conceptual prejudice, "people," "man," "humanity," "subjectivity," etc. Although Dai Houying advocates a certain sort of humanism, Marxist humanism perhaps, I will argue the "ren" in the title suggests the unclear mixture of various kinds of individual voices.

political campaigns launched by the CCP in the 1980s, the “Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign” of 1983 and the “Anti-Bourgeois Liberalization Campaign” of 1986, took this novel as their primary target. By the same token, this book drew significant attention from literary scholars throughout the English-reading world. Perry Link considered it representative of the “thaw” of political ideology after 1976, as a plea to revive “humanism” and to reject Mao Zedong’s theory that there is no human nature—only class nature.¹ Leo Ou-fan Lee agreed, by and large, viewing Dai Houying as a radical dissident and the novel as an attempt “to go more deeply into the inner self in order to rediscover more authentic humanity;”² technically, however, Lee deemed the novel a failure in its inability to transcend the generic boundaries of a conventional realist novel. Following these criticisms, Michael S. Duke’s chapter-long analysis regards this novel as an historiography of rupture typical of the “New Enlightenment discourse” in 1980s China, in which the return of “the human” and humanism constituted a step toward the unfinished project of May 4th “enlightenment;” thus this “human” was “the reaffirmation of human dignity and worth after twenty years of Maoist rule in China.”³

Recently, such sanctimonious appropriations of notions of “the human” by liberal humanist discourses have aroused suspicion among some critics. For instance, Beijing-based scholar He Guimei critically revisits this historiography and provides a genealogy of “the human” as a

¹ Perry Link, *The Uses of Literature: Life in the Socialist Chinese Literature System*, 27.

² Leo Ou-Fan Lee, “The Politics of Technique: Perspectives of Literary Dissidence in Contemporary Chinese Fiction” in *After Mao: Chinese Literature and Society*, Cambridge and London: The Harvard University Press, 1985, 183.

³ Michael S. Duke, *Blooming and Contending: Chinese Literature in the Post-Mao Era*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985, 160.

means of deconstructing the abovementioned myth. She argues that the concept was generated neither from May 4th humanism nor from any contemporary western humanism; rather, the inspiration driving humanist critique arose from the period it set out to criticize – that is, the specter of 19th century humanism inhering in the Chinese socialist tradition. Beyond arguing for the historicity of the concept particular to this tradition, He locates a discontinuity between the critical stance of the “human individual” that emerged at the beginning of the post-Mao era and the “liberal” understanding of the human that solidified in the late 1980s.¹ For He, the latter discourse, comprising the myth of “the human,” was produced not without heavy political implications—that is to say, it was ideologically forged to serve the rise of neoliberal policy and to prepare postsocialist citizens for the coming of global capitalism.

Similar discontent toward the dominance of liberal humanism appears in Shu-mei Shih’s reevaluation of “China and the human.” Unlike He Guimei’s Foucauldian neutrality, Shi explicitly encourages students of Chinese studies to revisit Marxist humanism, which she considers to be “a theoretical intervention in liberal, Eurocentric humanism and, as such, [a] potential that was not realized in postcolonial theory,” in the sense that “Marxist humanism also could have offered the possibility to conceive of the oppressed or the colonized as the human involved in revolutionary action.”² For Shih, Marxist humanism arose from a recuperation of the work of early Marx, especially the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, in many Eastern European countries following the death of Stalin. I believe Shih is

¹ He, Guimei, “*Xin qimeng*” *zhishi dang’an: bashi niandai zhongguo wenhua yanjiu*, 51-60, 74-90.

² Shih, Shu-mei, “Is the Post-in Postsocialism the Post-in Posthumanism?” *Social Text*, No. 1 (2012), 43.

accurate in asserting this to be a crucial thread running through the global 1960s, and she is also correct to argue that it had enormous influence on Chinese postsocialist intellectuals, such as Wang Ruoshui and Dai Houying. However, Shih's address of Marxist humanism leaves it highly abstracted, without endeavoring to penetrate into the material realities of China as a chaotic and ambiguous world in the late 1970s and early 1980s from which new humanist discourses could arise. I argue in the following pages that Maoist radicalism and its failures during the Cultural Revolution supplied one critical factor driving the rise of Marxist humanism and its subsequent metamorphosis into liberal humanism. This comes at least partially in response to Shih's exposition, which, however promising, underestimates the political capacities of Maoism. Highly constitutive of the rise of radicalism throughout the global 1960s, the concepts and discourses surrounding the notion of the post-socialist "human" demand further unpacking.

I attempt to utilize several post-humanist critical theories that have been persistently on guard against the theoretical limits of both liberal and Marxist humanism. Taking a particular kind of historical representation, the novel, as my primary interpretive object, the theoretical investigation will unfold from Franco Moretti's point in *European Bildungsroman* that, far from rigidly exhibiting a normative and monological hero, the novel is able to encompass both contradiction and reconciliation, thus rendering the heroic figure rather pliant, precarious, and impure.¹ Particularly in a historical moment when normativity has not yet taken hold in

¹ Makeon, Michael ed., *Theory of the Novel: A Historical Approach*, Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000, 559.

everyday life—as with bourgeois everydayness in Moretti’s case, or the postsocialist human in mine—it is contingency rather than necessity, or the encounter of various characters in a theatrical setting rather than a humanist hero’s monologue, which gets inscribed and vividly betrayed within the allegorical structure of a novel such as *Human, Ah! Human*. Here, I will revisit its theatrical setting where various kinds of newborn “human” figures encounter and contend with one another. Rather than the sudden emergence of a humanist hero, or a Marxist humanist hero, it was the encounter of the Machiavellian, the philistine and the romantic—their combination, permutation, and rehearsal in fictional structure—that offers up paths, as yet untrodden, approaching the historical Real. Yet the purpose for my revisiting is not to dig out another “origin” with which to replace the dominant humanist origin for the postsocialist human. Indeed, when I use the word “encounter,” I attempt to borrow its philosophical and political implication from Louis Althusser’s later writings. For Althusser, “encounter” implies the aleatory and non-anterior beginning of a system of ideas. There is neither Cause (like the original seeds of “the human”) nor End prior to the formation of the world. According to Althusser, the retrospective attempt to retrieve some original seed awaiting its full-blown maturation in later history only serves the attempts of the status quo to legitimize and naturalize the established system of ideas in the present,¹ which, for my purposes, is the rigid dualism to be found between the autonomous individual and the totalitarian state, or even, with reference to Shih, the revolutionary oppressed and the tyrannical oppressor. I hope my revisiting could

¹ Louis, Althusser, *Philosophy of the Encounter: Later Writings, 1978-87*, 163-207.

shake these hegemonic bodies of ideas and unearth something untamed and deeply buried. Yet it is not a theoretical deconstruction of the human per se that I offer so much as an investigation of the human in history, through the representational world with the capacity to capture the figures too fleeting to be grasped in the real.

3.1 Showing the Real: a note on Form

Before we could scrutinize the rehearsal of the various characters as historical personages, however, an examination of the form of this novel is necessary to exploring the deeper levels of the fictional structure. Indeed, at first glance, the surface narrative or storyline of this novel is far from attractive. It tells a love story between three middle-aged men and one middle-aged woman, all of whom are university professors. Nothing eventful happens. How, then, did this novel cause such a sensation upon publication?

A short answer could be offered with reference to “affect” or “feeling.” Dai Houying’s writings provided intellectuals with an opportunity to express their unspeakable feelings and to reexamine their traumatic past during the Cultural Revolution. The uneventful story of the novel contrasts sharply, in actual fact, with the eventful life of the author. Dai Houying had been an ultra-leftist college student in the 1950s, her early fame acquired by publicly humiliating her teacher, a humanist theorist. During the Cultural Revolution she took on the role of a rebel answering Mao’s call. Dai later became passionately involved with a former revolutionary poet, Wen Jie, who committed suicide because of their failed relationship owing to political intervention. Eventually Dai became the most rebellious humanist in the early 1980s, writing again and again about her life experiences.¹ In all of these texts, however, the

¹ These three novels include: *Human, ah! Human*, (*ren, a! ren* 人啊! 人) Xi’an: Taibai wenyi press, 1994. *The Death of the Poet*, (*shiren zhi si* 诗人之死) Xi’an: taibai wenyi press, 1994. *Footstep in the Air*, (*kongzhong de zuyin* 空中的足音) Hefei: Anhui wenyi press, 2000. one collection of letters, *The Grave in Heart*, (*xinzhong de fen* 心中的坟) Shanghai: Fudan daxue press, 1996, and one memoir,

extreme complexity and impenetrability of history prevent any smooth narrative formation. Dai refuses the optimism of a “romance,” which the traditional narrative or socialist creed had always managed to provide.

For Dai, a new textual technique with which to approach the “Real” of history is indispensable. In the postscript to *Human, Ah! Human*, Dai claims she had wanted to change the rules of socialist realism; in her novel, she did not want to organize a coherent plot, telling what already happened and revealing the predetermined destinies of her characters. Rather, her new task was to undo the closed narrative, showing and observing the “real,” and setting forth the contradictions. “Let every character stand out to open their own door of the soul and to explore their own small world.”¹ Such a transformation from narrating to “showing” points toward elements of a certain modernism. The novel opens with the following line:

“I am swimming forward and struggling for my life, enfolded.”²

And compare it with other two openings of socialist realist novels:

1929 was one of the worst years in Shensi Province’s long history of famines. During the first snowfall in November, famine victims, moving down from the plain north of the Wei River, filled the streets of Hsiapao Village. — *The Builders* ³

At the south-east tip of Sanliwan Village are two connected courtyards known as Flagstaff Compound. — *Sanliwang Village* ⁴

Personality/Fate: My Story, (*xingge/ mingyun: wode gushi* 性格/命运：我的故事) Xi’an: Taibai wenyi press, 1994.

¹ Dai Houying, *Ren a, Ren!*, 354. In this article, unless otherwise noted, all translations of this novel are mine.

² *Ibid*, 2.

³ Liu Qing, *The Builders* (*chuangye shi* 创业史). The Chinese version was first published in 1960. This translation is from the English version: Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1964, p. 1.

⁴ Zhao Shuli, *Sanliwan Village* (*sanli wan* 三里湾) The Chinese version was first published in 1955. This

The difference between these two kinds of narrating devices in presenting fictive reality is evident. In classic socialist novels, where the fictive space unfolds is a space under an omnipresent bird's view. Hence, the characters are almost exclusively observed from the outside of the individuals themselves; the scenes of life, as exemplified by Hsiapao Village and Flagstaff Compound, are shown on a stage strictly controlled by the narrator. Besides that, the fictive present, the “now,” is also an already-happened “now,” a “now” in past tense. Or, in the words of Benjamin, the storyteller could only ever tell a dead story.¹ Because the fates have already befallen the characters, the teller is able to use a neutral tone and, thus, *retell* the story objectively. Therefore, the classic opening scene is always characterized by the “solemnity of the narrator.” It is unimaginable to find an isolated, subjective perspective within the serenity and solemnity of collective life.²

translation is from the English version, Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1957, p. 5.

¹ Walter Benjamin, “The Storyteller,” in *Illuminations*, 83-110.

² Here I am not arguing that the classic socialist realist narratives are traditional or pre-modern narratives as often implied by western critics. Indeed, the technique of socialist realism could also be considered “postmodern.” According to the research of Chen Pingyuan, the first-person voice in its various forms in monologues, diaries, and correspondences was widely used in May 4th fiction for the purpose of expressing the inner feelings of the modern individual. See Chen Pingyuan, *The Transformation of Narrative Mode of Chinese Fiction*, (*zhongguo xiaoshuo xushi moshi de zhuanbian* 中国小说叙事模式的转变) Beijing: Beijing University Press, 2010, 58-93. However, the sense of anxiety or crisis over this narrative mechanism gradually emerged: How could we represent other people's voices with this exclusively subjective and isolated perspective? This anxiety was heightened when the revolutionary situation demanded revolutionary literature to represent the proletariat, the peasant, and the rural community. Later, under the name of Zhao Shuli, a new narrative technique spread rapidly within revolutionary literature and socialist realism. For some critics, the “Zhao Shuli Mode” could be considered the narrative of an alternative modernity, which formed a sharp contrast to the narrative mode suggested by Benedict Anderson or Karatani Kojin with regard to Japanese modern literature. (See He Guimei, “Beyond the Perspective of Modernity: Rethinking the Studies of Zhao Shuli,” (“Chaoyue ‘xiandaixing’ shiye: Zhaoshuli wenxue pingjishi fansi” 超越“现代性”视野:

Something changes when the first word of the novel becomes “I.” Dai explicitly states that she draws on stream of consciousness as a western “modernist” technique that serves to create an impressive existential world.¹ The “flood” in this sentence implies a fall in a broader sense. And within the structure of this syntax exemplary of modernism, what lies before the “I” is absolute darkness. At the very beginning, the reader encounters an unknown “I.” He or she is immediately thrown into an existential world. This “I” is swimming in the cataclysm and struggling in the jungle of the human world. It is this “I,” rather than the omnipresent narrator that anchors the reader’s perspective.

But this technique is not typically modernist. Leo Ou-fan Lee finds that “her [Dai’s] experiment in inter-subjectivity consists in having the story told respectively and sequentially by each of the main characters” and concludes that Dai is technically inadequate to keep on an atomistic individual’s stream of consciousness.² After the first few pages in which this existential “I” dominates, another voice emerges: “Are you still dreaming?”³ asks the wife. All of a sudden, the conventions of social life return, as do the realist principles. Yet, if we do not dismiss this textual “inadequacy” as an unsuccessful challenge of “realist conventions,” but rather consider the invention and transformation of textual technique in its own historicity, then

赵树理文学评价史反思), *Jiefangjun yishu xueyuan xuebao* (解放军艺术学院学报), No.4 (2013), 54-60.) For the “Zhao Shuli Mode,” it is a community rather than the individual, theatricality rather than authenticity, which is accorded privilege.

¹ Dai Houying, *Ren a, Ren!*, 354.

² Leo Ou-Fan Lee, “The Politics of Technique: Perspectives of Literary Dissidence in Contemporary Chinese Fiction” in *After Mao: Chinese Literature and Society*, 184.

³ *Ibid*, 3.

we find remaining in the narrative device the tension between personal authenticity and collective conventionality. Neither the monologue of a modernist first-person narrator nor realism's bird's-eye view—not even authorial intervention—could dominate the narrative. As a result of contradiction and reconciliation, the whole novel is organized around more than twenty chapters, each chapter with its own, independent narrator. The view of a narrating subject remains consistent throughout each paragraph; yet every voice must pay respect to other voices. What is more, the persistent existence of the perspectives of other people exposes the “fictive” and peremptory feature of any first-person perspective and produces the effect of what might be considered “first-person theatricality.”¹ Therefore, on the one hand, there is subjectivity and authenticity; on the other hand, objectivity and theatricality. This tension reminds us of the existence of multiple voices rather than just one: beneath the apparent narrative of a humanist hero lies a system of minor characters whose various points of view provide equally effective ways of showing the Real.

¹ Mark Twain's technique of “first-person theatricality” refers to “a form of acting, of posing, feigning, taking up positions,” which betrays the first-person narrative. See, Jameson, Frederic, *The Antinomies of Realism*, 169.

3.2 The wild and the Machiavellian

If one purpose of this novel is to “show,” then this demands we pay due attention to the whole fictional structure underlying the surface narrative. It allows the minor characters to “stand out to open their own door of the soul.” In an era when humanist discourse had not yet taken hold, these souls and voices put forward varying figures of the human.

The first group of characters consists of Zhao Zhenzhuan (the heroine Sun Yue’s ex-husband), Xu Hengzhong (Sun’s colleague and pursuer of her affections), You Ruoshui (another colleague, an opportunist), and Xi Liu (the dean, power-seizer). Each has his own bitter memory of the Cultural Revolution. Although the first three were once rebels while the last character was the authority figure whom the rebels attacked, in the postsocialist period the history of rebellion has now receded and a sense of nihilism dominates. For Zhao, “history is sly and capricious;”¹ for Xu, “all history can be reduced to four words: always going upside down;”² for You, in history “I must always be prepared for counterblows.”³ For Xi Liu, history is nothing but power struggles: “in the past I made contributions; in the Cultural Revolution I suffered; now I have power.”⁴

For these disillusioned intellectuals, teleology and the objective laws of historical materialism have lost all credibility. History is reduced to endless struggles for power and

¹ Dai Houying, *Human, Ah! Human 2*.

² *Ibid*, 37.

³ *Ibid*, 310.

⁴ *Ibid*, 17.

wealth. However, compared to Nietzschean nihilism, the former rebels are now stripped of their rebellious passions and “will to power.” Generally speaking, in the postsocialist “Scar” or humanist literary genres, the Red Guards or rebels are usually debilitated and stigmatized. Their histories of rebellion are buried into repressed unconsciousness, which only “raises an alarm”¹ on occasion. And this specific post-revolution atmosphere in which the novel was both written and read, the former rebels can only be coded as crippled, castrated confessants, such as the figure of Zhao. He is morally responsible for the revolutionary violence. Yet the traumatic history he represents lapses into the darkness of memory and refuses to be retrieved. Are there alternative narratives available with which to approach the erased Real of history?

Indeed, the narrative does provide something different. In an episode titled, “A Story of Li Yining,” we find another rebel leader and another husband. This much wilder, low-class husband/rebel not only betrays but also physically abuses and publicly humiliates his wife. Yet this episode is told in a neutral and peaceful tone by the wife without moral judgment. “I guess there is no love or faith in human beings; the only thing left is everyone’s struggle for life.”² This indifference, however, brings back the figure of a wild and energetic rebel in place of the stereotypical picture of Red Guards in mainstream “Scar” literature. While the tamed and castrated rebel Zhao conjures up a Rousseauian authentic subjectivity, Li’s husband is shown as a Hobbesian individual, with a demonic thirst for power, sex, and material interest, a solitary fighter in the natural state of “war of all against all.” This low-class rebel indeed reveals the

¹ *Ibid*, 2.

² *Ibid*, 140.

political unconscious inherent in Zhao's inner voice: "I am swimming onward and struggling for life."

A much clearer image of such a Hobbesian rebel could be found in another literary text, the novella *Moving Back to the City* (*Diaodong*, 调动), published in 1979.¹ It tells the story of how a Chinese "rusticated youth" (*zhiqing* 知青), previously a Red Guard, manages to return to his metropolitan home city from a remote town after Mao's death. As a realist representation, this novella captures the social chaos of the transitional period where the old ideology was losing ground, social and economic problems were intensified, and the policy of party leaders and local officers vacillated.² Indeed, many fictions of the period provide various narratives of this "return wind" (回城潮).³ However, because of his "radical quality of evil" among the 16

¹ Xu Mingxu, "Moving Back to the City" ("diaodong" 调动), in *Controversial Works in the New Era: The Public Letters* (*xinshiqi zhengming zuopin congshu: gongkai de qingshu* 新时期争鸣作品丛书: 公开的情书), Changchun: Shidai wenyi press, 1986.

² Michel Bonnin in his detailed book *The Lost Generation: the Rustication of China's educated youth (1968-1980)* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2013) presents a vivid picture about the fate of these 16 million educated youths. Particularly relevant part is Chapter 6, from page 123 to page 186.

³ Ye Xin's *Wasted Time*, (*Cuotuo suiyue* 蹉跎岁月) tells the bitterness of rusticated youth's everyday life in the remote mountainous Yunnan region. This novel was published in a literary journal *Harvest* (*Shouhuo*, 收获) in 1980 and 1.1 million copies of this issue sold out immediately. In the early 1990s, *Sinful Debt*, (*Nie Zhai*, 孽债), the poignant tearjerker that hit home with a national audience, was also based on Ye Xin's rusticated youth stories. However, there are other ways to represent this "time" and "debt." For instance the hatred and melancholy of the rusticated youth were eclipsed by a kind of heroism or idealism in Liang Xiaosheng's stories. In his *There is a Storm Tonight* (*Jinye you baofengxue*, 今夜有暴风雪, 1984), which recorded an historical event taking place from November 1978 to Spring 1979 in Heilongjiang, the "last idealist" represented by the heroine stands guard on the night of a snowstorm, confronting the nihilism and cynicism of fellow soldiers in a lonely gesture, while her fellows flee the Great Northern Wilderness.

million rusticated youth, I will argue our protagonist Li Qiaolin perhaps turns out to be the most aesthetically disquieting one.

Li's sole purpose was to "move back;" however, the obstacles were enormous. Some could be cleared away by his weapon and super-weapon, bribery and flattery, yet others asked for a higher price—for instance, he had to marry a strange girl suffering from epilepsy in order to obtain a marriage certificate for his return. Some missions were even tougher due to the moral burden involved, e.g., abandoning his lover who had supported and comforted him through the most difficult years. But this weight seemed easily shed, as the girl in question responded to him with a stone-cold and unmoved tone to say, "Congratulations and good luck,"¹ followed by a long silence punctuated by a sudden shrill cry. Our hero retreated immediately. A description of his psychological turbulences for a short interlude is then presented to the reader. Such a technique, a way to render the "*mauvaise foi*" of a villain, which Jameson recognizes in Eliot as a strategy for weakening the hold of the ethical system of the readership,² is now in this narrative more aggressively utilized as the justification for the self-fulfillment of a Hobbesian individual. Finally, the readers hear the words of Napoleon Bonaparte: "There is no normal virtue in political struggle."³ After that, our hero embarks on his journey more resolutely; he even uses his body to satisfy the wife of an officer, and surreptitiously serves the purposes of the officer desperately desiring of offspring yet frustrated due to his sexual

¹ *The Public Letters*, 98.

² See, Frederic Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism*, 114-137.

³ *The Public Letters*, 138.

dysfunction. Following the dirty sexual bribery, our hero is only one step away from the final victory. However, the last stroke comes from the most powerful, and also the most depraved and hardened, villain in the eyes of Li Qiaolin, the county party secretary. In utter despair, Li indulges himself in alcohol and thinks about committing suicide and homicide; again, it was Napoleon's voice that awakened him: "First go into the real battle, then we will know the results."¹ At the final point, as he used up nearly all of his weapons, with unswerving "will" and "courage," as well as the cunning of political blackmail, he challenges the most powerful and succeeds marvelously. By the end of the narrative, the reader is treated to a sense of the poetic power akin to the epic Homeric art of *The Odyssey*;² for example, the hero's will and action, the test he undergoes, the experience of suspension, inexhaustible strength, and formulation of individuality, etc.

With regard to this Nietzschean self-preservation and individuality-formulation, Horkheimer and Adorno in their modern reading of *The Odyssey* provide a vivid summary of the moment when Odysseus sails past the Sirens:

In the multitude of mortal dangers which he has had to endure, the unity of his own life, the identity of the person, have been hardened. The realms of time have been separated for him like water, earth, and air. The tide of what has been has receded from the rock of the present, and the future lies veiled in cloud on the horizon.³

We find at the end of *Diaodong*, when Li's bus pulls away, similar descriptions: "The

¹ *The Public Letters*, 93.

² Adorno and Horkheimer's interpretation illustrates how this metaphor of "returning home" connects with the *Bildung* of the bourgeois subject – a rational modern individual. See, Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002, 25-62.

³ *Ibid.* 25

‘Tiger Rock’ receded into the mountains,” and “as for ‘what will my future be?’ he found it vast and hazy.¹” Indeed, the novella’s existential opening scene, which echoes that of *Human, Ah! Human* has already hinted at the similarity: “The bus bumped violently in every direction as though it were a raft floating on the mighty sea.”²

Yet, unlike Odysseus’s individuality which is founded upon the Nietzschean will to distance oneself from the mystical, irrational power of nature, and unlike the Rousseauian authentic human that is conveyed in Zhao’s confessional tone, this individual hero behaves in the opposite way; to be human, one needs to be animal first.³ In a symptomatic scene, when the bumping bus makes our hero feel like throwing up, he takes it to be a test from “fate” and heroically fights back by swallowing the matter that otherwise would be ejected as vomit. It metaphorically implies that the *Bildung* of this postsocialist individuality is predicated upon a process of cannibalistic internalization. The hero must internalize his own wildness, animality, evilness, and immorality. I call such a hero a Machiavellian hero. Such an image of the postsocialist individual forms a sharp contrast to the “human writ large” in the dominant humanist discourse of this period. Later, I will show how the romantic, authentic, and humanist hero ultimately clashes with this Machiavellian character. But for now, let me digress a bit further and investigate this Machiavellian individual a little more deeply. Returning to *Moving*

¹ *The Public Letters*, 156.

² *Ibid.*, 86.

³ For Julia Kristeva, the building of the western bourgeois male body is made by the abjection and the exclusion of excretion. In my reading of this Chinese novella, “abject behavior” and self-abasing become indispensable for the *Bildung* of the individual male subject in the 1980s. See Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: an Essay on Abjection*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.

Back to the City—when our hero is terrified and overwhelmed by his own quality of evil, the deities with the capacity to rescue him are Machiavelli and Napoleon Bonaparte. Their proverbs hover in the mind of our hero. To some degree, the courage to overcome moral restraints becomes, in this context, a kind of *political Virtù*, as noted by Althusser: “But it must then be said that the Prince is morally virtuous through *political Virtù*, and Machiavelli would like him to be so as often as possible.¹”

According to Althusser, this Machiavellian *political Virtù* consists of two parts: first, a sacred purpose, a higher moral imperative, and second, “to be bold to go into the real battle,” the virtue of “action,” or “practice.” In Althusser’s eye, for Machiavelli, the sacred purpose is the unity of Italy; then to achieve this goal, the Prince could use any scheme, fox’s lies or lion’s violence, in real battle-time, to fulfill it. In *Moving Back to the City*, “returning home” or the personal pursuit of happiness is considered a sacred purpose, for which the protagonist commits various moral crimes including bribery, betrayal, adultery, political blackmail, etc., as a means to fulfill it.

Whether or not “returning home” could be considered a “sacred purpose” remains to be seen. For now, I would stress that the second aspect of *political Virtù*, that is, the courage to act, is what Li learns from Napoleon, Mao, and the Cultural Revolution. Indeed, such a Machiavellian figure haunted many of the postsocialist writings of the era. We can find Li Yining’s ex-husband in *Human, Ah! Human*, but in fact, such characters as Zhao Zhenhuan and Xu Hengzhong are

¹ Louis Althusser, *Machiavelli and Us*, London and New York: Verso, 1999, 93.

also debilitated Machiavellians, while You Ruoshui and Xi Liu are stigmatized ones. It is also worth mentioning Lu Yao's famous novella *The Life* (人生 *rensheng*) in passing, the low-born, ambitious and aggressive, heroic yet villainous protagonist of which once aroused a multitude of discussion as a national sensation. Both in *Moving Back to the City* and *The Life*, the authors' boldness in positively representing the Machiavellian hero's psychological moments and actions is remarkable. Unsurprisingly, *Moving Back to the City* incurred fierce critiques almost at once upon publication. One commentator indicated the most disconcerting part of this novella is "a halo rising behind a ruffian:" "We find he is a formidable person, with the temperament of a careerist and a conspiracist."¹ The critic did not deny the aesthetic power of the hero; nevertheless, how could a hero be revealed as a mere ruffian? The question now arrives at the first aspect of virtue: how could the sacredness of political virtue serve the aggressive survivalist instincts of the individual?

To answer the question in a more sophisticated way, maybe we need to shift our focus from Machiavelli to the Machiavellian Mao Zedong and to Mao's progeny, the Red Guards and their life experience in the Cultural Revolution. In *Moving Back to the City*, the author implies that the protagonist was a Red Guard in his college, and Lu Yao, author of *The Life*, was the leader of rebels in his county. To explore how Mao and the Cultural Revolution affected our authors

¹ See Yang Ziming, "A Reading of *Diaodong*," ("du *diaodong*" 读《调动》) in *The Public Letters*, 160. The two designating words, "careerist" and "conspiracist," were often used by the authorities to characterize Lin Biao 林彪, "Gang of Four" 四人帮, and other corrupted rebel leaders during and after the Cultural Revolution. If every rebel was indeed a "careerist" and "conspiracist," then it would be hard to use "Machiavellian virtue" to justify the rebellion.

and protagonists, I want first to call attention to Mao's endorsement of Hobbes in his early writings. In Mao's *Marginal Notes to Friedrich Paulsen's A System of Ethics*, noting Paulsen's criticism of Hobbes' egoism and self-preservation, Mao defends Hobbes' notion of self and says, "self-interest is primary for all persons."¹ But Mao does not stop short before the Hobbesian passive self-preservation, and it is even less likely that Mao would agree with Hobbes' contract theory or absolutism. At the end of this piece, Mao concludes by laying out his two principles of ethics:

In the realm of ethics, I advocate two principles. The first is individualism. Every act in life is for the purpose of fulfilling the individual, and all morality serves to fulfill the individual... The second is realism. In terms of time, we see only past and future; we do not even see that there is a present. Realization does not refer to this; it refers rather to the spiritual and physical experiences that I bring together in the course of my life in the universe, and which I must make every effort to actualize.²

"All morality serves to fulfill the individual," or, "I must make every effort to actualize;" based on what Mao himself regards as materialism, we can easily find the source of our protagonist's spiritual power. Mao's ethics, as I will show, ultimately approaches Spinoza, especially the Spinoza explained by Balibar and Macherey. Mao poses intrinsically necessary challenges to the limits of the external world, and thus he obtains freedom without the intervention of moral principles (altruism, Confucianism, etc.). We can compare Mao's realism with Macherey's interpretation of Spinoza's *Causa Sui* and conatus, which is at the same time finite (from without) and infinite (from within): "the pressure of ambient forces, which holds

¹ Mao Zedong, *Mao's Road To Power: Revolutionary Writings 1912-1949* (Volume I), Armonk and London: M.E.Sharpe, Inc. 1992, 220.

² *Ibid.* 251-252.

together all corporeal beings and constitutes nature as their global form of individuality, is the infinite sequence of their causal determination.”¹ For Mao as well as for Spinoza, the spiritual and physical experience holds together to constitute the individuality in reality. It does not need a moral system outside the atomic individual. As a result, we find the most courageous and militant individual/atom in Mao’s ethical world. And also, in Mao’s poetic world, we find a picture of the freedom of one million creations.

I stand alone in cold autumn.
The River Xiang goes north,
around the promontory of Orange Island.
I see the thousand mountains gone red
and rows of stained forests.
The great river is glassy jade
swarming with one hundred boats.
Eagles flash over clouds
and fish float near the clear bottom.
In the freezing air a million creatures compete
for freedom.
In this immensity
I ask the huge green blue earth,
who is master of nature? ²

The scene of “a million creatures [competing] for freedom” is also the ontological base of Mao’s imagination of his Red Guards and the Cultural Revolution. Mao’s sayings and Mao’s poems play a vital role in recruiting the courageous and militant Red Guards as his followers. But we can put it another way, saying that it is the Red Guards who utilize the idol of Mao to legitimize their infinite power and to fulfill their desires by rebellious action. The famous

¹ Pierre Macherey, *Hegel or Spinoza*, Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2011, 180.

² This famous poem is titled “Changsha,” written in 1925; the translation is Willis Barnstone’s. See Mao Zedong, *The Poems of Mao Zedong*, Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 2008, 31.

slogans and Mao's sayings during the Cultural Revolution, such as "to rebel is justified (造反有理)," "to overthrow Yama, to liberate the imps (打倒阎王、解放小鬼)," "kick off the party, carry out revolution by ourselves! (踢开党委闹革命)," all encourage the creation of such rebellious subjects. Like the natural imagery in the poem of the River Xiang, the one thousand hills, rows of stained forests, the one hundred boats, the eagles and fishes, now the Red Guards, the protagonist Li Qiaolin in *Moving Back to the City*, Li Yining's ex-husband, Sun, Zhao, and Xu in *Human, Ah, Human!*, all like ghosts in the dark, oppressed by Party authorities for years, are encouraged to "swarm," to "flash over," to "float near," and to contend for their own freedoms. "Making every effort to actualize" their individuality, they seek to repudiate the last traces of the fatalism of the party-state's will. In this sense, the aggressive survivalist instinct of the individual *per se* constitutes the most sacred political virtue.

However, we also know the verification of the Cultural Revolution is based upon its holy political purpose and its strict moral system rather than the various inclinations of individuals—to overcome the "three distinctions" between country and city, industry and agriculture, manual and mental labor for a more egalitarian socialism, to struggle against the party-state and bureaucratic formalism, and to build a better socialism and collective moral world, etc. It will not be difficult to distinguish the "true" revolutionist from the degenerated one, or to distinguish the Cultural Revolution *de jure* from the Cultural Revolution *de facto*. However, as the novel reveals, the real problem is that in the late years of the Cultural Revolution and in the inaugural years of the post-Mao era, by the time when Li Qiaolin returns home, there is only

one degenerated virtue, self-preservation, and the bare struggle for power and wealth. Napoleon I degenerated into Napoleon III, the Great Cultural Revolution degenerated into the lumpen proletariats' pursuit of personal gain.¹ Indeed, to consider the catastrophic effect of the Cultural Revolution as a product of "degeneration" is a way of rethinking its real history and its consequences. We can push it a bit further, moreover, by asking whether it is possible that the degeneration starts from the very beginning. In *Human, Ah! Human*, Sun Yue, the heroine of this autobiographical novel, recalls her own rebelling:

"I always try to be serious about any political struggle, and I always demand myself to devote all my heart and body into these movements and struggles, but I did not expect..."²

Ten years later, in one memoir, the author Dai Houying provided a more explicit explanation for this ellipsis, to emphasize that *no* act of rebellion would be capable of precluding the private and abject purpose; the sacred purpose of rebelling is incapable of preventing the infiltration of selfish motives such as revenge, terror, self-preservation, power-seizure, material and sexual desire, and so forth.³ Yet, to push it further, we still find the tricky question of the Machiavellian virtues shows that even without the support of the ideal moral system, the brave action of a villain, his Kantian "radical evil,"⁴ could still be partially verified.

¹ "Bonaparte, who precisely because he was a bohemian, a princely lumpen proletarian, had the advantage over a rascally bourgeois in that he could conduct the struggle meanly." See Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972, 72.

² Dai, Houying, *Human, Ah! Human*, 115.

³ Dai *Personality/Fate: My Story*, 92.

⁴ At the beginning of the 21st century, Immanuel Kant's discussion of "radical evil" attracts considerable academic attention. My discussion in this part might echo these discussions from a remote Chinese context. The tension which Kant finds between "the ethical order" and "the incentives

That is to say, to some extent, even a degenerate rebel could be justified according to the logic of the Cultural Revolution. Alain Badiou articulates the relationship of “power struggle” and “revolution” in an interesting way: “It is rather ridiculous to oppose ‘power struggle’ and ‘revolution’, since by ‘revolution’ we can only understand the articulation of antagonistic political forces over the question of power.”¹ To articulate the antagonistic political forces is to re-politicize a depoliticized politics. It is to encourage ordinary people to go into real battle in order to struggle for their particular interests. According to Mao, “the right to rebel” is the right of the “the oppressed” to fight bureaucratic oppression and class exploitation. Here, modern egalitarian politics and a radical Hobbesian individualism play crucial roles, as it was in this historical context that the Machiavellian human came into being and struggled for survival. However, the subordination of the moral imperative to personal inclination also creates aesthetic tension and moral crisis, and thus must be countered with other figures.

of a free power of choice” is exhibited vividly in Li Qiaolin’s psychological moments and heroic actions. I will agree with Stephen Grimm’s refusal of Allen Wood’s Rousseauian defense of “radical evil.” Kant’s uneasiness mainly comes from the pressure of Hobbes. Here is not a place to discuss Kant’s “radical evil;” yet I believe both discussions (Kant’s and Li Qiaolin’s) could benefit from each other. Further discussions, see Wood, Allen, *Kant’s Ethical Thought*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) Chapter 9 and Grimm, Stephen, “Kant and Radical Evil,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* No.4 (2006), 635-63.

¹ Badiou, Alain, “The Cultural Revolution, the Last Revolution?,” 484.

3.3 The Politics of Everyday Life

The mainstream postsocialist literature in this transitional period asked for order and governance. In the atmosphere bidding “farewell to revolution,” hence in most literary representations as well as in this particular fictional world, the Machiavellian rebel is either debilitated or stigmatized. What kind of “new man” was desired, then, in the postsocialist pursuit of new life? In this novel, the new man is symbolically embodied in the new husband chosen by heroine Sun Yue. What might strike us as surprising is that, besides the humanist hero, He Jingfu, another competitor, Xu Hengzhong, is a mediocre intellectual, a pragmatic person, and a typical philistine. In the fiction, the heroine tells a friend about her feelings: “Sometimes I find something lovable in Xu. For instance, he is skilled in creating the atmosphere of family. I feel at ease in such an atmosphere, although in no time unbearable boredom follows.”¹ Regarding this ambivalent attitude, critic Dai Jinhua observes insightfully: “To refuse Xu is to resist the seduction of another self... for the latter self, what is worthy is merely a peaceful everyday life, rather than the idealist, romantic love.”² Indeed, the “Scar

¹ *Ibid*, 134.

² Dai Jinhua, *The Raft of Fording: Chinese Female Writing and Female Culture in the New Era*, (*Sheduzhizhou: xinshiqi zhongguo nvxing xiezuo yu nvxing wenhua*, 涉渡之舟: 新时期中国女性写作与女性文化) Beijing: Beijing University Press, 2007, 91. Another critic, Xudong Zhang, points out the ideology of such postsocialist everyday life in his analysis of the early 1990s film production: the fairy tale that the everyday life of ordinary people “would nevertheless be warm and rewarding if society would only leave them alone” is none other than “rewrite(ing) history to make the past narrative available for current politics, that is, the pessimism and anti-utopia passion of the liberal intellectual under the shadow in 1989 trauma as well as the rising of Chinese urban middle class in early 1990s with the arriving of global capitalism.” See Xudong Zhang, “National Trauma, Global

Literature” and “Humanist literature” of this period were inundated with images of family and everyday life. Those highly-charged ideological representations always featured a warm family for individuals to take shelter in from the intrusion of politics, and ruining the family was the most inhuman atrocity committed by the activists of the Cultural Revolution.¹ Yet such a prevailing dualism countering individual with state is incapable of explaining the complex political implications of everyday life conveyed in this novel. The story expresses an ambiguous and paradoxical attitude toward both. Hence, I prefer to draw upon the terms “political society” versus “life world” to form a preliminary alternative framework. I have illustrated that the emergence of the philistine Xu Hengzhong is premised upon the debilitation of the Machiavellian “Xu.” In other words, what was rejected by the reformist regime and the nascent intellectual circle was the Hobbesian “natural state,” or what Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt describe as the perpetual “exceptional state” of power struggles that characterized Mao’s Cultural Revolution.² What was welcomed, instead, was the Weberian “normal situation,” i.e. rational rule, technocracy, and the rule of law.³ Weber never attempts

Allegory: reconstruction of collective memory in Tian Zhuangzhuang’s *The Blue Kite*,” in *Journal of Contemporary China* V.12 (37), 2003, 634, 625. Yet the historical situation of the early 1990s was different from that late 1970s and 1980s, and a more specific analysis is necessary for a close-up of this beginning of the 1980s desire for everyday life.

¹ The most influential texts in the era include *The Scar, Hibiscus Town, Bitter Love* (Kulian 苦恋).

² Antonio Negri, and Michael Hardt, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*. New York: Penguin Books, 2005, 76-78.

³ Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1978, 38-40. See this sentence: “There are all manner of continuous transitions ranging from the bloody type of conflict which, setting aside all rules, aim at the destruction of the adversary, to the case of the battle of medieval chivalry, bound as they were to the strictest conventions, and to the strict regulations imposed on sport by the rules of the game.” For

to deny powers and interests behind the law, but he emphasizes the difference between the indirect violence embodied in law and direct violence. What law could provide is predictability, security, and stability. In the fictional tale, although Xu is once a passionate rebel, he is now bored of and terrified by the endless conspiracies and struggles. By the same token, Li Yining, the victimized wife, lays down political textbooks while picking up *How to Knit* and *How to Cook*, and she remarries an ordinary worker in order to escape from the “whirlpool of politics.”

But fleeing from the “whirlpool of politics” does not mean escaping from politics altogether. In fact, politics infiltrates indirectly and stealthily through something resembling Althusser’s ideological state apparatuses. Therefore, the realm of “everyday life” in this period must not be taken as a defensive realm, as is generally imagined in the logic of individual/state dualism; rather, the rebuilding of “everyday life” was crucial to establishing the norm of the postsocialist state. Or, as Franco Moretti puts it, it is “an anthropocentric space” where all social activities and class struggles “converge in the domain of ‘personality.’”¹ The postsocialist realist fictions hence played a vital role in the Jamesonian² “cultural revolution” which replaced the failed

Weber, the term “peaceful” conflict is applied to cases in which actual physical violence is not employed; the “normal” situation. This, perhaps, is the departure point of his liberal sociology.

¹ Michael Makeon, ed. *Theory of the Novel: A Historical Approach*, 560.

² According to Jameson, the study of the textual determinants invented by 19th-century realist novels addresses how an invention/convention of fictional narrative participated in the struggle for certain (bourgeois) tastes and ways of life in the field of cultural politics. To understand Jameson’s concept of “Cultural Revolution,” I consider the following sentence most important: “In this sense, the novel plays a significant role in what can be called a properly bourgeois cultural revolution - that immense process of transformation whereby populations whose life habits were formed by other, now archaic, modes of production are effectively reprogrammed for life and work in the new world of market capitalism.” *The Political Unconscious*, 152.

Cultural Revolution of Mao, a cultural revolution unfolding along the categories of “marriage,” “family,” “material life,” “beauty,” “bodily desire,” “human feeling,” “love,” and so on.

This revolution is initiated first in the form of the rebellion of the “material world.” The world inhabited by Xu and other philistines is the world of “matter,” which loosened the spiritual control dominating the soul-body dualism in modern Chinese literary tradition. Xu’s uppermost concern is “material benefit,” while Li Yining, as mentioned, only reads books like *How to Knit*. A vivid material world composed of television, washing machines, shoes, Western-style suits, face cream, perfume, etc., is unfolding before our eyes. While a sarcastic tone is used to depict this world to convey a critical attitude towards the vulgarity of ordinary philistines, the tension between the narrating voice and the characters’ own consciousness reveals the contradiction arising between the idealism of postsocialist individuals and their demand for secularization. Clothes, food, electric appliances, furniture—in other words, money and material wealth in now play a vital role in defining the “human.”

Though “material desire” was already present in socialist literary representation, it was not until the rise of such postsocialist literary representations that the temptation of matter is shown to become so irresistible that it threatens the dominating spiritual-material hierarchy. In reading socialist texts of the early 1960s such as *Don’t Forget* (*Qianwan buyao wangji* 千万不要忘记) and *The Young Generation* (*Nianqing de yidai* 年青的一代), Xiaobing Tang observes an “anxiety of everyday life” in socialist China.¹ Mao’s Cultural Revolution can then be seen

¹ Tang Xiaobing, *Chinese Modern: the Heroic and the Quotidian*. London: Duke University Press, 2000, 163-195.

as a radical response to such material temptation, a heroic undertaking to eradicate selfishness and the “property rights of the bourgeoisie.” However, the radical egalitarian politics and the passionate call for rebellion not only fail to eliminate selfishness, but on the contrary create the Machiavellian opportunists that turn out to be much more fierce and aggressive pursuers of material wealth. In another of Dai’s novels, *The Death of the Poet* (*Shiren zhi si*, 诗人之死, 1982), following the greedy eyes of a rebel couple, the reader is led into the interior of a bourgeois, middle-class family:

[Their] excited gaze swept over the room. Every thing—the books, television, radio, various kinds of artwork... all were “newcomers” since the Cultural Revolution! Finally, their greedy eyes met, followed by a reassuring smile. Was it not the Count of Monte Christo’s underground treasury that now rushed to mind?¹

“Every thing” is grasped by these greedy eyes, wherein the word “greed” employed by the authorial voice reveals its ironical and critical attitude; yet with the technique of style indirect libre, the narrating voice also creates an impression that the narrator’s (the reader’s) eye is identifying with the greedy eyes of the characters and shares with the characters the same excitement for possessing things. This ambivalent attitude toward “material things” is heightened when the narrator mentions the “Count of Monte Cristo,” the name of the hero in the same-titled book about a rising bourgeoisie in Dumas’ 19th century France. Indeed, it was one of the most welcomed names in this transitional period. The “Count of Monte Christo” became a publicly criticized yet secretly admired figure, not only owing to Jiang Qing’s (Mao’s wife, a later stigmatized rebel leader) recommendation but also because of the dramatic story

¹ Dai Houying, *The Death of the Poet*, 424.

he represented of losing and regaining wealth. His life-long endeavor to retrieve his fortune creates a heroic personality. Philosophically speaking, according to Amèlie Oksenberg Rorty, in the period when Dumas was writing, “individuals acquire[d] their rights by virtue of their powers” and were judged by their abilities to amass goods.¹ A similar understanding of the human appeared in the literary representations of the postsocialist period. In *Human, Ah! Human*, Li Yining admits that one of the reasons her new lower-class husband is attracted to her is for her income; Wu Chun, a veteran, claims that he is able to marry a young, beautiful village girl because of his money. Both Li and Wu are faithful defenders of secularism and even the narrative’s sarcastic tone fades away when narrating their “love” stories.

However, in order to establish the normality of postsocialist everyday life, vulgar materialism nonetheless must be supplemented by an exquisite sense of “taste.” If “television and radio” represent modern life for the family that is pro-bourgeoisie, then the “work of art” reveals in it a longing for refined taste. In the case of *Human! Ah, Human*, Sun asks Li Yining, who has married a worker, “Do you and your husband have the same taste? Does your marriage have love?” To which Li answers: “I know he does not like fiction or poetry at all...but what does it matter? He cares about our family. When he looks at me, he is thinking of buying me a new coat.”² A new coat is important, yet the anxiety of “taste” remains. The question follows, then, as to whose taste.

The condescending attitude of elite intellectuals with regard to this question sheds light on

¹ Makeon Michael, ed. *Theory of the Novel: A Historical Approach*, 545.

² Dai, Houying, *Human, Ah! Human*, 142.

the contradictions to be found in the everyday life of interclass marriage. Through its various stories, this novel crystallizes and reveals the crisis of everyday life amid the great transformations taking place in Chinese society. The narrator retains an ambivalent attitude toward interclass marriage, which contrasts with other narratives comparable in theme and time period, such as in Zhang Jie's short story "Love Can't be Forgotten" (*Ai shi buneng wangji de* 爱是不能忘记的),¹ which delegitimizes interclass marriage under the holy name of "love." Love can't be forgotten, but it is the love of intellectuals and cadres. Kam Louie satirizes that "in a country that is still poor, where housework is still done by hand and where the financial burden of an extra mouth to feed is enormous, it is interesting that the majority of love stories do not directly deal with economic problems."² A probable explanation for this could be that in the postsocialist era the rhetoric of "love/taste" functioned to create new aesthetic norms while simultaneously obfuscating their political and economic origins. According to Weber, under the camouflage of "culture" or "civilization," the dominant taste could present itself as something neutral and universal, something that has its own history, that is to be idolized and imitated by those of lower status or class.³

¹ Zhang Jie, "Love Cannot be Forgotten," ("ai, shi buneng wangji de" 爱,是不能忘记的), in *Beijing Wenyi* (北京文艺), No. 11 (1979), 19-27.

² Louie Kam, *Between Fact and Fiction: Essays on Post-Mao Chinese Literature and Society*, Sydney: Wild Peony, 1989, 63.

³ According to Max Weber's distinction between "class" and "status," "class" is a totally economically determined category, yet "status" appears more as a semi-autonomous social community determined by a type of cultural convention. Of course, Weber will not ignore the determinate economic power, particularly the capacity of consumption in the culturing of a "taste." However, Weber thinks that in certain situations both propertied and property-less people can belong to the same status group as long as they share the same status honor. It is for sure that he tries to undermine the economic

This is why I consider the rebuilding of postsocialist “everyday life” in literary representation as a form of Jamesonian “cultural revolution,” within which “archaic” feelings and ways of life could be efficiently reprogrammed for the life of a new world. In the socialist play *Don't Forget*,¹ the value of sackcloth, representing rural, healthy, revolutionary culture prevails over the value of a leather jacket, which carries the associations of urban, rotten, bourgeois culture. Yet, as both Cai Xiang and Xiaobing Tang point out, Maoist socialist culture failed to establish a stable Gramscian “cultural hegemony;” hence in postsocialist literary writings, socialist cultural hierarchy is shown to be quickly overturned. In the “new era,” rural or proletarian “habits” were deemed uncultivated, barbaric, or just bad parenting,² all the while western-style culture and taste—evening dress, trench coats, pianos—demonstrated gentility and refinement.

From ownership of property to its acquisition, postsocialist everyday life gradually takes shape in a period of chaotic social transformation. It maintains a critical attitude toward the Machiavellian personality and the Hobbesian state of war, yet as it attempts to rebuild a cozy family for privileged social groups (cadres and intelligentsia), it betrays conservative tendencies. Xu Hengzhong finally marries a doctor, whose stable income (wealth) and

determinism by this category of “status;” but I will not say that Weber never takes the class seriously; “class interest” and “class struggle” are discussed in the previous two sections, from 928-932. For me, Weber’s merit is his always sophisticated thinking of the various social phenomena. His formalism is based on his realistic observations. (Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* 928-933 volume 2).

¹ Cai Xiang, *Revolution and Its Narratives: China's Socialist Literary and Cultural Imaginaries, 1949-1966*, 324-334.

² Liu Xinwu. *The Class Master, in Prize-Winning Stories From China 1978-1979*, 18, 16-29.

intellectual background (taste) guarantee the success of Xu's secular pursuit. This "success" is ensured by the dramatic rise of intellectuals' economic and political status, as well as their cultural privilege, that characterize the golden age of Chinese intelligentsia. However, this social transformation also leads to a severe crisis of interclass marriages between intellectuals (and cadres) and their lower-class partners. Secular marriage is built on the balance among various factors, such as passion, personality, looks, talents, reputation, and wealth.¹ Li Yining's marriage supplies one instance: in the turbulent years of the Cultural Revolution, her worker husband's family background had provided her with political security, at a time when the economic gap between intellectuals and workers was minimized. Yet, in the postsocialist period, the financial income and political status of the two classes becomes increasingly disproportionate. Therefore, if we follow the conservative logic of this pro-bourgeois everyday life, the legitimacy of interclass marriage will ultimately be challenged. "Pure love," which had played a vital role in breaking social hierarchy throughout modern history, now becomes the most effective tool for rebuilding social hierarchy and class distinctions through the newly evolving discourse of "taste."

It is therefore necessary to stress that in *Human, Ah! Human*, rather than canceling the legitimacy of interclass marriage, the narrative cancels itself—repeatedly exhibiting various stories of interclass marriage without authorial intrusion. The novel's other two stories address

¹ I use Zhang Jingshen's theory of marriage brought up as early as in the 1920s. Quote from Haiyan Lee, *Revolution of the Heart: A Genealogy of Love in China, 1900-1950*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007, 143.

Wu Chun and Li Jie, both idealists who marry peasants; one goes to Tibet to serve the country, the other goes to the countryside to help the peasantry. The narrator claims to remain silent, yet it is precisely in this silence that the limits of the discourse of everyday life are exposed.

3.4 Romantic Love and the Human

This article has sought to shed light on the various emerging, inchoate signs surrounding “the human” before the human “writ large” took hold in prevailing humanist discourse of the 1980s.¹ This humanist discourse has incurred various criticisms from perspectives informed both by post-Mao leftism and postmodernism. In the last section,, I will investigate its originary conditions of possibility. Above I have uncovered two figures of the human, the Machiavellian and the philistine, whom our romantic hero He Jingfu and heroine Sun Yue encountered in a world in which they were trapped, and from which they sought to escape. The romantic human hence comes into being through his/her rejection of both the rebellious past (the Machiavellian) and the conservative now (the philistine).

My interpretation of this romantic “human” differs from the majority of previous studies which tend to set the postsocialist “humanist hero” against the socialist “class hero.” In the fictional world of this novel, the old, abstract theory of class struggle has already lost its glamor in a world of disenchantment. It is this vulgar and coarse world that provokes our romantic hero/heroine’s repulsion. The characters whom the heroine (Sun Yue) cannot accept and the hero (He Jingfu) resists (Zhao Zhenhuan, Xu Hengzhong, Xi Liu) are all pragmatic, selfish individuals. In this sense, the new humanist hero shares with the old socialist hero a

¹ In the postscript of this novel, Dai Houying writes: “One character writ large suddenly appeared before my eyes: ‘human!’ A song that had been cast aside and forgotten for so long tripped off my tongue: human, human nature, human feeling, humanism!” (Dai Houying, *Human, Ah! Human*, 349).

transcendent idealism and revolutionary passion; we discover that the two books He Jingfu has carried throughout his vagrant years are *Dream of the Red Chamber* and the *Selected Works of Marx and Engels*.

Human, Ah! Human in its time was not an exceptional case. In fact, many protagonists of romantic love stories from this period were both romantic and revolutionary. Zhang Kangkang's "The Right to Love" (*Ai de quanli* 爱的权利) from 1979, for example, contrasts two groups of concepts. This story starts with the words of a dying old artist, a victim of the Cultural Revolution: "Mo, don't play the violin any longer...Beini, marry a worker please...to be...an ordinary person...don't... get yourself involved in politics...don't love..." Here, "art," "politics," and "love" are placed together in one group while "worker," "ordinary life," and "marriage" occupy the other. In the end, Beini, the heroine, disobeys her father's will and decides to bravely pursue her lover—a humanist, romantic artist, and passionate revolutionary.¹

The general reputation this period tends to carry, promoting the notion that "love trumps revolution," may not be entirely accurate. Haiyan Lee, in her analysis of Zhang Jie's "Love Can't be Forgotten," offers a sophisticated analysis, asserting that "revolution and love have alternatively sought to inhabit the space of the sublime and to demote their rival to the realm of the quotidian."² In writings of this period, there are two kinds of love—pure love, on the one hand, and quotidian marriage, on the other—as well as two kinds of revolutions—the

¹ Zhang Kangkang, "Right of Love," ("aide quanli" 爱的权利) in *Shouhuo* (收获), No. 2 (1979), 110.

² Haiyan Lee, *Revolution of the Heart: A Genealogy of Love in China, 1900-1950*, 301-302.

authentic versus fake, corrupted revolution. Above, I have elaborated the quotidian side of *Love Can't be Forgotten*, and how this story uses a privileged sense of taste to evaluate love and to delegitimize interclass marriage. There is another, utopian, “pure” side to the story. To use the author’s words, “the most reliable marriage is the one built upon ‘authentic’ love, the one that is free of any economic consideration once the capitalist mode of production and property ownership are abolished.”¹ Following this logic, the pursuit of “authentic love” is tantamount to the search for a real socialist society.

This distinction between the “quotidian” and “authentic” could also apply to revolution. In *Human, Ah! Human*, Xi Liu, a veteran cadre and alleged communist, is criticized by He and Sun as a fake, corrupted revolutionary. Hence the disillusion with the revolution in this transitional period was not because communist ideals and socialist ethics themselves were suspect, but because they have been usurped by hypocritical unbelievers to pursue personal interests. Besides, Sun dislikes Xu Hengzhong’s cynical wisdom and accuses him of losing his revolutionary passion. While the Machiavellian politician uses the socialist slogan to manipulate others, the philistine and the opportunist are skilled in building a cozy family by taking advantage of the rules of the mundane world, which Xu and Sun consider to be a world of “alienation.” They hope to rescue revolution from hypocritical politicians and cynical nihilists.

¹ Quoted from Sun Wusan, “An Ordinary Person: An Interview With Comrade Zhang Jie,” (“yige putong ren: ji nvzuo jia zhangjie tongzhi” 一个普通人——记女作家张杰同志) *Qingchun* (青春), No.7 (1980), 29-30.

In the novel, He Jingfu is writing a book titled *Marxism and Humanism*, which reflects the heated debates around Marxism, humanism and alienation taking place in the 1980s. A brief examination of the one of the most influential texts—Zhou Yang’s “Thoughts on Several Theoretical Issues on Marxism”—from this period will aid in interpreting the fictional hero He Jingfu. Zhou Yang points out that the usurping of power by corrupted bureaucracy has caused widespread alienation in the political realm, while the personal cult of Mao has created alienation in the spiritual world.¹ If humanism were truly capable of respecting an individual’s independence and self-consciousness, then it should prevent a person from being fooled or manipulated by persons in power. Zhou’s observation is very similar to He Jingfu’s discussion of alienation. Although Zhou’s view was officially denounced as “preaching bourgeois liberalization,” and He Jingfu was criticized by the authorities within the fictional world, we could find common among them the passion for “permanent revolution;” on one occasion, Zhou defended himself by declaring that his thought came from Mao’s notion of anti-bureaucratization.² Indeed, in both the fictional and real worlds, many advocates of Marxist humanism considered themselves to be “authentic socialists.” But who is endowed with the ability to distinguish the authentic from the fake, so called? For romantics and humanists alike, the judge is neither scientific law (Friedrich Engels’ *Dialectics of Nature*, class struggle theory)

¹ Hong Zicheng ed., *Historical Documents of Contemporary Chinese Literature Vol (2)*, (*Zhongguo dangdai wenxueshi shiliao xuan xia* 中国当代文学史史料卷(下)) Wuhan: Changjiang wenyi Press, 2002, 725.

² Chen Weiren, *Tang Dacheng: Fifty Years in Chinese Literary Circles* (*Tang dacheng: wentan fengyu wushinian* 唐达成:文坛风雨五十年). America: Xiliu Press, 2005,154.

nor is it official Marxism. The romantics can only listen to their inner voice, at once individual and universal. Revolution thus retreats from outside in, after which point a necessary transformation takes place.

“Authenticity” becomes the moral foundation for both love and revolution. Consider the moment when romantic love befalls hero and heroine. He Jingfu recalls the time when he and Sun were acting together in a play in college:

In the play, the little girl spoke to the audience: ‘Dad should not be blamed. He is hungry.’ Suddenly, she threw herself into my arms, crying ‘Dad!’ She was crying with all her sincerity, not a bit like performing.

My heart and body were trembling. I forgot to act. I lifted her head with my shaking hands, and, with a passionate gaze, cried out: ‘Sun Yue!’ My eyes at that moment must have been terrible! In shock, Sun opened her mouth but couldn’t speak, ‘Dad!’¹

Authenticity emerges when the actor “forgot to play,” surely the most infelicitous performance. He Jingfu forgets his theatrical role of “Dad” in the setting of an anti-Japanese war drama. He also forgets his social role, that of a college student in socialist China, a China of traditional ethics. With seizure-like trembling, our protagonist disengages himself from both theatrical and social settings. Yet the infelicity here comes not from a fallible convention, in a vaguely Derridean sense,² but from a deliberate, heroic refusal—a resolute denial of the Althusserian interpellation of the subject. At this moment, it is not external convention but the “innermost” voice that becomes the highest law governing the character’s behavior. He Jingfu later added, “I played *about* myself.”

¹ Dai, Houying, *Human, Ah! Human*, 29.

² About Derrida’s discussion of Austin and the theory of performance, see his article “Signature, Event, Context,” in Derrida, Jacques, *Margins of Philosophy*, 307-330. However, this discussion seems to hold little relevance to my discussion on authenticity/theatricality here.

The inner voice of “myself” is thus elevated to the level of narrative privilege, and a typical romantic figure is conjured—that of He Jingfu as solitary wanderer, passionate revolutionary, faithful patriot, sentimental lover, and determined individual with high self-esteem. Regarding romanticism in European modernity, Charles Taylor has argued that 18th and 19th century aesthetic and literary movements laid the moral foundation for modern society.¹ We find resonances of this in postsocialist China. While romanticism sought, ostensibly corrective measures for the Machiavellian and the philistine, it continued the mission passed down by the latter. The Machiavellian introduced radical egalitarianism and the demoralized ethic of self-preservation; yet his wildness was debilitated by the cynical, pragmatic philistine, who legitimized the needs and desires of the individual’s secular life. This selfish individualism was nonetheless incapable of laying the moral foundation for the period. In 1980, an influential journal, *Chinese Youth*, published a letter titled, “Why Does the Road of Life Become Narrower and Narrower?”² The writer told the story of how her communist ideals were destroyed by the cruel and selfish nature of society. “Social Darwinism educates me;” “everyone is selfish;” “the propaganda of communism is either exaggeration or hypocrisy.” While this young woman had already lost her faith in communism, her self-consciousness continued to reject the hypocrisy of society. Her agony and anxiety arose from the loss of lofty ideals, which neither base desires nor official ideology could replace. Yet the idealized figure of a romantic and humanist literary

¹ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001, chapters 20 and 21, 355-392.

² Pan Xiao, “Why Does the Road of Life Become Narrower and Narrower?” (“Rensheng de lu a, zenme yuezou yuezhai?” 人生的路啊，怎么越走越窄？） *Zhongguo qingnian* (中国青年), No.5 (1980).

hero offered an aesthetic hope. The fictional character He Jingfu was popular among the young generation. This authentic individual appeared to repel the hypocritical aspects of socialism while preserving its utopian idealism, and moreover left a space for individuality while calling upon the universal figure of “the human.”

By raising the notion of “aesthetic hope,” however, I should emphasize that this authentic individual is a textual effect produced by the literary institution of the period. In the fictional world, compared to the other characters, the mind and consciousness of the romantic He Jingfu is fully exhibited. Mainly it is revealed through his diary, letters, and monologue, rather than ordinary colloquial language. He Jingfu listens to his inner voices to such an extent that he is usually absent-minded when communicating with others. Even Sun Yue found his “heart is the tabula rasa.”¹ In a word, He Jingfu is the most idealized, abstracted, and silent character. He turns out nonetheless to be the most influential figure whose interior world is capable of efficiently and powerfully affecting the reader.

To explain this aesthetic phenomenon a brief word on the transformation of the literary institutions in this period is necessary. It is commonly known that, in the heyday of the Cultural Revolution, theater and public radio supplied two dominant mechanisms for the dissemination of literary propaganda and aesthetic education. Another aesthetic institution appeared starting from the late years of the Cultural Revolution, amid the political turmoil and “rustication” movement that facilitated the broad dissemination of political, aesthetic and literary texts from

¹ Dai Houying, *Human, Ah! Human*, 222.

the locus of privileged families in central cities into the remote countryside, including Mao's *Quotations*, the Marxist classics as well as plenty of internally published and circulated political and literary books. As thousands of educated youth (*zhiquing*) disappeared from public space, either sent into remote rural areas or having retreated into the urban homes of their parents, they read and wrote in a highly isolated state. These intellectual youth and their relatively free association in small social gatherings, such as salons (*shalong*), created the main body of what is often referred to as "underground literature" in the late years of the Cultural Revolution. Following this in the inaugural years of the postsocialist period, with the (re)publication of a vast number of literary journals, the reading and writing practices of the educated, rusticated youth were officially encouraged and publicly welcomed.

If theater and radio evoked public passions and inspired political action in the socialist period, the aesthetic mechanism of reading and writing in solitude or within miniature social settings contributed greatly to the formation of individual interiority. Walter Benjamin has famously noted the difference between the novel and oral storytelling traditions. While the storyteller takes what he or she tells from shared experience, "the novelist has isolated himself:" "The birthplace of the novel is the solitary individual."¹ The reader of a novel is also isolated; "in this solitude of his, the reader of a novel seizes upon his material more jealously than anyone else."² Following Benjamin's observation, I argue that the inner voices of He Jingfu came with the revitalization of the novel and the rise of the intellectual class of this period. In the novel,

¹ Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller," in *Illuminations*, 87.

² *Ibid*, 100.

He Jingfu rarely speaks to other characters in colloquial language, yet he communicates with his readers, who are single individuals responding to this romantic hero's inner voices and thereby reproducing their own interiorities, no matter the distance between metropolis and mountains. This practice of reading/writing not only isolates the individual from his or her everyday environment but also produces a universal, "authentic" human. In Benjamin's words, solitary individuals meet each other in writing and reading. Can such characters, at once innocent and irresponsible, take responsibility for the dark burden of history and the chaos of politics?

For the heroine Sun, He Jingfu's blank history and his tabula rasa of the heart are both seductive and suspicious. Reading Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, following a sophisticated contemplation of history and fate, Sun offers a romantic yet rushed solution for the tragedy of history:

The God of Fate looks so big and powerful that he can toy with all kinds of people in the palm of his hand. Even so many surpassingly clever and powerfully influential personages have been made fools of by He. In the past this phenomenon has driven many people into the depths of despair, into self-negation and the negation of humanity; but is not the true cause of this condition to be found precisely in the fact that we lacked conscious awareness, self-respect, and self-confidence.¹

Critics like Duke have reason to feel dissatisfied with this "slogan of radical secular humanism."² About romantic humanism, Carl Schmitt's sarcasm is pungent: "It is exciting to imagine that man, like Prospero in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, holds the 'mechanical play' of

¹ Dai Houying, *Human, Ah! Human*, 268. English Translation is Michael S. Duke's, See *Blooming and Contending*, 167.

² *Ibid*, 168.

the drama in his hands, and romantics are fond of imagining such ideas of an invisible power of free subjectivity.”¹ He Jiangfu and, in this case, Sun Yue are precisely such romantics. Considering the impotence of humanists in the face of rampant capitalism in 1990s’ China, one might agree with Schmitt’s accusation of romantic humanism’s irresponsible escapism and illusionary subjectivism.

However, if we are patient enough to consider the overall aesthetic effect of these romantic figures of fiction, we will find that the framework of liberal humanism is incapable of fully interpreting them. Like the author of *The Tempest*, the author of *Human, Ah! Human*, had an incredibly intricate attitude toward “history” and “the human.” In fact, the heroine Sun Yue demonstrates a different kind of romantic idealism from He Jingfu. Unlike He Jingfu’s innocence, Sun’s attitude toward history is “melancholic.” Benjamin discovers “melancholy” to be the aesthetic “affect” of German *Trauerspiel*, “an element of German paganism and grim belief in the subjection of man to fate.”² For Benjamin, this paganism and melancholy come from the death of God, the side-effect of Luther’s reformation. For Sun Yue and others who have suffered from the disillusion with “socialist utopia,” the God of revolution has fallen and human society is now subject to an incomprehensible Fate. Amid such an atmosphere of desperate pessimism and nihilism, the authentic Human becomes the hope for redemption, a leap towards another transcendent being. Hence Sun’s choice of He and romantic humanism does not derive from her innocent belief in secular humanism but is grounded in the desire to

¹ Carl Schmitt, *Political Romanticism*, Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 1986, 78-79.

² Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, London and New York: Verso, 1998, 138.

get rid of melancholy and grim paganism. This desperate hope served to create an aesthetic utopia in the inwardness of the weak hearts of intellectuals. Such resurrection of a utopian world is also exhibited in Chen Rong's 1980 novella, *At Middle Age* (*Ren dao zhongnian* 人到中年),¹ a story which starts with the dying moment of the protagonist, a female doctor who has fallen into a coma due to a heart attack. At her dying moment, her feeble, melancholic memories flash back—the violence, the philistinism, the family burden, the collapsed society. But when resurrected, the heroine awakens as a new human full of courage to create new life and a new community. The narrative thus ends with a melancholic idealist's triumph over the Machiavellian and the philistine.

The purpose of this article has been to exhibit the tortuous itinerary through which this destination, the birth of a new “human,” is achieved. I have presented the real historical conditions under which the aesthetic Machiavellian, philistine, and romantics met and contended, arguing that the birth of “humanism” in postsocialism cannot be understood as a direct reaction to socialist “class nature.” Rather, it should be understood in the concrete historical site of the late 1970s and early 1980s. The failed Cultural Revolution in its later years had ignited the wild Machiavellian rebels' fierce struggle for power and interests, as well as “wild materialism” which gave rise to a secular everyday life and to its philistine advocates. As the newly-established everyday life gradually revealed its conservative nature, the

¹ Chen Rong, “At Middle Age,” (“rendao zhongnian” 人到中年) *Shouhuo*(收获), No.1 (1980), 52-92.

romantics who inherited the revolutionary passion of previous years fought hard with corrupted politicians and cynical opportunists, devoting themselves to the construction of an authentic figure of the human “writ large.” This romantic figure of the human, while preserving hope for melancholic idealists, cannot be exempted from accusations of irresponsible escapism and illusionary subjectivism.

All of these points have been read out from an intricately structured fictional text, *Human, A!, Human*. Through this hermeneutic reading, I have endeavored to render a rehearsal of all these figures, the Machiavellian, the philistine, and the romantic. It is this rehearsal or encounter, rather than the solitary human “writ large,” that paved the way for the postsocialist human.

4.1 Defective Figure(s)

The Small and Great Robinsonades

In this chapter I will discuss a series of defective figure(s) of “productive-possessive individual” in the late 1970s and early 1980s. “Productive-possessive individual” is a term I create to approach the western concept of “possessive-individualism” or *homo economicus*. However, when I use the term “approach,” I mean I could not find the *homo economicus* per se or the ideal image of Robinson Crusoe in Chinese historical and literary context. What I find are various kinds of figures of “productive-possessive individuals.” Here the use of the “-” indicates the “defectiveness” of these figures, that is, the gap, the non-correspondence, and the inconsistency between the ideal concept of “*homo economicus*” and the concrete literary figures created by Reform Literature (gaige wenxue, 改革文学) and Literature of Street and Bazaar, (shijing wenxue 市井文学) around 1980. Therefore, what concerns me in this discussion is the historical conjuncture of “productive-possessive” individual in Chinese social and literary context, where the intricate relationships among individuality, labor, and property rights are exhibited in variegated colors.

What I concern in this chapter is the “*homo economicus*” in the late 1970s and early 1980s of China. But I think it is better to start with a detour. I need to ask, how do we understand the

“*homo economicus*”? Therefore, let’s first examine the defectiveness of “*homo economicus*” in the European history. For example, the “Robinsonades” in 18-19th century Europe. Indeed, “Robinsonades” is a term used by Marx:

The subject of our discussion is first of all material production by individuals as determined by society, naturally constitutes the starting point. The individual and isolated hunter or fisher who forms the starting point with Smith and Ricardo, belongs to the insipid illusions of the eighteenth century. They are Robinsonades which do not by any means represent, as students of the history of civilization imagine, a reaction against over-refinement and a return to a misunderstood natural life. They are no more based on such a naturalism than is Rousseau’s “contract social,” which makes naturally independent individuals come in contact and have mutual intercourse by contract. They are the fiction and only the aesthetic fiction of the small and great Robinsonades. They are, moreover, the anticipation of “bourgeois society,” which had been in course of development since the sixteenth century and made gigantic strides towards maturity in the eighteenth.¹

We know it is the first paragraph of Marx’s draft introduction for his life-long project, “Critique of Political Economy.” Why does Marx start with an aesthetic figure and an aesthetic critique?

In Chapter One, I have discussed the “ideological investment” in *Robinson Crusoe*. We know Robinson is always considered as a classic or perfect figure of economic man, *homo economicus*, and an ideal type of man for the bourgeois society. It is a transparent, stable, and ideal figure. When we have mentioned Robinson, a group of ideas or principles immediately pop out of our minds, for example, the seven axioms proposed by MacPherson as the classical foundations of “possessive individualism,”

- (i) What makes a man human is freedom from dependence on the will of others.
- (ii) Freedom from dependence on others means freedom from any relations with

¹ Karl Marx, *A Contribution to The Critique of Political Economy*, Fairford: The Echo Library 2014, 135-136.

other except those relations into which the individual enters voluntarily with a view to his own interest.

- (iii) The individual is essentially the proprietor of his own person and capacities, for which he owes nothing to society...
- (iv) Although the individual cannot alienate the whole of his property in his own person, he may alienate his capacity to labor.
- (v) Human society consists of a series of market relations....
- (vi) Since freedom from the wills of others is what makes a man human, each individual's freedom can rightfully be limited only by such obligations and rules as are necessary to secure the same freedom for others.
- (vii) Political society is a human contrivance for the protection of the individual's property in his person and goods, and (therefore) for the maintenance of orderly relations of exchange between individuals regarded as proprietors of themselves.¹

“Freedom of will,” “self-interest,” the individual as the proprietor of his own self, labor, and estate, the alienation of labor, market relation, the regulation of market to protect the fair competition of equal wills, and finally, a political society of democracy. MacPherson summarizes these principles from his study of Hobbes and Locke and we know how Defoe's novel popularizes this group of thoughts at the beginning of 18th century. For Marx, theorists, economists and philosophers who support this group of thoughts may also include Adam Smith, David Ricardo, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and even some socialist activists such as Karl Grun and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon. All of them form, represent, imagine, create, and finally fictionalize and mystify the small and great “Robinsonades”, as the fundamental anticipated figure shared by the “bourgeois society,” “which had been in course of development since the sixteenth century and made gigantic strides towards maturity in the eighteenth.” And following MacPherson's definition of “possessive individualism,” perhaps we can say all of these ideas

¹ MacPherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962, 263-64.

around the central figure of Robinson still remain to this day the fundamental principles of liberalism in the Western society and has even spread across the world together with the expansion of global capitalism and neoliberalism.

For Chinese New-Left critics who agree with Marxist David Harvey's critique of Deng Xiaoping's reform policy as neoliberalism "with Chinese Characteristics," "a particular kind of market economy that increasingly incorporates neoliberal elements interdigitated with authoritarian centralized control,"¹ and in particular agree with his observation that "in so far as neoliberalism requires a large, easily exploited, and relatively powerless labor force, then China certainly qualifies as a neoliberal economy, albeit 'with Chinese,'"² then, the first phase of Chinese reform around 1980 which established the "individualized" and "family responsibility system" in rural area is a preparatory phase for the arrival of global market in the later phases. And for some other cultural critics, such as Luo Gang and Liu Li in their influential article "Individual Narrative in the Rift of History: Female in-between City and Country and the Dilemma of Self-Consciousness in Contemporary Chinese Literature,"³ a village girl's nascent "self-consciousness" or "individuality" in early Reform Literature only prepared for her later reification and alienation in the later stage of global market, which is no more than the self-consciousness of selling her labor force or sexual body in the neoliberal economy in the

¹ David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2005, 120.

² *Ibid.*, 144.

³ Luo Gang and Liu Li, "Individual Narrative in the Rift of History: Female in-between City and Country and the Dilemma of Self-Consciousness in Contemporary Chinese Literature," ("lishi kailiechu de geren xushu: chengxiangjian de nvxing yu dangdai wenxue zhong geren yishi de beilun" 历史开裂处的个人叙述: 城乡间的女性与当代文学中个人) *Wenxue pinglun* (文学评论), No.5(2008), 129-136.

1990s. To be specific, in discussing the emergence of self-consciousness and its accompanied ideology of modernization in the 1982 short story *Ah, Xiangxue* (*o xiangxue* 哦, 香雪), they notice this ominous scene of a group of village girls waiting for the arriving of the monster-like train:

They carefully dressed up from head to toe, imitating the city girls in the train. Then they lined up by the railway tracks, as if they were waiting to be reviewed. ¹

It is ominous because for Luo Gang and Liu Li, such a posture of “waiting to be reviewed” by modernization and global capitalism foretells the doomed fate of other two girls in the article. One is Yonghua, a migrant female laborer, one of the 81 victims of the notorious fire of Zhili Factory in 1993, which revealed the ravaging power of “capitalism with Chinese character” not only because of its sheer numbers of victims but also of its cruelty - when the fire swept across the factory, it was during working hours, hence most of the doors and windows were locked, trapping the majority of female workers inside the factory. The other tragic figure is Yingzhi, a literary figure in Fangfang’s 2001 novella *The Running Fire*, (*benpao de huoguang* 奔跑的火光) a village girl who desperately exchanges her sexual body for the money and for her wish-fulfillment of a imagined, modern-fashioned house, which ultimately ruins her life. “Besides body, what else could she sell?”² The two authors ask. For them, it is the ideological self-consciousness of “possessive individuals” created in the 1980s that produced the “easily exploited, and relatively powerless labour force,” subject to the Chinese neoliberal economy.

¹ See Tie Ning, *Ah, Fragrant Snow* (*o xiangxue* 哦, 香雪), in *Best Chinese Stories (1949-1989)*, Beijing: Chinese Literature Press, 1989, 320.

² Luo Gang and Liu Li, “Individual Narrative in the Rift of History: Female in-between City and Country and the Dilemma of Self-Consciousness in Contemporary Chinese Literature,” 135.

Their article is representative of the recent “New Left’s” revisiting of Reform Literature and their critique of the Reform ideology in the post-Mao period. David Harvey’s critique of neo-liberalism is also a typical Marxist critique. Marx and Engels make the famous argument in Part I, Section D of *The German Ideology*¹ that the proletariat is the product of big industry and the bourgeois class, which converted the existing propertyless classes and a portion of the propertied into proletarians. In this sense, the figures of the victimized Asian female migrant laborers turn out to be the dialectical opposition of the masculine hero Robinson Crusoe.

However, Althusser points out in his later writings another way of understanding. He criticizes Marx and Engels’ idealist understanding of the proletariat in *The German Ideology*. To him, they are “positioning themselves with the logic of the accomplished fact of the reproduction of the proletariat on an extended scale,” that is to say, they use the “accomplished ideal system” of the bourgeois society to interpret the individual self-consciousness of the proletariat and therefore inevitably tame the wildness of the proletariat who come from their own history. Likewise, perhaps we could also find the Hegelian teleology and finalism in Luo and Liu’s critique that Xiangxue, a girl with the nascent individual self-consciousness in the 1982 fiction, would inevitably fall victim to the global capitalism and end up the powerless female laborer. Besides, we find the self-consciousness of these two victimized girls are interpreted by the critics using the framework of “possessive individualism”, such as the “freedom of will,” “self-interest,” the individual as the proprietor of her own body, labor in

¹ See Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, New York: International Publishers, 2004, 82-96.

market relation, etc. All of these ideas are projected back to understand Xiangxue, whose ambiguous individual subject is thus reduced to an inauspicious seed waiting for its full-blown in capitalism with Chinese character. I will argue, such a critique of “possessive individualism” is still trapped in the transparent and abstract idea system of the bourgeois society, the insipid illusions of small and great Robinsonades.

Defectiveness: Marx’s Critique

Now, let’s return to Marx’s critique of the Robinsonades of Political Economy in this extremely important first paragraph. Marx’s paragraph is obviously infused with a satiric tone. It is understandable if we put into consideration Marx’s situation of writing around the year of 1857 or 1858 when Marx decided to compose an introduction for his voluminous manuscript, the Grundrisse.¹ On one hand, he was reading the theoretical works of Rousseau, Smith, Ricardo, Grun and Proudhon, and had encountered repetitively the prototype of Robinson, while on the other hand, he was studying the empirical data collected from British’s current economy in the Great British Library. He had also communicated with workers, visit them at home, and carefully listened to their stories and reports, and he had to pay due attention to the international affairs for he sold his articles on newspapers as a journalist and news writer. Hence it is understandable that he found the inconsistency, incoherence, and instability between these

¹ It is the Grundrisse which has provoked the greatest interest amongst new readers and commentators today. It is regarded as the manuscript of the published *The Critique of Political Economy* and the later *Das Kapital*.

abstract theories, principles, and transparent figures and the actual historical situation of various kinds of lives. Therefore, he found the “defectiveness” of these fictional figures. “They are the fiction.”

I think it is necessary to give a further elaboration about this word, “fiction.” Marx says it is a “fiction” rather than saying it is a “lie.” If Marx considers the Robinson story as an ideology, then it is not an ideology in the sense of false consciousness, but in the sense of “ideological investment” as I have explained in Chapter One. Therefore Marx says the small and great Robinsonades are no more than “insipid illusions of the eighteenth century” and “the anticipation of ‘bourgeois society.’” Robinson is the anticipation, desire, and wish-fulfillment of the “bourgeois society” of the 18th century. In this way, Marx tries to historicize, provincialize, and de-mystify this ideal figure. In other words, Marx uses a kind of materialist interpretation to understand the situation indexed by this figure, and reveals its “defectiveness” beneath the transparent idea system in its own history.

Such a reinterpretation of materialist method demands a more sophisticated understanding of the meaning of “fiction.” I have mentioned Clifford Geertz’s understanding of ethnographical writing as fiction in Chapter One already. He makes the meaning of such a “fiction” explicitly:

They are, thus, fictions; fictions, in the sense that they are “something made,” something fashioned” – the original meaning of *fictiō*.¹

Or we can say, fiction means to describe the reality, to give the things the form. Then for

¹ See Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, New York: Basic Books, 1973, 15.

Geertz, there are two kinds of descriptions, or giving forms. The thin one, that is, to record the empirical data at its appearance and to speak it with our ready-made language system. In such a reduction, the empirical data are separated from their social context and are thus tamed and made transparent. The second one is the thick one, that is, the ethnographer tries his best to put his feet on the empirical field when fictionalizing the world. Geertz admits it is unavoidably an impossible mission. “The besetting sin of interpretive approaches to anything – literature, dreams, symptoms, culture – is that they tend to resist, or to be permitted to resist, conceptual articulation and thus to escape systematic modes of assessment.”¹ That is, there will inevitably be failure for ideas to capture the things, hence the defectiveness of any idea system or ideology. When the bourgeoisie attempted to fictionalize the 18th century Europe, to put the chaotic world into a form or a figure, they found it necessary to filter out other disruptive materials – the reality of an Irish worker or an Indian farmer for example – in order to claim that only Robinson is the “real man.” But Geertz tells us that the things tend to resist, to escape the systematic modes of assessment. Indeed, there is rarely a perfect correspondence between the things and words. The rift between the world of language and the world of things persistently would remain. Therefore, all concepts are always defective.

Hence, I argue that Marx’s method in his critique of political economy in general and the critique of “economic man” in particular is just a defective idea as such. That is to say, Marx tries to reveal the inconsistencies, ruptures, as well as the conceptual slippage of the system of

¹ *ibid.*, 24.

political economy, so as to render the figure of Robinson unclear, enigmatic, and intractable. The figure is no longer clear and transparent because Marx put him in to test of the real social and historical situation. The Robinson is now conceived as a historically developed figure embedded in concrete social relations, rather than one that is posited once and for all by nature. Marx reminds us that Robinson is the abstraction of an 18th century Englishman, as elaborated in this famous paragraph:

Our friend Robinson Crusoe learns this by experience, and having saved a watch, ledger, ink and pen from the shipwreck, he soon begins, like a good Englishman, to keep a set of books. His stock-book contains a catalogue of the useful objects he possesses, of the various operations necessary for their production, and finally of the labour-time that specific quantities of these products have on average cost him. All the relations between Robinson and these objects that form his self-created wealth are here so simple and transparent that even Mr Sedley Taylor could understand them. And yet these relations contain all the essential determination of value.¹

The mystification made by political economists renders Robinson an isolated individual and his production a natural, pre-historical one. Hence, in such a picture “all relationships between Robinson and the things which form his self-made wealth are here so simple and transparent.” However, Marx reminds us Robinson has already been an 18th century Englishman – he prays, he is used to the slavery system, he takes advantage of the 18th century technology, and most importantly, he has the “experience”, which teaches him the average social “labor-time” of each of his production in the early 18th century. But in the myth of the political economists Robinson is an abstract “economic man” with rational production - for example when Robinson plans to plant the wheat, he thinks about the seeds, the season, the

¹ Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume1, New York: Penguin Books, 1990, 170.

outputs and calculates how much he can consume, after which he finally achieves his expanded reproduction and the accumulation of capital. However, Marx asks, is there any such isolated individual and isolated production in the real world? Marx points out, man is always a social being. Robinson is a man in the Stuart times, hence the real free man's labor necessarily has a social form determined by the historical structure – class relationship, level of productive forces, religion and culture, etc. Indeed, even in the fictional world we find Robinson has Friday as his social relation. Therefore, it is reasonable to ask if they work together, how would they deal with their relation of production and how would they distribute the products? Are there negotiations, conflicts, and coercions? Why is there no problem of property rights? How to resolve the problem of Friday's father's request for migration in the second half of the book? What about the function of the Bible in this small society? Actually all of these details are mentioned in the novel yet concealed and ignored by the Robinsonades or the transparent, perfect representation of Robinson.

If we want take all these into consideration and try to seriously deal with the “fictionalization” of social contradiction in *Robinson Crusoe*, then we need to do some thick interpretations of Robinson's world and analyze the collective political (un)conscious of Defoe's early 18th century Stuart world as Ian Watt does in *The Rise of the Novel*. However, such is not the purpose of this study. My purpose is to investigate and interpret the “fictionalization” of productive-possessive individual in the first few years of post-Mao China. But I believe it is helpful here to emphasize this methodological invention of Marx, which I

can call a way of defective thinking, that is, to use the opaque figure to “index” some concrete and intricate historical situations and to reveal the weakness of any systematic articulation about the idea of economic man. Jacques Lezra in his new book provides us with an accurate elaboration of this method:

Capital, however, takes on directly, and assumes as the condition of its analysis, the related clutch of undecidabilities that weaken classical political economy’s understanding of its objects (of the things it treats, of the concepts it produces and works on). Realism and/ or nominalism; an aspectual, indexical *als*-structure and/or an assertoric identity proposition; *Res sunt consequentialia nominum* and/or *nomina sunt consequentialia rerum*. What these “and/or” tricks designate is not a contradiction, in the happy sense given the term in the Hegelian tradition. Marx’s concepts, his second-order objects, are defective rather than contradictory – therein lies their precision, their flexibility, their analytic fruitfulness.¹

As a beginning for further studies, in the following pages I will elaborate on the undecidable fruitfulness of the figures of “productive-possessive individual” and explain each figure in its indexical structure. Indeed, when I create the term “productive-possessive individual” instead of using the ready-made concept of “economic man” or “possessive individual,” I have already emphasized the undecidability or defectiveness of the literary figures of the period rather than reducing them into the stereotypes and transparent figures of “economic man.” Here the use of the “-” indicates the gap which indexes the historical conjuncture between the different modes of production in the liminal post-Mao years. Was it a period of socialism? Post-socialism? Pre-post-socialism? And the critical rift which I want to emphasize here is the gap between a small producer and a possessive proto-capitalist. About

¹ I use professor Lezra’s manipulate here, the article is titled “Capital, catastrophe: Marx’s “Dynamic objects.”

the laboring body of the period and its aesthetic connection with socialism in the individual laborer, I will use the figure of “a young girl carrying a load,” a figure silhouetted by Wang Zengqi’s famous short story *A Tale of Big Nur* (*danao jishi* 大淖记事) in the early 1980s to demonstrate. I will also discuss Zhu Yuanda in *The Man from a Peddler’s Family* (*xiaofan shijia* 小贩世家) and other “Literature of Street and Bazaar” (“shijing wenxue” 市井文学) to exhibit the secular bitterness or happiness and the utopian ethical world of individual laborer and small producer. Finally, I will discuss how the capitalist spirit arises in the figure of Little Carpenter in *Descendants of Lu Ban* (*luban de zisun*, 鲁班的子孙), a novella published in 1983 which explicitly reveals the crisis of the ethos of individual laborer and small-producer caused by the sudden intrusion of the proto-capitalist spirit.

4.2 Qiaoyun is Carrying a Load: the Individuality of the Labourer

The Laboring Body

I choose Qiaoyun in Wang Zengqi's prize-winning short story *A Tale of Big Nur* (*danao jishi* 大淖记事, 1981) as the point of departure for my exploration of the post-Mao productive-possessive individual. In this section, I will focus on the connection between the labor, the small producer's ethical world, and the post-Mao individuality. At first glance, the concept "productive-possessive individual" seems not far from the Lockean concept of *homo economicus* in terms of the relation of labor and property to the socialized individual, which have come to ground the "liberal" thoughts of modern civil society. For Locke property does not refer to the estates at first. Locke says that "every Man has a Property in his own Person" – his labor. Or we can look at the famous laboring body in the *Second Treatise of Government*:

Though the earth, and all inferior creatures be common to all men, yet every man has a property in his own person. This nobody has any right to but himself. The labour of his body, and the work of his hands, we may say, are properly his. Whatsoever then he removes out of the state that nature hath provided, and left in it, he hath mixed his labour with, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his property.¹

With such a perspective, let's look at the figure of a laboring girl, Qiaoyun (July Cloud), at the end of Wang Zengqi's *A Tale of Big Nur*:

Without any hesitation July Cloud [Qiaoyun] took the two baskets her father had used, knocked away the dust and went to earn money by carrying loads as her father had done. The local girls and women admired her. At first they were worried, but soon they stopped worrying when they saw her carrying her loads with quick, steady steps. From then on, July Cloud worked as a woman porter, wearing a big red flower on one

¹ Jone Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, North Clarendon: Tuttle Publishing, 1993, 128.

side of her head. As she carried purple water chestnuts, green water caltrops and snow-white lotus roots, she walked elegantly like a willow branch in a gentle breeze. Her eyes were as bright as ever, but their expression was more firm and profound. She had become a capable young wife. ¹

Locke's man with the labor power of his body and the work of his hands becomes the capable individual. Such a new figure and new individuality predicts the economic take-off of Great Britain in the 18th and 19th century and the rising of the bourgeoisie. Similarly, by carrying loads with her shoulders, Qiaoyun becomes a capable young wife. Does this figure also indicate the take-off Chinese economy in the reform era of China and the arriving of the post-socialist civil society? It is not an easy question to answer. I will prove in the following pages that such similarity is by no means a mere coincidence. But if we want to make a more sophisticated understanding, to look into the "defectiveness" of Chinese "economic man" in his/her own historical condition, we'd better pay more attention to the dissimilarity or the inconsistency of these two figures. For example, in the Lockean model of economic man, in his canonical formula that "lives, liberties, and estates," we find besides the ownership of the self, the laboring body, there is the aspect of thingness, the wealth and the estates. By combining individual's labor with the nature (land), he makes this land and the products of land his own property; Locke's treatise indeed legitimizes the private ownership of land and in the later stage, with the invention of money, even the unlimited accumulation of wealth (capital) is also morally justified by Locke's theory. For Balibar, this latter aspect will develop into the "constituted property," that is, the property constituted, the acquisition of wealth. Finally, such

¹ See, in *Prize-Winning Stories From China 1980-1981*, Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1985, 260-261.

“property” then preconditions only the liberty and individuality of the “proprietor,” the propertied man, rather than the laborer, could be a truly independent, free citizen.¹ To put it in another way, with the development of a capitalist society, the appropriation of wealth triumphs over the laboring body in understanding the individuality. In this way, the original aspect of the ownership and capability of labor is obscured.

But in Qiaoyun’s story, there is no possibility for such transformation from the living labor to the appropriation of wealth. Qiaoyun goes to earn money by carrying loads, but the money earned barely makes the ends meet. “There were three mouths to feed now and neither of the men was able to make any money.” She has to feed her paralyzed father and her severely injured husband. In the story, Qiaoyun’s life was suddenly changed at the age of seventeen when her father, an industrious porter, fell from a plank and was paralyzed from the waist down. Qiaoyun’s life fell into trouble, but with the support of the neighborhood and her lover, the young and handsome Eleventh Boy, her life was not short of trivial happiness. Even after she was raped by Chief Trumpeter of the local armed force, she was not beaten by fate. “She sat on the bed woodenly” for a while, but it would not change her will to a happy life. She accepted Chief Trumpeter’s money but gave her warm body to Eleventh Boy resolutely. Such silent resistance caused the envy and fury of Chief Trumpeter who, together with his companions, heavily beat Eleventh Boy, almost to death. Their atrocity caused a mute and grave demonstration of Eleventh Boy’s guild, the tinsmiths. The Chief Trumpeter was exiled at the

¹ Etienne Barlibar, “‘Possessive Individualism’ Reversed: From Locke to Derrida,” in *Constellations* Volume 9, No 3, 2002, 302.

end. However, Eleventh Boy was severely hurt. Now, Qiaoyun had to carry loads to work as a woman porter. Obviously, it was not a tragic story. Because of the difficulty in life, she became a capable wife with her own labor by her hands. At the end of the story, in the scene of a beautiful young woman carrying a load, with her laboring body with vigor and strength, the accumulating aesthetic power reaches the peak. But such aesthetics of the laboring body cannot be fully understood if we leave aside the typical environment of the east “big Nur,” the life-world of the subaltern society of the “porters.”

The porters led a very simple life: earning their living by their strength, eating three meals of rice a day cooked on the top of an earthenware jar which had a hole in its side, for they had no real stove... At meal times the men squatted outside their homes, holding big bowls of rice with vegetables, small fish, preserved beancurd or pickled hot peppers. They wolfed down their food with such relish that nothing in the world seemed more appetizing.¹

If Locke’s prototype of possessive individual is buttressed by the rising of the merchant class, then from Qiaoyun’s laboring figure and her grassroots society, perhaps we can find another component of the civil society – the people in the street and bazaar. I need to immediately highlight that the “street” in post-Mao Street and Bazaar Literature should not be mistaken as the “street” in the “Street Literature” in North America, because in the early post-Mao period, there was no merchant class as the dominating class; rather people on the street, such as the small merchants, the vendors, the craftsmen, the free laborers working as porters, and even the peasants, can be regarded as “grassroots,” who constituted the majority of the post-Mao (post)socialist civil society. It is these groups of people that became the unique

¹ See, in *Prize-Winning Stories From China 1980-1981*, Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1985, 247.

subject matter of Wang Zengqi's literary world as well as the world of "big Nur." Although the world of "big Nur" or the "Street and Bazaar" is not an idyllic world - Wang Zengqi's stories are always full of bitterness of these trivial lives - Wang in the meanwhile presents their secular happiness and individual dignity. Indeed, such a world is much closer to the life-world rendered in Dutch paintings favored by Hegel:

Yet if we wish to bring to our notice the most marvelous thing that can be achieved in this connection, we must look at the genre painting of the later Dutch painters... Satisfaction in present-day life, even in the commonest and smallest things, flows in the Dutch from the fact that what nature affords directly in other nations, they have had to acquire by hard struggles and bitter industry, and circumscribed in their locality, they have become great in their care and esteem of the most insignificant things. On the other hand, they are a nation of fishermen, sailors, burghers, and peasants and therefore from the start they have attended to the value of what is necessary and useful in the greatest and smallest things, and they can procure with the most assiduous industry... [A]nd through their activity, industry, bravery, and frugality they have attained, in their sense of a self-wrought freedom, a well-being, comfort, honesty, spirit, gaiety, and even a pride in a cheerful daily life.¹

We know that Hegel's fondness for Dutch paintings relates to his enthusiasm toward the nascent bourgeois society. Hegel's aesthetics is translated by Zhu Guangqian who had it published in 1979. Taken into consideration the importance of Hegelian aesthetics for socialist China, Wang Zengqi would not be unfamiliar with Hegel's thoughts above. Indeed, Wang admits that he likes Dutch paintings and acknowledges the influences of genre paintings on his writing of *A Tale of Big Nur*.² Therefore, it is reasonable to infer that in rewriting the pre-PRC society with the reimagining of a post-Mao civil society for the future, Wang shares with Hegel

¹ G.W.F. Hegel, *Hegel's Aesthetics Lectures on Fine Art* (Volume I), New York: Clarendon Press, 597-598.

² See Wang Zengqi, *Completed Collection of Wang Zengqi (Wang Zengqi quanji 汪曾祺全集)* vol(3), Beijing: Beijing shifan daxue press, 1998, 218.

some aesthetic passions about a utopian figure and life-world. But what is more important for me is not the factual relation or influence. For me, Wang's "big Nur" reminds us of another possible origin of the civil society besides the merchant class and the small and great Robinsonades - the world of "fishermen, sailors, burghers, and peasants," just like Qiaoyun's laboring body reminds us of what Balibar terms as the "constituent property" in Locke - the ownership of labor, life, the capability to act - which is distinguished from the constituted property¹ in "possessive individualism." Hence, we arrive at the third level about the difference between Locke and Wang's laboring bodies. If Robinson and the readers feel a kind of content and pleasure in the large stock of sheep, the harvest of wheat, the faithful Friday, the kingdom he has created in the once barren island, then the "comfort, honesty, spirit, gaiety, and even a pride" of Hegel's Dutch world and Wang's big Nur comes not from the largeness of possession, but from their bitter industry for the most insignificant things and their struggles in their real everyday life. In this story, Qiaoyun is poor and miserable, but she is also full of vigor. Unlike what always happens in the European naturalist novels, that a philanthropist comes to help her, or in the socialist realism, where the Party usually offers help, it is Qiaoyun herself that carries the load with her own labor and creates her "self-wrought freedom." Here we find another kind of new-born individuality. Just as a comment at the period said, "[she was] determined to life, determined to love, and pursued the right of human tenaciously," "she did not want any redeemer, she can save her life by herself."² This perhaps will make us recall the

¹ "'Possessive Individualism' Reversed: From Locke to Derrida," 302.

² Ling, Yu, "Poem? Painting? A Reading of *A Tale of Big Nur*," ("Shishi? Shihua? Duwangzengqi de danao

lyrics of *The International*, “No savior from on high delivers/No faith have we in prince or peer/Our own right hand the chains must shiver.” Therefore, is Qiaoyun still a socialist figure, or a post-socialist one? What is the continuity and discontinuity between Mao’s socialist aesthetics and politics and what is presented in such a figure of laboring girl? How should we interpret such a figure in the concrete context of post-Mao China?

The Legacy and the Debt I: Onto-typological and Socialist Aesthetics

Indeed, Wang Zengqi and his writings occupy a remarkable and unique position in the transition from Mao to post-Mao period. However, the intricacy of Wang’s writings when referring to the socialist tradition has far from been explored. In the English-speaking world, among the very few studies, Wang is classified as a “Native Land Literature” (“xiangtu wenxue” 乡土文学) writer connected with the pre-PRC writer Shen Congwen and impacting the “Root-seeking” (“xungeng” 寻根) writers in the middle of the 1980s.¹ As I have criticized in Chapter One, by charting the genealogy between the pre-Mao and post-Mao “Native Land Literature,” such an understanding of Wang Zengqi repeats the narrative of Chinese literary historiography

jishi” 是诗?是画, 读汪曾祺的《大淖记事》) *Dushu*(读书) No.6(1981), 42-47.

¹ Carolyn FitzGerald’s article, “Imaginary Sites of Memory: Wang Zengqi and Post-Mao Reconstructions of the Native Land,” provides us with a detailed investigation of Wang’s unique vision of the “native land” and his modernist formal experimentation with language. About the former aspect, David Wang and Jeffrey Kinkley’s study establish the connection between Wang and Shen Congwen and about the latter aspect, Li Tuo’s article “Wang Zengqi and Modern Chinese Writing: also on Mao’s Style” (“Wang Zengqi yu xiandai hanyu xiezuo: jiantan ‘mao wenti’” 汪曾祺与现代汉语写作——兼谈“毛文体”) sets the basic tone. FitzGerald gives us an overview of scholarship on Wang Zengqi in such a tradition. (*Modern Chinese Literature and Culture*, vol. 20, no. 1 (Spring 2008), pp. 72-128).

established in the 1980s. Therefore, in establishing a coherent history of “20th Century Chinese Literature,” the huge discursive rupture from Mao to post-Mao is entrenched and the intricate relationship between socialist tradition and Wang Zengqi’s writings is obscured.

However, a close-up of Wang’s writings in this period will easily find that the content of Wang’s most stories, for example, the figures of laborers, small-producers and vendors, as well as their subaltern life-world, continue the socialist tradition or even the tradition of the Cultural Revolution at least on topical subject, that is, the tradition of “Workers, Peasants and Soldiers’ Literature.” (“gongnongbing wenxue” 工农兵文学) Biographically speaking, Wang was an important member of the collective writing group of “Revolutionary Model Opera” (geming yangbanxi 革命样板戏) *Shajiabang* (沙家浜) and therefore established a close relation with the notorious political figure Jiang Qing during the Cultural Revolution. Such an embarrassed affiliation had caused Wang a lot of trouble in the post-Mao years immediate after the Cultural Revolution. And in the post-Cultural-Revolution period, Wang made stringent critiques of the “neo-classicism” of the Cultural Revolution literature and art, and his criticisms should not be considered as entirely hypocritical. Indeed, as early as in the 1950s, Wang had connected himself with another left-wing cultural tradition, that is Zhao Shuli’s more populist tradition, which confronted the idealism and abstraction of the “socialist realism.” I will analyze the debates and struggles between these two socialist traditions very soon, but for the current purpose, it is sufficient to remind my readers the multiple influences upon Wang Zengqi in his forty-years of writing career. To put forward Li Tuo’s profound observation, “I believe Zhao

Shuli has a deep impact on Wang's writings in the 1980s, perhaps Zhao's influence is greater than his well-known teacher, Shen Congwen."¹

Perhaps my expedition can start from the aesthetic question between Shen and Wang. For C.T. Hsia, "the pastoralism of Shen Ts'ung-wen [Shen Congwen] therefore is on the same moral plane and speaks with the same urgency to modern man as that of Wordsworth, Yeats, and Faulkner."² Here, Hsia indeed puts Shen's writing of "human nature" into the moral plane and critical tradition of New Criticism which, according to Peter Button, closely connects with the metaphysical and onto-theological reasoning of the South in aesthetically resisting the global modernity.³ Indeed, the "innocence" which Hsia finds both on Shen Congwen's literary figure Xiaoxiao and Faulkner's Lena Grove in *Light in August*, is indeed the other side of the same coin of the "original sin" of Cao Qiqiao in Zhang Ailing's *Golden Cangue* (jinsuoji 金锁记), which for Hsia perhaps constitutes the only truly fallen character in the whole of modern Chinese literature. To put it shortly, retreating to the soul (inner depth) in response to the trials from the absurd and cruel codes of society is perhaps Hsia's "onto-theological reasoning" and his evaluation of Shen Congwen's aesthetic power.

However, Qiaoyun never retreats into her inner depth of the soul. Rather, like Hegel's

¹ Li Tuo, "Wang Zengqi and Modern Chinese Writing: also on Mao's Style" ("Wang Zengqi yu xiandai hanyu xiezu: jiantan 'mao wenti'" 汪曾祺与现代汉语写作——兼谈“毛文体”), *Huacheng* (花城), No.10(1998), 136.

² C.T.Hsia, *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999, 191.

³ See, Peter Button, *Configurations of the Real in Chinese Literary and Aesthetic Modernity*, Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2009, 119-127.

Dutch people who “through their activity, industry, bravery, and frugality [they] have attained, in their sense of a self-wrought freedom,” Qiaoyun carries the load with her own shoulders, and “[was] determined to life, determined to love, and pursued the right of human tenaciously.” Such a practical posture toward mundane life perhaps is typical of what Hsia accuses as the humanitarian didacticism of the leftist writings. Or, it can be treated as a kind of onto-typological reasoning, as Peter Button demonstrates in his reinterpretation of the socialist aesthetic tradition “typification.” (“dianxinghua” 典型化)

Button in his new book uses the term “onto-typological” to interpret the “typification” of socialist aesthetics.¹ The term “onto-typology” is invented by Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe in his *Typography*² as a response to Heidegger’s critique of metaphysics with his term “onto-theological.” “Onto-theological” consists of three components. “Logical” is logics, the ground; “onto” is about ontology, the relationship between the universal and the particular, and onto-logical means the universal is the ground of any particular; “theo” is about the theology, suggesting that God is the ground of every creation. We know the target of Heidegger is such a transcendence of the European metaphysics. In such a perspective, retreating back to the inner depth of soul, as demanded by C.T. Hsia’s approach of new criticism, means to reestablish the wholeness of the world by turning from the particular individual into the universal humanity and from the mortal creature to the immortal creator, the God. In Chapter Two I have already

¹ Peter Button. *Configurations of the Real in Chinese Literary and Aesthetic Modernity*. See Introduction, Chapter Two and Chapter Four.

² Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Typography: Mimesis, Philosophy, Politics*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998, 43-138.

discussed the theological remains in the modern enlightenment discourse and the Cartesian subject. I have also discussed the influence of such a monotheistic enlightenment on the literary discourse of Chinese modernity. But C. T. Hsia in his *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction* finds a deviation, that is, the Chinese left-wing literature, which presumes a kind of secular humanism and believes that human being in a particular environment can resolve their own problems through their work, practice and political struggle. This, according to C.T. Hsia, is the weakness of Chinese modern literature, and indicates the ominous future of the 20th century Chinese literature. But for Button, it is a promising and productive “onto-typological” road for Chinese aesthetic modernity. The concept “onto-typological” distinguishes itself from the “onto-theological” transcendence, “type[o]” here means a frame or a figure, close to Heidegger’s *Gestalt*, therefore “typological” suggests that the figure and his/her figuration in a concrete situation or *subjectum* bestows the meaning. For example, in *A Tale of Big Nur*, there is no psychological depth or religious soul as the transcendent Being of human nature; rather, the figure of Qiaoyun is (re)presented in her “Big Nur” – the commune, the people and the life world. Therefore, her work – carrying a load – is symbolic of her figuration or typification. Button uses Heidegger’s following paragraph to elaborate the aesthetic signification of such a typification:

In another respect, the metaphysical conception of Worker is, however, differentiated from the Platonic and even from the modern, except that of Nietzsche. The source of giving of meaning, the power which is present from the outset and this stamping everything is Gestalt [form] as the Gestalt of a humanity... Not the I-ness [Ichheit] of an individual person, the subjectiveness of the egoity, but the preformed form-like presence of a species of men (type) forms the most extreme subjectivity which comes

forth in the fulfillment of modern metaphysics and is presented by its thinking.¹

Here the “worker” comes from Jünger’s *The Worker – Master and the Figure*. In dialogue with Jünger’s theoretical elaboration of the figure “worker,” Heidegger tries to probe the apogee of the Western ontological discourse. Why does Heidegger argue “the metaphysical conception of Worker is, however, differentiated from the Platonic and even from the modern, except that of Nietzsche”? Lacoue-Labarthe explains, it is because in this case the figure – although still an idea – is a man (or a woman) presenting itself in the *subjectum* as a species of men (women). Therefore the onto-typo-logy finally proceeds “from a ‘modification of transcendence into ‘rescendence,’ wherein transcendence itself founders and disappears: ‘a rescendence of this kind, through the figure, takes place in such a way that its state of being present is represented and is present gain in the imprint of its stamping.’”² Hence, both Heidegger and Lacoue-Labarthe find in Jünger’s “worker” a new and special kind of will to power, and Lacoue-Labarthe reminds us that it actually comes from Hegel to Nietzschean or post-Nietzschean *Gestalt*. Heidegger might consider Hegel’s idealism as the summit of modern metaphysics, but perhaps we can find another kind of Hegel from his theory of “type,” as we exhibited in his above-mentioned elaboration of Dutch paintings, where the “commonest and smallest things” are bestowed with meaning by the fishermen and peasants’ will to power and hard struggles “in their locality.” Indeed, Hegel’s discussion of Dutch paintings is arranged in the section of “dissolution of romantic art” and his high evaluation is incongruous with his

¹ Martin Heidegger, *The Question of Being*, (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1958), 54-55.

² Lacoue-Labarthe, *Philippe, Typography: Mimesis, Philosophy*, 55-56.

depreciation of romantic art and his system of the dialectical development of aesthetics. Is it possible to find such an onto-typological Hegel here? As for Nietzsche, Heidegger has already considered him as an exception, whose master-words of nihilism summit in the figure of Zarathustra, a total character. According to Lacoue-Labarthe, such a Zarathustra, in the strongest sense of a figure, commits metaphysics in the process of completing itself, that is to say, through allegorism, it “*Gestals*” an allegorical world, and *fictio*, gives form to, an idea system in the last analysis. But on the other hand, since Zarathustra does not represent the will of God, but is a master of himself, a man in the human world, he necessarily has put metaphysics at the stage of its completion, hence the allegorism inevitably ends by “emptying itself and destroying itself from within,”¹ and therefore calls into question the Platonic determination of Being, because “the essence of *Gestalt* is only accessible after the prior elucidation of *Ge-stell*.”² That is, the final allegorical figure makes us think about the “unthought,” what lies behind or beneath the formation of the world.

If such a philosophical discussion is too obscure and esoteric, then in the following I can try to put the question much more clearly, with our reading of an allegorical type of worker, Qiaoyun. As mentioned above, at the end of *A Tale of Big Nur*, we encounter such an aesthetic figure:

July Cloud worked as a woman porter, wearing a big red flower on one side of her hair. As she carried purple water chestnuts, green water caltrops and snow-white lotus roots, she walked elegantly like a willow branch in a gentle breeze. Her eyes were as bright as ever, but their expression was more firm and profound. She had become a

¹ *Ibid.*, 61.

² *Ibid.*, 60.

capable young wife.

People familiar with the cliché of socialist realism of Mao's period may find such a figure of woman laborer very close to the mode-type (leixing 类型) of the proletarian women. However, if it is the case, why would this figure generate such tremendous aesthetic power in a totally anti-revolutionary atmosphere of the post-socialist years? We need to keep in mind that this allegorical figure appears at the end of the story, that is to say, the type of Qiaoyun is not from the abstract, static and transparent mode-type, but is a proper type (dianxing 典型), a defective figure indexing a concrete situation – the typical environment of big Nur. Under such a perspective, we find the *Ge-stell* beneath the formation of the world, and the bestowal of meaning by the *Gestal* is crucial for such an onto-typological figure. We are compelled to explore, what is the “unthought” behind such a figure of a laboring woman? Qiaoyun is a figure in her figuration, that is to say, the combination of *Gestal* with *Ge-stell* contributes to Wang Zengqi's imagination of the post-Mao life-world of the “streets and bazaars.”

But before our further exploration of this world, perhaps we'd better make account of the aesthetic connection between the “worker” in German philosophical discussions in the 1950s and the “laborer” in socialist (and in this sense post-socialist) literature writings in China. Is it pure coincidence for the encounter of the Jünger's worker and Wang Zengqi's laborer? Indeed, Peter Button's book on “Chinese literary and aesthetic modernity” has already elaborated the theoretical pertinence of the aesthetics of socialist realism to the Hegelian and Nietzschean aesthetics. According to Button's elaboration, the first confluence is Lu Xun's figure of Ah Q in his *A Short Story of Ah Q (a qou zhengzhuan 阿 Q 正传)* with the influence of Zarathustra

on Lu Xun's writings in the early 1920s; the second important correspondence is between Cai Yi, an influential Marxist aesthetician, and Heidegger in their explication on Hegelian Type (dianxing 典型). Of course, Chinese socialist aesthetics has its own development path and the elaboration of Chinese aesthetic modernity as part of global modernity is far from being completed by Button's excellent study. However, with Button's articulation, and C.T. Hsia's discovery of the "humanitarian didacticism of the leftist writings," it will not be difficult for us to find the furthest distance between Qiaoyun as a figure in Wang's mature writings and the character of Xiaoxiao created by Wang's college teacher in the 1940s, Shen Congwen. Both of these two girls suffer from the painful experience, but if the "absurd and cruel codes of society" in Shen's novella is insignificant and is only used to test the innocence of an ideal figure of universal humanity embodied in Xiaoxiao, the difficulty Qiaoyun experiences is real and crucial as her typical environment. The individuality of Qiaoyun does not refer to the "I-ness of an individual person, the subjectiveness of the egoity", but refers to "human being as species being." This Marxian catchword which is popular in socialist China indeed is very similar to the Heideggerian term, "the preformed form-like presence of a species of men forms." Qiaoyun as a species of women is only formed by the big Nur, or within the *Ge-stell* which comes prior to the *Gestalt*. Therefore, if the *Gestalt* as a type is formed in the story with the laboring body, a type very close to Zarathustra who by her "will to power" is "determined to life, determined to love, and pursued the right of human tenaciously," and "did not want any redeemer, she can save her life by herself," then this figure also compels us to think about something "unthought

of,” the prior collective world which is unfolded with the presentation of an individual type. Button tells us such a process is exactly what Cai Yi understands as artistic typification, a method to deal with the individual figure with his/her typical environment:

And yet it is vital to keep in mind that for Cai Yi, this higher-level type, in its actual artistic representation, remains more singular, specific, and concrete. Such types are more universal, but it is clear that what makes them universal is their capacity to provide an ever more precise approximation of humanity in its species-being.¹

For Shen Congwen, the figure Xiaoxiao is “universal” in the sense she represents an ideal type of “human-being;” however, for Qiaoyun, she is universal or as a type because it can provide an approximation of humanity in its species-being. “Species-being” here means any group of people who is determined by the categories of society as “class” or “stratum.” Under such an aesthetic theory, human society is organized into groupings always along class lines. Qiaoyun belongs to the “porters,” determined by the economic conditions, the social stratum, and the cultural environment of the east of big Nur. She is also determined by the social relationship between her stratum to other stratum, for example, the Eleventh Boy’s stratum, the tinsmiths, as well as Chief Trumpeter’s stratum, the local armed force. Surely, the narrative of this story is dramatic and Qiaoyun’s misfortune is unique. But just as Cai Yi argues, as a type, the more singular, specific, and concrete the Qiaoyun’s figure is, the more universal it is, because it approximates the situation of this group of people more precisely – it reminds us of the otherwise invisible social determinants of this social group. Therefore, if we say Qiaoyun is a type of the east of the “big Nur,” it does not mean her figure is projected by the formula or

¹ Button, Peter. *Configurations of the Real in Chinese Literary and Aesthetic Modernity*, 184.

the abstract idealist system of the “proletarian women”, but because she indexes and typifies the total social determinants of the porters. For instance, although it is an accident that her father fell from a plank when carrying the load, such high risk is socially determined by this sort of construction work. Besides, poverty brought about by sickness is also a common phenomenon for such an impoverished subaltern group. Take another example, not every girl of east big Nur would suffer the violence of rape, but the risk of being raped for the porters’ girls is obviously higher than other social groups. Indeed the story has already indicated that the ruffian’s behavior is evidently encouraged by his class’s privileged status and the humble economic and political situation of the porters. Indeed, Wang Zengqi in his other stories, such as *The Daughter of Gu’s Toufu Shop* (*gujia doufudian de nver* 辜家豆腐店的女儿), *Three Friends over the Cold Years* (*suihan sanyou* 岁寒三友), has vividly exhibited how the economic oppression causes the sexual oppression upon the daughters of poor families. Therefore, readers are touched by such a “painful” story because of the aesthetic power of such a figure; they are touched not because they are moved by Qiaoyun’s individual fate, but because they are touched by the sufferings of this social group as a whole. On the other side, once Qiaoyun’s will to power, and her vigor and strength as a species being is revealed, the new kind of ethical meaning is also bestowed upon this group of people and even influences the social totality. The figure of the worker stamps on everything, to use Jünger’s words. Indeed, it is how the aestheticization of politics works in (post-) socialist realism.

Now, I think it is sufficient to argue that the aesthetic tradition of typification which was

theoretically elaborated by Cai and others and was practiced by the socialist realism has not entirely disappeared in the post-Mao Chinese literature. As in the case of Wang Zengqi, I find that it is rather a revival of this tradition which was devitalized by the neoclassic tendency in socialist literature and aesthetics. This neoclassic tendency, which is termed as “formulism and conceptualism” by its critics since Hu Feng, could be philosophically considered as the infiltration of metaphysics into the tradition of Hegelian Marxism. Numerous idealist images produced by socialist realism, especially during the Cultural Revolution period, can only be regarded as model-type rather than proper type. They are static, transparent and abstract. These figures of workers, peasants and soldiers no longer index or typify the real situation. In this sense, Wang Zengqi is both the heir of socialist legacy and as its internal rebel.

The Legacy and the Debt II: The Folk’s Perspective

Indeed, it is not new to regard Wang as an internal rebel of the Maoist tradition. Li Tuo’s article “Wang Zengqi and Modern Chinese Writing: also on Mao’s Style,” for example, has already provided a sophisticated observation about the continuity and discontinuity between Mao’s popular style and Wang’s popular style at the level of language. Li Tuo uses the term “Mao’s Style” rather than “Mao’s discourse” in order to emphasize that the main focus of his article is “form” rather than the “content” of socialist writings and post-socialist writings. And the central issue of the form, or the style of modern Chinese writing in Li’s article, is the imperative of the “popularization” (“dazonghua” 大众化) of Modern Chinese. But is not

Mao's style or socialist culture a popular style or culture? How could Wang's popular style resist Mao's popular style? In order to answer this question, I think it is necessary to make a distinction between two discursive sources assimilated by Chinese leftist culture. On one hand, it is the political discourse of the Leninist "vanguard party" theory which could be considered as the continuation and radicalization of May-Fourth enlightenment discourse; on the other hand, it is the folk ethics and the local life-world absorbed in leftist culture to support the political discourse but is never completely controlled by the latter. ¹Keeping in mind this distinction, it will be easy to understand the role of Wang's popular style in challenging Mao's style, as Li Tuo explicitly points out:

Like Zhao Shuli, Wang Zengqi loves folk culture. He is infatuated with everything of the folk, operas, tales and songs, even an advertisement posted on the Bamiancao Street in Beijing for a midwife, "Light Cart and Fast Horse, Lucky Grandma for Your Kids" ("qingchekuaima, jixiang laolao" 轻车快马 吉祥姥姥) is extolled by Wang. It is a poem!²

Let's first look at the most interesting part, the folk advertisement, "Light Cart and Fast Horse, Lucky Grandma for Your Kids." It is a saying from folk culture. But it is a kind of verse, beautiful in rhythm and easy to understand. Besides, cart and horse, Grandma and kids, these are all things of everyday life. "Light," "fast" and "lucky" are all daily expressions which express the everyday trivial feelings of common people. In this sense, as Li Tuo finds, even certain kind of classical style of writing could be used by Wang as resource of the

¹ For a more detailed discussion, see Meng Yue, "'The White-Haired Girl' and the historical complexity of Yan'an Literature" ("'baimaonv' yu Yan'an wenxue de lishi fuzaxing" "白毛女"与延安文学的历史复杂性), *Jintian* (Today) No.1(1993), 171-188.

² 135

“popularization” of modern Chinese language. Of course such “certain kind” is the language style which has been known for its closeness toward daily life of man of letters – the classical style of the prose of Ming and Qing dynasties. Now, perhaps it is not difficult for me to temporally summarize the characteristics of Wang’s language style: the ordinariness, the concreteness and the closeness to the world of things, as can be easily found in the above-mentioned paragraph of *A Tale of Big Nur*:

At meal times the men squatted outside their homes, holding big bowls of rice with vegetables, small fish, preserved beancurd or pickled hot peppers. They wolfed down their food with such relish that nothing in the world seemed more appetizing. ¹

We see ordinary things like homes, bowls, rice, vegetables, fish, beancurd, peppers. The English translation is quite good, except for the metaphorical term “wolfed down” – the more literal and more accurate translation should be “devoured” because Wang rarely uses metaphor in his writing. Li Tuo argues, such language style challenges two kinds of writing style, the Europeanized vernacular style and the Maoist style. For the former, Li uses Wang’s early writing to present its language features: westernized grammar, psychological description, techniques as “free indirect styles,” etc. It is a style accused by the revolutionary Qu Qiubai as aristocratic style, with which, according to Li, Wang has broken up since 1945.² The latter is the Maoist style. Although Li finds it difficult to fully elaborate it, he does suggest its several characteristics, such as the emphases on political discourse and spiritual aspect, the frequent use of metaphors and big words, as well as its tendency of modernity, the persistent desire for

¹ See, in *Prize-Winning Stories From China 1980-1981*, 247.

² Li Tuo, “Wang Zengqi and Modern Chinese Writing: also on Mao’s Style,” 132.

negation and sublation. Compared to these two styles, it is not hard to comprehend the political implication of Wang's "popularization" in terms of formal innovation, that is, the ordinariness, the concreteness and the closeness to the world of things.

However, Wang's rebellion is not limited to the formal aspect. For a broader understanding of the significance of Wang's writing, we need to pay more attention to the content of his writing. Dialectically speaking, just as both Adorno and Jameson have demonstrated, we cannot talk about content without talking about form, and vice versa. The "Popular Language Movement" ("dazhongyu yundong" 大众语运动) in the 1930s is directly related to the dilemma of mass enlightenment discussed in Chapter Two. Could the mass use their own language? Or do they need to be enlightened and absorbed into the new language system? For such a debate, it is necessary to first introduce an important revolutionary writer, Zhao Shuli, who has huge influence on Wang Zengqi's post-Mao writing, as observed by Li.¹

Zhao Shuli is the model writer of "Yan'an Literature" ("yan'an wenxue" 延安文学) in the 1940s. Model in the sense of Mao's famous saying, that "fresh, lively Chinese style and spirit which the common people of China love."² But a significant divergence between Mao's Yan'an discourse and Zhao's unique peasant's cultural standpoint should not be blurred. To be more specific, when I say "Mao's discourse" or when I mention "Mao's talks at the Yan'an

¹ Ibid.,136.

² Mao Zedong "Oppose Stereotyped Party Writing" ("fandui dangbagu" 反对党八股) in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung (vol. 3)*, Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1965, 53-68.

forum on literature and art”, “Mao” does not mean Mao Zedong’s personal thought (which has a strong populist tendency, as shown in Chapter Two), but means “Mao” as the leader of CCP, a Leninist vanguard party which considers its members to be the most class-conscious and politically advanced sections of the proletariat or working class. Although by emphasizing “Chinese style and spirit,” a strategy of sinicization of Marxism was carried out by Mao and his followers to weaken the influence of the Third International and to crack down the opposite faction in party, and although for the purpose of policy propaganda, old folk art forms are necessary in Yan’an period, it does not mean the party have given up their vanguard elitism and enlightenment project to educate the masses, or given up the attempt to “enhance” the mass. “Putting new wine into old bottles” (“jiuping zhuang xinjiu” 旧瓶装新酒) was a shared strategy for the party and the leftist intellectuals in Yan’an to deal with the dialectical relationship between “popularization” (puji 普及) and “enhancement.” (tigao 提高)

Against such background, Zhao Shuli has a unique standpoint, a kind of populist, and anti-enlightenment standpoint. Neither the petty-bourgeois consciousness nor the proletarian consciousness constitutes Zhao’s ground, rather, he frankly admits, what he concerns most is ordinary peasant’s feelings and interests. Zhao does not deny that literature serves politics or even serves the policies, but only insofar as the politics or policies will benefit the ordinary peasants. Therefore, it is understandable in the late 1950s and the 1960s, when the politics and policies impaired local peasants’ interests, the previous “model” writer became a brave dissident. For example, as Cai Xiang mentions in his book, Zhao sent letters and wrote essays

to central authorities to criticize the policies, including “My Views on How Communes Should Lead Production” (“gongshe yinggai ruhe lingdao nongye zhi wojian”公社应该如何领导农业生产之我见) and “A Doer, Pan Yongfu” (“shiganjia Pan Yongfu” 实干家潘永福) in which his realist attitude concerning the problem of peasant’s livelihood was clearly expressed.¹

In this light, perhaps we can grasp the significance of Zhao’s ambitious enterprise in the beginning year of PRC. At the end of 1949, Zhao established a popular literary magazine titled *Tales and Songs* (*shuoshuo changchang* 说说唱唱) with others. An advertisement about the magazine says:

Tales and Songs is a colloquial, popular, comprehensive monthly literary magazine... We tell the stories, we sing the verses; if you can read, you can understand them, but if you cannot read, it doesn’t matter, you can listen to the stories and operas, and you will like them.²

The first thing is still the form. This magazine provided a platform for the “old literature and arts”(“jiu wenyi” 旧文艺), which included various forms of folk operas and folk storytelling. All of these old, popular arts had been considered as “feudal dross” since the May 4th New Culture movement, but now Zhao and his comrades attempted to legitimize them and seriously think about their modernization. Then, the magazine established close relation to the audiences of the “old arts,” that is, the grassroots class. In this sense, Zhao did not regard these artistic forms as “tools” for “popularization” or “enhancement,” as “old bottles” prepared for

¹ Cai Xiang, *Revolution and Its Narratives: China's Socialist Literary and Cultural Imaginaries, 1949-1966*, 287.

² See Zhang, Jun, “Zhao Shuli and *Chat and Sing*: on the Modernization of Old Arts” (Zhao Shuli yu shuoshuochangchang zazhi de shizhong: jiantan jiuwenyi de xiandaihua tujing yu keneng, 赵树理与<说说唱唱>杂志的始终——兼谈“旧文艺”现代化的途径与可能), *Fujian luntan* (福建论坛), No.12 (2014).138.

new wines, but as the carriers of the aesthetics, emotions and interests of the grassroots class. Thus, it makes sense that a researcher, Zhang Jun, argues that it was “a struggle for literary space and cultural hegemony for the aesthetic taste and narrative models of the grassroots class.”¹ Accordingly, the editorial board of the magazine put forward a radical and offensive proposition, “We encourages writers to use the perspective of common people to write and record the social transformation and the new lives of various kinds of people.”² If People’s Republic was already founded, people already became the new masters of the country, and Chairman Mao encouraged to use “fresh, lively Chinese style and spirit favored by the common Chinese people,” why common people could not use their own perspective to write and read the new world?

The founding of PRC and the favorable cultural and political environment at the beginning years did contribute to the huge success of this magazine and Zhao’s enterprise. Indeed, *Tales and Songs* helped create the boom of popular literature and renaissance of old folk arts in the first few years of PRC. However, Zhao obviously underestimated the difficulty for such a populist and anti-transcendence program. The magazine soon encountered two kinds of critical voices. On one hand, criticisms came from the leftist elite intellectuals who desired to enlighten the mass; on the other hand, criticisms came from the proponents of socialist realism who tried to impose on the daily life of ordinary people the self-consciousness of the proletariat. Indeed from 1950 to 1952, *Tales and Songs* was fiercely attacked by the authoritative *Paper of*

¹ *Ibid.*, 136.

² *Ibid.*, 139.

Literature and Art (*wenyi bao* 文艺报) at least three times, and Zhao Shuyi was soon driven out of Beijing at the beginning of 1952 and the magazine finally announced its closure three years later. Sure, the failure of Zhao was partly due to the inevitable factional strives, but I will argue the antagonism was fundamentally political or even theological. Actually the works published on the magazine were constantly accused of having depreciated the figure of the proletariat. For example, a critic criticized the protagonist of Meng Suchi's *Jin Suo* (金锁) for lacking the fighting spirit and moral integrity and therefore was not a "real" figure of the "working people." ("laodong renmin" 劳动人民) But Zhao's counterattack emphasized that under the humble social condition of the poor and from the perspective of the impoverished peasants, this protagonist was more "real" than the idealist figure of the proletariat. To use the Heideggerian term I elaborated in last section, it was the antagonism between rescendance and transcendence, or between onto-typological and onto-theological. Of course Zhao would not entirely accept the figures of grassroots class created by the old folk arts which are without question influenced by feudal ideology. He encourages the modernization of old art and emphasizes the new life in the new society; for example, most stories on *Tales and Songs* were about the grassroots class's productive activities and fighting. But Zhao still insists that the angle to observe these great transformation should be from the perspectives of the common people.

It is not difficult to find that the figure Qiaoyun and *A Tale of Big Nur* are very close to Zhao Shuli's idea. Qiaoyun does not fight against Chief Trumpeter who rapes her in the way

that an ideal model figure of the proletariat would do. Rather, she reacts as a “typical figure” of the east big Nur, the daughters of porters. She accepts Chief Trumpeter’s money indifferently but sleeps with her lover Eleventh Boy, resolutely and enthusiastically. Is it not a revenge? Actually in this story we find not only the unspeakable bitterness, but also the resilience and the trivial happiness of this humble porter’s daughter. I think we can say Wang’s narrating perspective is very close to the perspective of the common people. Perhaps we can conclude Wang’s writing in the early 1980s as *Tales and Songs*’ unexpected harvest thirty years later.

But this is no accident. Indeed, Wang was the editor assistant of Zhao and worked with Zhao through all the successes and failures of *Tales and Songs*. In Wang’s later years, Wang writes several articles for Zhao, full of emotions, and in one place, he writes down “Zhao Shuli is a lovely person. He dies in the Cultural Revolution. I miss him so much.”¹ After Zhao left the magazine, Wang stayed, until its final closure. Then he went to another magazine *Folk Literature* (*minjian wenxue* 民间文学) and continued to collect and edit folk operas and songs. One academic article in this period draws my attention, titled “Lu Xun’s Basic Opinions on Folk Literature,” (“Luxun duiyu minjian wenxue de yixie jiben kanfa” 鲁迅对于民间文学的一些基本看法). The article was published in 1956, the year when Mao encouraged intellectuals to criticize government and the party, which was followed by the “Anti-Rightist Movement” (*fanyou yundong* 反右运动) the next year. Perhaps we should connect it with

¹ Wang Zengqi, “On Language Issue of Chinese Literature,” (“zhongguo wenxue de yuyan wenti” 中国文学的语言问题) in *Completed Collection of Wang Zengqi*, vol(4), 219.

Wang Suren's article, "Is Folk Literature the Feudal Literature?" ("minjianwenyi shi fengjian wenyi ma" 民间文艺是封建文艺吗) published in March, 1955, the final issue of *Tales and Songs*. We know the works published on *Tales and Songs* are always derogated by leftist elite intellectuals as "feudal literature", hence we could see Wang's article begins with sentences like "Folk Literature in China is not an isolated phenomenon, rather it is always related with the ideological struggle on literature," and "[Lu Xun] On the other side always needs to persuade his comrades and friends in the same camp and to fight with certain subjective and naïve tendencies."¹ Obviously Wang was launching a final counter-blow after the death of *Tales and Songs*.

Wang chooses a proper starting point, which is Lu Xun's concluding article about the "Popular Language Movement" written in the 1930s, "Talk about Language outside the Door." ("menwai wentan" 门外文谈) At first glance, the popularization of language and the defense of folk literature are merely problems of "forms", but just as He Guimei rightly points out, "'old art and literature' (including old ethical order) for Zhao Shuli is not merely supplementary resource (as Zhouyang concludes about 'national form'), but his irreplaceable base and matrix,"² for both Wang Zengqi and Lu Xun, language or colloquial language is the foundation of their cultural politics of radical enlightenment. Lu Xun's article is not as much a

¹ See in Wang Zengqi, *Completed Collection of Wang Zengqi*, vol(3), 65.

² He Guimei, "The Question of Modernity on Zhao Shuli's Literature" ("Zhaoshuli wenyi de xiandaixing wenti" 赵树理文艺的现代性问题), in Tang Xiaobing ed. *Re-reading: The people's literature and art movement and its ideology (zaijie du: dazhongwenyi yu yishixingtai 再解读: 大众文艺与意识形态)*, Beijing: Peking University Press, 2007, 106.

satisfactory resolution for the popularization of language as an explicit expression of his own radical ideal of the “unification of written and spoken language.” (“yanwen yizhi” 言文一致) I have discussed elsewhere¹ the two intractable difficulties in “unification of written and spoken language” for modern Chinese language. First, premodern China has an independent and integrated classic writing system which is the main carrier of the national (elite) culture; second, instead of a unified spoken language, there are various kinds of local dialects in China. If the “unification of written and spoken language” serves the purpose of modernizing and constructing modern nation-state, then creating a new written language (Latinization for instance) for the spoken language at the expense of the classical writing system is not a wise choice. But Lu Xun and his radical comrades endorsed “Latinization” for another reason, a desire for radical enlightenment, that is, to let everyone speak out and write down his or her own feelings and interests. Here Wang Zengqi finds the affinity of Lu Xun’s opinion and the proposition of *Tales and Songs*, “if you can read, then you can understand them, but if you cannot read, it doesn’t matter, you can listen to the stories and operas, and you will like them,” and “use the perspective of common people to write.”

Indeed, Wang explicitly elaborates Lu Xun’s radical thoughts in the 1930s on folk art and literature in particular and the culture and life-world of the working people in general. First,

¹ Xie Jun, “How to Imagine China in Late-Qing Period? Review on Wang Feng’s *The Transition of World and the Transformation of Essay*” (“ruhe zai jindai xiangxiang zhongguo? – du wangfeng shiyuntuiyi yu wenzhangxingti” 如何在近代想象中国?——读王风《世运推移与文章兴替》), 《现代中文学刊》, 2016年第2期。 *Journal of modern Chinese Literature*, (*xiandai zhongwen xuekan* 现代中文学刊) No.2 (2016).

folk literature is the literature of small producers and therefore the background of its birth and its basic topic are “laboring”, which fundamental attribute determines its aesthetic characteristics to be “fresh and pure, robust and vigorous.” Wang correctly points out Lu Xun’s fondness for folk opera and especially the “folk ghosts”, as elaborated by Tsuneki Maruo (丸尾常喜).¹ We can find the freshness and robustness of these “ghosts” under Lu Xun’s pen, but are not such features also the aesthetic features of Qiaoyun and other figures in Wang’s later writings? Neither Wang nor Lu denies the influence of feudal culture and the ruling ideology on Folk Literature, which mostly comes from the writing ideological system, the “Chinese characters,” but on the other hand they also stress the laboring people’s wisdom for survival and their energy of resistance. About the belittled and derisive jokes about the working people, Lu Xun says, “for the grassroots Chinese themselves, they may not chat like this, even if they chat like this, they will not consider it as a joke.”² In this way, Lu Xun has already reached the opposite of his criticism of “national character” ten years before. Following Lu Xun’s opinion, Wang launches his own critique of the enlightenment discourse, arguing folk form is not just a tool for enlightenment, neither “popularization” or “enhancement.” About the famous slogan “putting new wine into old bottles,” Wang argues, “Many comrades in that period considered folk literature as an empty bottle, but what is in it is really good wine. We will benefit a lot if we drink this good wine.”³

¹ See Tsuneki Maruo’s discussion in *The Entanglement of Human and Ghost (renyugui de jiuge 人与鬼的纠葛)*, Beijing: Renmin wenzue press, 1995.

² Wang Zengqi, *Completed Collection of Wang Zengqi*, vol(3),69.

³ *Ibid.*

Wang talks many times about how his writing benefits from folk literatures and folk operas. At the beginning of this section, I have mentioned the ordinariness and concreteness of Wang's language style which to a large extent learns from the folk language. But language style is just one aspect, other influences from folk literature include his choice of subject matter, his perspective to observe the life and world, his method to shape a figure and to narrate a story, etc. Return to Wang's writing in the early 1980s, one remarkable feature about his presenting of the grassroots class is perhaps his approach toward folk's perspective instead of the proletariat's perspective. Therefore, his literary world is not a world of working class and peasantry, but a world of "street and bazaars." Qiaoyun is a girl in the street of east big Nur. In 1988, Wang summarizes about such a world in his preface of *The Collection of Literature of Street and Bazaar* (*shijing xiaoshuo xuan*, 市井小说选), as follows:

There is no epic in the fictional world of Street and Bazaar Literature. There are only trivial lives of common people. There is no hero. All are about ordinary people. Who are the people in the street and the bazaar? They are all living small things.¹

In the world of big Nur, these living small things are petty shopkeepers, peddlers, craftsmen, the unskilled laborers. They are individual laborers and small-producers. Their social status is humble, their economic resource limited, and many of them work laboriously and industriously, even so, they barely have enough to eat and warm themselves. But they also "tell tales and sing songs," and have their own meaningful world. For Wang Zengqi, Street and Bazaar Fictions are fictions that try to understand, describe and (re)present the life-world of

¹ Wang Zengqi, in "Preface of *The Collection of Literature of Street and Bazaar*," (*shijing xiaoshuo xuan xu*, 《市井小说选》序) in *See Completed Collection of Wang Zengqi* (*Wang Zengqi quanji*, 汪曾祺全集), vol(4), 235.

the streets and bazaars. In this sense, Wang claims, the writers of streets and bazaars are socialists in a broad sense, a kind of socialist literature as the opposition of “elite literature.” But such a “socialist” literature may not include the socialist realism which is required by Lukács and others to present any events narrated inherently significant because of the direct involvement of the characters in the world history. There is no epic but only the trivial happiness and bitterness of the “living small things” in a fragmentary, prosaic world, as Wang makes clear in expounding his aesthetic interests for an earthworm seller, “The matchbox makers, the garbage collector, water flea picker and sophora flower bud producer...I have interests on all of them. I want to know them. What do they eat and what do they think? Or, to use your term, their material life and their spiritual life.”¹ This “your” refers to two figures, one university professor and one science researcher, created by Wang as representatives of the intelligentsia, who consider the “earthworm seller” as lower form of life if not the garbage of society. It is clear that Wang’s indignation and hostility toward such an enlightenment discourse revived in early 1980s. Wang fights back; for him, this earthworm seller is a person with so much glamour - he is heathy, vigorous, earns his own living with his own hands. Besides, Wang (re)presents his meaning and value which cannot be judged and evaluated by the outside force, for instance, the standard of modernization. Like Qiaoyun, the existential meaning comes from his laboring body and his life-world. Or, “in the air we have breathed, among people we could

¹ See Wang Zengqi, “Earthworm Seller” (“mai qiuyin de ren” 卖蚯蚓的人), in *Completed Collection of Wang Zengqi*, vol(2), 65.

have talked to, women [men] who could have given themselves to us,”¹ as Benjamin chants in these poetic words. Here, Wang Zengqi’s endorsement of common people’s life-world and his hostility toward both left elitism in Mao’s period and New Enlightenment in the post-Mao period is evidently exhibited.

The Legacy and the Debt III: Individuality, Ethical World and Property

However, Wang’s socialist perspective in the 1980s was already a little different from Zhao Shuli’s. Cai Xiang notes that in the early 1960s, even though Zhao bravely criticized the party policy and described the problems in collectivization, he never denied the legitimacy of socialist road and the collective labor - that is, if collective labor ends, there would be divisions of wealth in the rural classes.² However, Wang’s writings almost avoid the socialist and collective period, and return to what Cai Xiang calls the “deeply buried” memory of individual labor and private ownership in the pre-PRC years.³ Wang Zengqi actually was not unique at the period, indeed in the year around 1980, with the economic reform carried out in the rural area, a new mode of production – individual labor and “distribution according to labor” (“anlaofenpei” 按劳分配) – was implicitly endorsed by the reform regime. Indeed lots of the “Reform Literature” (“gaige wenxue” 改革文学) propagated the policy of “Household Contract Responsibility System” (“jiating liancha chengbao zerenzhi” 家庭联产承包责任制)

¹ See, Benjamin, Walter, *Illuminations*, New York: Schocken Books, 1969, 254.

² Cai Xiang, *Revolution and Its Narratives: China's Socialist Literary and Cultural Imaginaries, 1949-1966*, 289.

³ *Ibid.*, 290-296.

and encouraged the individual labor to replace the collective labor. For instances, we have Gao Xiaosheng's *Li Shunda Builds a House* (*Li Sunda zaowu* 李顺大造屋), *The Poor Chen Huangsheng* (*loudou huzhu chenhuanheng* 漏斗户主陈奂生), Gu Hua's *A Small Town Called Hibiscus*, He Shiguang's *On the Threshing Ground* (*xiangchangshang* 乡场上) and so on. But just as Lin Ling's recent article about *On the Threshing Ground* points out, ¹this kind of "individual labor and private ownership" could not be reduced to the abstract categories of property rights in the textbooks of economics. Rather, as I have elaborated at the beginning a defective category, it is connected with a concrete political environment and the ideological imagination of a new ethical world. What is it? Let's be a little patient and go back to Zhao Shuli's legitimization of socialist politics first.

In the following paragraphs, I want first to introduce Cai Xiang's excellent elaboration of the moral foundation of socialism in his analysis of Zhao Shuli's 1946 fiction *The Land* (*diban* 地板). It is a good point for my discussion because at this moment, the controversial project of collectivization was not yet put on socialist agenda. The central issue in the political debate in the novel is, the land or the labor, which can claim the power to create the world?

For the proponent of land, Wang Laosi, exploitation is reasonable, because the land belongs to the landlord, with the original contract and the ownership supported by the property regime

¹ Lin Ling, "Another Possibility of 'Revisiting the 1980s:' *On the Threshing Ground* and the Strength and Crisis of the 'Distribution According to Labor.'" ("chongfan bashiniandai' de lingyizhong keneng: *xiangchangshang* yu 'anlaofenpei' yuanze de shengji yu weiji" 重返“八十年代”的另一种可能——《乡场上》与“按劳分配”原则的生机与危机) *Hangzhou shifan daxue xuebao* (杭州师范大学学报) No.5 (2012),46-52.

of Chinese villages. Therefore, the landlord has the exclusive rights to determine the amount of rent and to collect rent. For such a typical contract theory, there could be another way to question, that is, in terms of the legitimacy of the original contract. But unlike later socialist novels, Zhao Shili avoids this issue due to the party policy of the period. Zhao focuses on a more fundamental issue, what is the ethical foundation of the private property regime? Hence, the debate should start with the discussion of natural state.

For the supporter of labor, Wang Laosan, there are two reasons. The first is the labor power theory. He divides the land into two concepts, the “deserted mountain” and “good soil.” The deserted mountain is nothing but a state of nature and itself cannot be the basis for the creation of a lifeworld. Only when combined with human labor, such as Old Chang’s grandfather’s industrious work, can the deserted mountain be transformed into good soil.¹ Therefore, because it is the labor which creates the lifeworld, the laborer naturally becomes the creator of the world. And he or she thus is able to attain a type of political and cultural dignity, and is endowed with legitimate political and economic rights of working on the land and of the acquisition of the products of land, which is the results of his/her labor. On the other hand, Cai Xiang also finds that the dignity of laborer is part of the traditional morality, “In China’s rural society labor always has been seen as an individual’s virtue. An individual who, through his own labor, obtains the necessities of life not only commands the respect of others but essentially

¹ Cai Xiang, *Revolution and Its Narratives: China's Socialist Literary and Cultural Imaginaries, 1949-1966*, 258.

helps maintain ‘the rule of ritual.’”¹ But the traditional morality also contains other kinds of “feudal morality,” for example, “those who do mental labor rule, those who do manual labor are ruled.” In this sense, then Chinese’s revolutionary politics in 20th century on one hand re-appropriated certain traditional virtues, especially the virtues of the working people, while on the other side overturned the traditional ideological morality imposed by the feudal class. Cai Xiang considers the politics of labor and the laborer’s dignity to be extremely important to the newly-formed individuality of Chinese people and the politics of modern and contemporary Chinese society.

The aspect of “labor” is also connected with Wang Laosan’s second group of reason. The heaven, the justice, equality, and the sympathy from an organic society. In this story, the moral problem is crucial issue for the illegitimacy of land and exploitation theory. The cruelty of class exploitation is exhibited in the case of Old Chang “starved to death.” In such a narrative, Cai Xiang points out, class relations are shown to be not only irrational but also devoid of sympathy. Benevolence and sympathy are always the inherent requirement of a good society. By utilizing such traditional virtue, the story legitimizes the revolutionary politics which promises to create a better, more benevolent and just society. However, socialism not only brings the benevolence and sympathy, but also brings the modern equalitarian politics. Since the laborer is the creator of the new life-world, most members of the grassroots class should have equal rights as equal individual. That is to say, the dignity politics of laborer adds the element of radical equality to

¹ *Ibid.*, 277.

the Chinese modern understanding of justice. And in this sense, Cai Xiang thinks Zhao is incredibly modern and radical.

All these principles, such as labor creating the world, the dignity of labor, individuality, sympathy, social justice, a society of equality, appear in *A Tale of Big Nur*. In this sense, Wang Zengqi is also incredibly modern and radical. But would not Qiaoyun's laboring body prepare the arriving of global capitalism through its labor power? To answer this question, a more sophisticated observation is necessary.

Indeed, I think it is not completely correct for Cai to argue that "the importance of labor power as highlighted in 'The Land' – including its sacralization – is a form of modern expression that also transcends the narrative paradigm of bourgeois modernity."¹ If we look closely at Locke's theoretical elaboration of property in *The Second Treatise of Government*, we will find very similar discussion about "natural land" ("deserted mountain") and "cultivated land" ("good soil") - "Whatsoever then he removes out of the state that nature hath provided, and left it in, he hath mixed his labour with, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his property," as well as the highlight of "labor power,"² "This labour then which puts the greatest part of value upon land, without which it would scarcely be worth anything," "labour makes the far greatest part of the value of things."³ At first glance, Locke looks even more radical than Zhao Shuli or Wang Zengqi, as he argues once man has mixed

¹ *Ibid.*, 260.

² John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, 128.

³ *Ibid.*, 136.

his labour with land, he could make the land (not only the product) his property. And indeed, unlike what Lin Ling argues, the modern property right or *Homo economicus* is merely anthropocentric right and lacks moral foundation,¹ at least in Locke's theory, the moral principles for the birth of modern private property rights are clearly illustrated: first, the benevolence of God, "God has given us all things richly," for our convenience, and make us not starve; second, the principle of moderate acquisition, waste is not allowed, "Whatever is beyond this, is more than his share, and belongs to others."² But at the latter part of Locke's elaboration, in order to legitimize the exclusive possession, such a moral foundation of moderate acquisition is gradually eroded.

Indeed the huge divergence between Locke's *Homo economicus* and the post-Mao laborer and small producer, as we find in the figures of Qiaoyun, Li Shunda and Chen Huansheng in Gao Xiaosheng's stories, as well as Zhu Yuanda in Lu Wenfu's *The Man From Peddler's Family* (*xiaofan shijia* 小贩世家) which I will discuss very soon, deviates from the difference between the exclusive possession and moderate acquisition. We need to keep in mind that although departing from the Christian moral system, Locke's theory ideologically served for the landowner class in the enclosure movement who soon became one important part of the new bourgeoisie class; Locke asked for exclusive private property rights of land from the common ownership. We need to know in ancient system of arable farming in open fields,

¹ See Lin Ling, "Another Possibility of 'Revisiting the 1980s:' *On the Threshing Ground* and the Strength and Crisis of the 'Distribution According to Labor.'"

² Jone Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, 130.

although common land is owned by monarch, the monarch's property rights are not exclusive, and the rights are shared by the poor peasants who live in the common. Therefore, Locke needs to deal with the huge gap between labor and the rights of laborer in the Christian ethics and the exclusive possession and accumulation of wealth (land and capital) which served the rising capitalist class. He has to invent two expedient supplementary terms to achieve the coherence of his theory. The first one is the precondition of unlimited resource. Locke repeats again and again that there is always enough and good left in common for others, therefore the enclosure will not impair other person's rights to labor and to possess. The second one is the invention of money. Locke argues, "The exceeding of the bounds of his just property not lying in the largeness of his possession, but the perishing of anything uselessly in it."¹ Therefore once money was invented, he could exchange his possession for money before they spoiled and avoid the perishing of anything useless in his property. But if no-waste principle derives from the moderate acquisition principle required by Christian ethics, it seems money does not resolve the fundamental problem, which is the anxiety of inequality. However, as long as the resource is unlimited, the largeness of certain people's possession will still not impair other's "convenience." Perhaps in Locke's time, there was still large amount of common land left for other cultivator's enclosure, which allowed Locke to say "enough and good left in common for others." But for Locke these "others" definitely do not include the bondman, and peasants working on the common land, or the Indians in America. Indeed, the world is not empty and

¹ *Ibid.*, 138.

the resource is far from unlimited, not as Locke's theory has presupposed. Putting all these into conclusion, it is obvious that Locke cannot fill the gap between the morally justified labor and the accumulation of wealth guaranteed by exclusive private property rights.

But the background of the (re)presentation of individual labor, the laborer's individuality, as well as their un-exclusive property right in the late 1970s and early 1980s was entirely different, which necessarily leads to a different imagination about the ethical world of a (post)socialist civil society. "Household Contract Responsibility System" is not exclusive property ownership, but is closer to a kind of village joint property. The private peasant and his family can use or even occupy the land for the products for a long period, but he could not title it and exclude other villagers' right to reclaim it. Such a measure is used to preclude the class re-division in rural society as Zhao Shuli worried, and to preclude the exclusive possession and the exceeding accumulation. As such, it is a kind of precautionary measure to protect the ethical world of small producers. I think it is important to make clear here that, it is the world of laborers and small producers, rather than the world of farmers as proto-capitalists as in Locke's theory, that contribute to the first stage of the development of post-Mao civil society. It is the working people in the grassroots class and the life world of street and bazaar that are the fundamental component of Wang Zengqi's socialist civil society. For Qiaoyun, her individuality does not derive from the property or wealth which she possesses, but comes from the laboring moment when she struggles for a slightly better life. And the same is for Chen Huansheng, Li Shunda, Feng Yaoba in rural reform literature. And it is also for Zhu Yuanda in

The Man from Pedlar's Family. I want to use this last text to conclude my discussion about the ethical world and individuality of small producer. This time, a peddler.

The Man from Pedlar's Family was published in 1979, two years before *A Tale of Big Nur*. Its author is Lu Wenfu, who, like Wang Zengqi, could be considered as another internal dissent of the socialist realism. In 1956, his short story *In the Depth of an Alley* (*xiaoxiang shen chu* 小巷深处) aroused controversial debates because its protagonist was a prostitute girl rather than the proletariat, the workers, peasants and soldiers. But she was a poor person living in an alley. The next year, Lu, together with other young writers such as Gao Xiaosheng and Fang Zhi, planned to found a magazine titled "Explorer," which claimed to intervene life and to explore the depth of socialist society.¹ However, his misfortune came sooner than Zhao Shuli. In the following year he was casted as a "rightist" and sent to the countryside. In the late 1970s, in a different political atmosphere, he decided to continue to write the "trivial living things" in the depth of alley. The peddler Zhu Yuanda is the most famous one.

The "family" in the title should be literally translated as "Hereditary House" because the Chinese word "shijia" (世家) comes from ancient historian Si Maqian (145BC-90BC) and his *Records of The Grand Historian*, which records the most influential aristocratic family in pre-Qin China. But this does not mean Zhu Yuanda comes from an aristocratic family, rather, his

¹ See, Zhou Genhong, "Explorer Literary Society: It's Ferment, the Critique toward it, and its Rehabilitation," (*Tanqiu zhe wenxue shetuan de yunniang, pipan yu pingfan guocheng* 《探求者》文学社团的酝酿、批判与平反过程) *Zhongshan fengyu* (钟山风雨), No.6 (2011).

“family from generation to generation has been engaged in peddling.”¹ With a sense of humor, such a rhetoric indeed reveals the literary tradition of “Common People’s Literature” (pingmin wenzue 平民文学) which Lu ties to connect himself with. Why should “family from generation to generation has been engaged in peddling” not be considered as an influential family for the grand history? We can easily find the influence of what Cai concludes as the labor’s dignity and radical equality of 20th century China. But now the peddler is a little closer to the “economic man” than the porter. For example, Zhu has his precious property inherited from his ancestors, “a brightly lacquered won-ton carrying pole”, which is unlike Qiaoyun’s ordinary carrying pole. And what’s more important, he is more rationally with regard to the economic profits and is skilled at his business, making and selling won-ton dumplings. In the socialist period, his illegal business in black market was unsurprisingly accused of profiteering and in the first year of the Cultural Revolution, his house was marked as “Evil Den of Capitalism.” But Zhu Yuanda is not a capitalist or proto-capitalist, the narrator argues:

If I could be counted a member of the proletariat, then how could he, being poorer and more wretched than I, be considered a capitalist? ²

This “I” is a cadre and is much richer than Zhu. Zhu is poorer and more wretched because his family has “eight mouths to feed in all.” Such an expression reminds me of Qiaoyun’s story, “There were three mouths to feed now and neither of the men was able to make any money.” It was the first time for contemporary Chinese writers to represent economic issues in literature, and it was natural that at this moment the figure of “economic man” appeared. But could Zhu

¹ See in *Best Chinese Stories*, 119.

² *Ibid.*, 125

Quanda be considered as a prototype of “capitalist”? For both his critics (in the Cultural Revolution and also the leftists nowadays who accused the “Reform Literature” of preparing the capitalist road) and his supporters (the liberal observers and the economists who find the seed of property rights and market economics in the year around 1980), their hasty evaluations fail to distinguish the “moderate acquisition” from the “exceeding possession.” A small producer differs from a capitalist, or a possessive individual, not because of the degree, but because of the meaning of individuality, property rights, and the ethos between them are fundamentally different. For example, Balibar, in his “‘Possessive Individualism’ Reversed: From Locke to Derrida,”¹ argues that in Locke’s original text about labor and property there is a moment of appropriation rather than impropriation for the “individuality.” For Balibar, it is not the alienated labor in land and products as property, or the abstract and subjective self-consciousness of the unalienable subject, but the moment of appropriating or possessing of the laboring body that produces the individuality. Perhaps this “appropriation” could be explained with Hegel’s famous discussion on the slave’s individuality,

Work, on the other hand, is desire held in check, fleetingness staved off; in other words, work forms and shapes the thing. The negative relation to the object becomes its form and something permanent, because it is precisely for the worker that the object has independence. This negative middle term or the formative activity is at the same time the individuality or pure being-for-self of consciousness which now, in the work outside of it, acquires an element of permanence. It is in this way, therefore, that consciousness, qua worker, comes to see in the independent being [of the object] its own independence. ²

¹ See, in *Constellations* Volume 9, 2002(3), 299-317.

² Hegel, G.W.F., *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Oxford, New York, Toronto, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1977, 118.

For Hegel, it is with this negative middle term, the activity of doing labor, or “appropriation,” that the object acquires its form and the “self” obtains his individuality. The “laboring” therefore is the middle term which links the three together, the laboring consciousness, the “appropriation”, and the acquisition in which the work is congealed. It therefore becomes self-sufficient. Perhaps with the help of Hegel, we can understand why in *The Man from Peddler’s Family*, not only the peddler, the laboring subject, but his laboring tools, the “brightly lacquered won ton carrying pole” are so important. Lu Wenfu gives us a close-up of its exquisite workmanship:

It was a miniature portable kitchen complete with cupboards, water tanks, wood shed, water canisters kept hot by surplus heat and storage compartments for salt, oil and spices.¹

Perhaps this exquisite workmanship is itself a product which work cultivates and endures and “is held in check.” Yet in the narrative, the tool is the extension of the laboring hand, a material workshop where labor cultivates and endures. At one end of the pole, it is the laboring body, the individual with dignity, at the other end, it is the won-ton dumplings. Around the dumplings is the livelihood of Zhu and Zhu’s family, as well as the friendship between him and “me,” an intellectual, “Our lives were so difficult. Every night he brought me a little warmth.”² At any rate, it is a self-sufficient life-world of people in the street. Then Lu’s criticism for the revolutionary consciousness in Mao’s period (represented by the narrator “I”) is that its lofty and abstract great words lead to the ruin of Zhu’s self-sufficient livelihood in the depth of the

¹ *Best Chinese Stories*, 128.

² *Ibid.*, 121.

alley. At its symbolic summit, in the heyday of the crazy Cultural Revolution, this won-ton carrying pole, which “had always provided warmth and a full stomach”¹ was destroyed by the Red Guards. If the figure of Zhu possesses both the old virtue (a capable man who with his hands obtains the necessities of life of his family) and the new virtue (the dignity of a diligent working man as well as his strong sense of equality between him and “me,”), then his sufferings in Mao’s period reveal the problematic and crisis of the abstract political and cultural revolution. The “noble theory” rarely helps the livelihood of Zhu and his family.

In the narrative of the story, what helps is the labor of Zhu’s children and wife. Two paragraphs after the tragic scene of the ruin of the livelihood, the author presents the glorious resilience of the grassroots class:

After dust about three days later, I saw Zhu’s wife leading along their four children. There was a length of string in each of their hands. At dawn the five of them returned one after the other. Each had a great bundle of waste paper tied to his or her back... By picking up enough of it, you could earn four or five yuan a day. So it’s true – Heaven does allow a way out!²

Here is a scene very close to the scene of “Qiaoyun carrying the load” presented at the beginning of this section. Even in the sympathetic tone, we can still find the dignity of laboring bodies and the vigor and strength of the working people. And the scene also resembles the genre painting admired by Hegel in talking about Dutch paintings, “through their activity, industry, bravery, and frugality they have attained, in their sense of a self-wrought freedom.” Or, we could think of Wang Zengqi’s “living small things” in “street and bazaar” and Zhao

¹ *Ibid.*, 127.

² *Ibid.*, 128.

Shuli's "perspective of common people." But there is something more. With their own hands, they could earn "four or five yuan," the moderate acquisition through which their labor could endure and their livelihood could sustain. Indeed, what is extolled here is the spirit of "earning one's livings by one's own hand" (zishiqli 自食其力), a kind of ethics inherited from the 20th century China and reinforced in this period with the formulation of a certain kind of economic man. But the property or acquisition can only be moderately obtained because there is a kind of "heaven" or justice that supervises the world. It is a heaven closer to Locke's moral heaven at the beginning who kindly provides the industrious laborer convenience and "does allow a way out", rather than the heaven which Locke assumes provides unlimited resource and allowing unlimited possession. All these constitute the small producer's ethical world. But is it possible that the Lockean "possessive individual" will appear? I will talk about it in the next section.

4.3 A Proto-Capitalist and the Crisis of Small Producer's Ethical World

Maximize Value or Not?

I have already exhibited individual laborer's dignity and small producer's new ethical world. Such joyous atmosphere runs through a series of works at that time. Particularly in some award-winning story like *On the Threshing Ground* (*xiangchangshang*, 乡场上), a poor man Feng Yaoba, who once "lived like a dog" now can straighten his back, because the "Household Contract Responsibility System" (家庭联产承包责任制) and the free open market has enabled him to fulfill his needs through his own labor as an individual laborer. The meaning conveyed by this text is clear - only through the reform on property rights can peasant individuals regain their freedom, independence, and dignity. But beneath such bright figure, the real politics is the transformation from common property to private property. This reminds me Harold Demsetz's famous observation in his article "Toward a Theory of Property Rights":

If a single person owns land, he will attempt to maximize its present value by taking into account alternative future time streams of benefits and costs and selecting that one which he believes will maximize the present value of his privately-owned land rights. ¹

At the first glance, the series of rural reform novellas by Gao Xiaosheng, such as *Chen Huansheng* (漏斗户主陈奂生) *Li Shunda Builds His House* (李顺大造屋), describe the similar transformation from communal property to private property, and how it enabled peasant individuals to internalize the externalities so as to enhance their enthusiasm for production.

¹ Demsetz, Harold, "Toward a Theory of Property Rights," *The American Economic Review*, Vol. 57, No. 2(1967), 355.

However, this is only one aspect of the problem. Harold Demsetz and the political economy tradition before him have not raised the question of different individuals' different capabilities to internalize the externalities, and their different points of departure. If we do not view from abstract theory but from concrete economic history, we will find such proposition for transference of property rights has a historical condition, in which some individuals are more active, while others are not; and the transference of property rights seeks to maximize the benefits of the individuals who are the most active. In China's context, this is the so-called "breaking the iron bowl." (打破大锅饭) This process was not without pain. In the rural reform novels at the turning point of the 1970s and the 1980s, some literary works have paid attention to this problem. For example, in Jin He's *Not Just Nostalgia* ("bujinjin shi liunian" 不仅仅是留恋), the distribution of the means of production during the privatization is determined by "drawing lots" (抓阄); and a family with insufficient laborers happens to get the worst animals, however, the village's party secretary could no longer use the power of the collective to redistribute. This symptomatic story reveals the incipient signs of the drastic gap between the wealth and the poor that was about to come in the next three decades. It is exactly what Zhao Shuli worried, the redivision of class.

The novella *Descendants of Lu Ban* (鲁班的子孙) also starts with the similar ominous scene. The Little Carpenter's opening his own carpenter workshop is predicated upon the disintegration of the collective workshop, which does not mean emancipation for everyone. To Fu Kuan, whose laboring capacity is weak and who has a large family to feed, this is a disaster.

And more importantly, this brings crisis to the traditional ethics of mutual aid and rural community and the socialist ethics of the equality of everyone. Demsetz's theory does not deal with such ethical problems, precisely because the entire tradition of liberal economics is established on the rejection of such a traditional or socialist ethics, which is why this real problem is obscured in the liberal tradition.

However, another more important question is, Demsetz's assumption that clear property rights will enable the individuals to "maximize its present value" does not conform to the principle of "moderate acquisition." What the individual laborer and small producer's pursue is the peaceful life and the moderate prosperity. For them, there is not yet the question of wealth accumulation or even capitalist accumulation, and they would not demand to exploit others and themselves to the exceeding of the bounds. For instance, Gao Xiaosheng's serial novella centered on the peasant figure Chen Huansheng, of whom we have already mentioned the *The Poor Chen Huangsheng* (*loudou huzhu chenhuan sheng* 漏斗户主陈奂生). After a few years he wrote another novella called *Chen Huansheng Changes His Job* (*chen huansheng zhuan ye* 陈奂生转业). In this story, Chen Huansheng, through his personal relation with Party Secretary Wu in the city, was recruited by the "brigade-operated rural industries" (队办企业) as salesman. Then, because he successfully obtains the production material in short supply, he was awarded the bonus fees of 600 RMB, which amounts to a peasant's whole year's income. The narrator describes, "as he counts the bills, his two hands were shaken. He kept thinking over and over

again: ‘Is this right?’”¹ In the next novel, *Chen Huansheng Signs the Production Contract* (陈奂生包产), Chen quits this job of salesman. Obviously, he doesn’t want to take advantage of his human resources to maximize his present value. Here, the way to obtain cash conflicts with the laborer and small producer’s ethics. But such stories also reveal the anxiety and crisis of the ethical world of small producers.

The Spirit of A Proto-Capitalist in 1983

The most vivid and controversial manifestation of this ethical crisis is Wang Runzi’s *Descendants of Lu Ban* (鲁班的子孙). Lu Ban is an ancient Chinese carpenter and is the patron saint of Chinese carpenters. In this story, there are two descendants of Lu Ban, one is the Old Carpenter, the leader of the carpenter’s cooperative in the village in Mao’s era, the other is the Little Carpenter, his step-son, who was criticized for opening a private-owned carpenter’s workshop during the Cultural Revolution and had to roam to other places as temporary worker. As descendants of Lu Ban, two carpenters have inherited the exquisite skills of carpentry, and both have inherited the hard working spirit. But there are conflicts between different kind of ethics. Indeed, this entire novel revolves around the crisis of the ethics. But what is the nature of this conflicts?

From the beginning, the Old Carpenter happily waited his step-son to return home. The theme of “returning” is popular at the period, but the happiness in this story may come from

¹ Gao, Xiaosheng, *Selected Stories of Gao Xiaosheng* (Gao Xiaosheng jingxuan ji 高晓声精选集), Beijing: Beijing yanshan press, 2006, 51.

the establishment of the small producer's ethical world. Hence, the returning in the new era comes with the feeling of emancipation which derives from the reaffirmation of the daily world. However, I also talk in the last section that such labourer and small producer ethics is closely connected to the ethics of socialist laborer, this is why Old Carpenter is at the same time a socialist, a builder of the socialist cooperative of carpentry. Then the happiness is added with kind of uneasiness - this carpenter's cooperative has disintegrated. Such "disintegration" hence takes on the allegorical meaning in the conscious level of the text. The novella speaks through Old Carpenter's mouth: "Socialism cannot be abandoned in the midway."¹ It also speaks through the mouth of the weak and heavily-burdened carpenter Fu Kuan: "The Communist Party has changed its mind, leaving us poor peasants behind! ..."² Such plain language has already engaged in the political debate in the 1980s about "capitalism or socialism?", which was the main reason why this novel was criticized by numerous critics. These critics of course would not say that it is not right to be nostalgic for socialism; rather, they borrow the discourse of "tradition" vs. "modern", in which capitalism is taken to be "modern", while Mao's era and the more traditional society are combined together and treated as the "premodern." Hence for them, the ethical crisis in the novella was treated as the ethical crisis when the premodern society encountered the modern era, rather than a ethical crisis of the disintegration of socialism. Due to the mainstream discourse of modernization and teleology, the defence for Lu Ban's

¹ *Descendants of Lu Ban*, 231.

² *Descendants of Lu Ban*, 260

virtue – the traditional or socialist ethical world – is considered to be “ideologically incorrect” or even “anti-reform.”¹

These two political explanations have persuasive to some extent. But we need to discern more exactly what is Old Carpenter’s concerns, and what is Little Carpenter’s problems. Indeed, Little Carpenters has the similar labourer and small producer ethics, and even possesses the strength to change his own fate like Qiaoyun. This is what the narrator affirms, or at least what Old Carpenter affirms or tolerates. Nostalgic as he is about the carpentry cooperative, Old Carpenter also identifies with the spirit of individual’s honest labor. However, what he could not stand is his step-son’s aggressiveness in possessing wealth. He is wild enough to seek to maximize his individual interests at the expense of the external moral system and therefore is very similar to the spirit of the Machiavellian rebels as I have analyzed in Chapter Three. To Old Carpenter, such displeased feelings keeps accumulating. First he finds that Littler Carpenter does not show any sympathy for the closing down of the carpentry’s cooperative, which to him is just a competitor; and then he finds that Little Carpenter seeks to maximise his personal interest by maneuvering social relations; besides, he discovers that Littler Carpenter, for more efficient output, not only use every bit of time to exploit himself, but also exploits his fiancée, Old Carpenter’s daughter, by making her do heavy manual labor. We know John Stuart Mill ardently applauds such brutal domestic self-exploitation, and characterizes the peasants who till for their own property is tired like “beasts of burden”. But Karl Kautsky points out that such

¹ About these discussions, see, *Descendants of Lu Ban*, 286-290.

opinion is really the opinion of the obdurate admirer, who fails to see that the labourer and small producer's life is "occupied by nothing other than work – apart from time set aside for sleeping and eating."¹ No matter how we evaluate it, this is precisely an important means for possessive individuals to fully internalize external power (his own labor, his fiancée's labor) to achieve capitalist accumulation in the incipient stage of market economy, which obviously goes against the experience of independent labor with a little leisure in traditional agricultural society and even socialist period. However, what infuriates Old Carpenter the most is that Little Carpenter has completely abandoned the tradition of egalitarianism, mutual aid, gratitude, and the socialist ethics and morals; he ignores Fu Kuan's difficulty and rejects his participation in new carpenter shop, which completely destroys the ethical imagination of the "street and barzzar" community that I have analyzed in the last section. However, Little Carpenter has his own reasoning, which is shown in his interior monologue below:

Little carpenter began to sweat. He must not hesitate any longer, as it has come to such a situation. To be honest, the words from the couples of Fu Kuan made him hesitate, soften, and sympathize, thinking that maybe he should do as his father told. But he cannot. Uncle Fu Kuan, if you join the carpenter's workshop, how should we calculate the income in the future? If we really divide the income as Father proposed, you will split 8000 RMB from me in a mere year! How much wood material? How much money can I make with those furniture? How can we calculate this? I can suffer some small loss, but I cannot suffer loss this big! Father is old, while the days ahead belong to us; we are going to build a new house, get married, buy television, radio, and motorbikes... there are so many places that could use money. It would be reasonable, though, to pay you with the price of temporary migrant workers in the city. According to the state, the maximum price for them per day is 1.76 RMB, so the maximum I can give you is 800 RMB one year. 800 is not a small number. Where else can you make such good money? But people will say I am "exploiting" you. But what is "exploitation"? The state can hire laborer, why can't the individual employers? The

¹ Kautsky, Karl, *On Agrarian Question*, London: Zwan Publications, 1988, 110-111.

Japanese and American factories all hire laborers, how free that is! But for the moment, I cannot be the first one to hire you. According to Chief Lin, big men are still fighting, ... Uncle Fu Kuan, don't blame me for my ruthlessness. People change according to their situations. If you really cannot survive in the future, I will give you a hand out of our good old relations. But I cannot help you this time. You cannot join the carpenter's workshop!

If we compare it with the possessive individualism that MacPherson summarizes from European theories, we will find that in 1983's China, a more radical possessive individualism was taking shape. This of course has its reality background. The countryside of East Shandong province in Wang Runzi's novella and the countryside of East China in Gao Xiaosheng's novella, are the experimental zone of the economic reform, and these township enterprises were a big propelling power for China's economic takeoff in the late 1980s; and the propelling power of township enterprises consists of wild individuals like Little Carpenter. I would say they are even much wilder, because on the one hand they have the characteristics of the possessive individualism in the 17th century's European capitalism. The Little Carpenter makes clear distinction between "me" (the Little Carpenter), Father, and Uncle Fu Kuan. Besides, he also possesses the calculating rationality as precise as Robinson Crusoe, a strong desire for wealth ("money, house, television, radio, and motorbikes"), and a clear desire for capital's primitive accumulation ("8000RMB, How much wood material?"); he reduces Uncle Fu Kuan, a human, a member of his ethical community, into "labor power" and calculates its output and price. And above I also mentioned that he has also counted himself, his fiancée and his step-father as "labor power" and seeks to extend their labor hours as long as possible. This new moral shakes the traditional ethical world to its root, and contributes to Little Carpenter's "ruthlessness." We

can only say, the radical conflict of the possessive rationality of Little Carpenter and the ethical tradition of Chinese traditional society and socialist society is real.

However, what is more worth noting here is something new about the Chinese possessive individualism. For example, Little Carpenter does not rely on the formal guarantee such as free market, or protective government, or clear property rights. His biggest advantage is his connection with an official, Chief Lin. Chief Lin uses the public resources to support the private business of Little Carpenter and provides important information for him. Such information resources and institutional guarantee clearly plays a greater role in Little Carpenter's wealth accumulation than the factor of labor and techniques, which is why Little Carpenter does not need clear property rights to lower his risk. As suggested in the novel, the property rights in the beginning of 1980s did not have a clear form yet, the Little Carpenter's workshop has not got approval from the village's party secretary, hence is in the grey area between "legitimate" and "illegitimate", but his guarantee comes from his personal relations with Chief Lin as well as the profit transport between them. We find that it is because this special, unclear personal relation that rules out many competitors for Little Carpenter, which is why the beneficiaries of this opaque market finds it to have such strong stimulation. At the same time, through Little Carpenter's work of benefits, Chief Lin also hollows the public resource and directs it toward personal business. For the whole society, this partially open mechanism lowered the possible transaction cost caused by fair competition, and was particularly conducive to the rapid accumulation of capital in the overall environment of rare capital. Such a realistic recognition

of institutional environment and property rights by Little Carpenter at that time, in my opinion, is wilder, and it constitutes the secret for China's economic takeoff.

A Further Note on Property Rights

Such "wildness", for sure, has generated severe social inequality, and it is easy to imagine the ethical crisis thus caused. But the novel seeks the solution by returning to the ethical world of laborer and small producers. The deprivation of Little Carpenter triggers the fierce fight-back of Old Carpenter; and the coarse quality of Little Carpenter's works causes the collective attack of Little Carpenter by the community, finally driving Little Carpenter to leave the village, where Old Carpenter will once again rebuild a harmonious ethical community for the village. Hence, the end of the novella returns to the "trivial happiness" that appears at the beginning of the novella, and loses the intensity of the political and ethical shock.

However, from numerous empirical studies, this is not the reality of China's economic development in 1980s. According to the numerous empirical studies in *Property Rights and Economic Reform in China*¹ and other studies, the basic assumption on property rights that "a market economy requires property rights that are defined with sufficient clarity and enforced with sufficient predictability to encourage individuals and firms to expend effort, plan, invest, and bear risks"² cannot explain the actual situation of China's reform of property rights and

¹ Edited by C.Oi, Jean and Walder, Andrew G., *Property Rights and Economic Reform in China*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999.

² *Ibid.*, 1.

economic development. The empirical studies in the above book on the one hand are based on empirical materials rather than theoretical abstraction, on the other hand borrow the theoretical innovations of institutional economics and economic history, especially Harold Demsetz's notion of property as "bundle of rights". This notion treats property rights as a series of institutional means to solve more effectively the problem of wealth redistribution, and hence provides an approach for more realistic observation of Chinese experience. For example, these studies discover that "financial incentives for government agencies and officials, bribes, and kinship or other social ties (are) sufficient to guarantee the predictability or trust necessary for investment and risk-bearing"¹ Such observation fits the social contradictions described in this novella. To me, the situation of the "brigade-operated rural industries" of post-Mao era as presented in this novel is more accurate than many proposals of economic theories.

In our story, this wild possessive individual Little Carpenter has a more flexible and more realistic attitude towards property rights and institutional protection, which may offer us further reflection on the existing theory of property rights. For example, there is a particularly interesting observation in Demsetz's discussion, "suppose an owner of a communal land right, in the process of plowing a parcel of land, observes a second communal owner constructing a dam on adjacent land. The farmer prefers to have the stream as it is."² He analyzes, if this is private property, negotiation will only take place between two proprietors; but if it is communal property, then the negotiation will involve the whole community collective, hence generating

¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

² "Toward a Theory of Property Rights," 357.

huge transaction costs. This of course makes sense, but Demsetz's discussion has a big loophole. The reduction of transaction cost is not because the justness of "rights", but because private property rights puts the greater common problem between two proprietors with controlled information so that it could be conveniently dealt with. Morton J. Horwitz has raised more complicated observation in *The Transformation of American Law*,¹ that precisely because the private character of property rights, in the early period of United States' economic development, some investors who are well-informed would take advantage of the information he had and built dams and factories beforehand at lower transaction cost, so that their interest is maximized. But obviously this not only would harm the interest of other proprietors in the downstream, but also is unfair to the general public of the community who have no access to such advantageous information and supportive policies. Whereas, if public discussion is held to openly publicize the benefits and harm of building dams and factories, it will greatly raise the transaction cost, although it will also enable the broader public to share the benefits in an egalitarian way. Hence, according to Horwitz's observation, the property rights and its legal institution born in that period, as well as government officials at that time, actually supported this adventurous behavior of "appropriation in advance", which is strikingly different from Demsetz's abstract theory. For me, this example looks similar to the case of Little Carpenter. Little Carpenter is the pioneer of the reform, and also the pioneer of grabbing and appropriating public resources. Through his advantage in information and institutional resources, he is the first to open the

¹ Horwitz, Morton J., *The Transformation of American Law, 1780-1860*, Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1979.

private business of Carpenter's workshop, and he takes advantage of the fruits of the public resource of social productivity. Of course, he also undertakes the risk of ethical blame and political punishment. But he is also more motivated than others, as the peculiar form of property rights gives him greater expectation for returns than other members, due to the special personal connection he possesses. He recognizes that although his production has made use of public resources, the newly formed property rights would attribute the benefits to individuals. And the opaque private property rights has made sure that such appropriation behavior would not be held responsible. This could probably be the reason why the initiative of individuals could be so mobilized and why the capital accumulated so rapidly. In this light, it is precisely this opaqueness, instability, and inequality of political and legal institution that catalyzes the rapid expansion of capitalist production, also giving rise to our wild possessive individual.

Conclusion: The Wild Individual

Now we arrive at the final stage, the conclusion. But what kind of conclusion? Would it offer a way out? In the preface I said I will explore the trail with my own feet, but I am not a Cartesian walker who only walks straight ahead in a forest in order to get out of it, rather, I am an Althusserian walker, who “seeking his path on the plain, never finds anything but another plain stretching out before him.”¹ That is to say, it is not an expedition for the origin or an end, it is an endless expedition toward the deepest of the virgin forests, from the presence to the absence, toward the void and therefore the beginning of the world.

This is also the requirement of my method of “thick description” which refuses any single conclusion. Clifford Geertz tells us an interesting story at the end of the introduction of his interpretative theory of culture,

There is an Indian story - at least I heard it as an Indian story - about an Englishman who, having been told that the world rested on a platform which rested on the back of an elephant which rested in turn on the back of a turtle, asked (perhaps he was an ethnographer; it is the way they behave), what did the turtle rest on? Another turtle. And that turtle? "Ah, Sahib, after that it is turtles all the way down."²

I start from the appearance of the world, the enlightenment subject, the “Human” writ large and the *Homo economicus*. Then, as in this Indian story, I find the huge elephant behind it. In Chapter Two, I show the “enlightening posture” is no more than the wish-fulfillment of the rising intellectuals and a kind of monotheist enlightenment that intends to “enlighten” others.

¹ Louis Althusser, *Philosophy of the Encounter: Later Writings, 1978-87*, New York and London: Verso, 2006, 191.

² “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture,” 28-29.

Then we find the “others,” the perspectives of a lumpen-proletariat, a Maoist and a lady of petty bourgeoisie, as well as their struggles for power and cultural politics. In Chapter Three, I revisit the theatrical setting of the novel *Human, Ah Human*, in which I find behind the humanist hero an encounter of the Machiavellian wild individual, the philistines who pursue earthly happiness, and the romantics. In Chapter Four, after a close-up of the *Homo economicus*, I detect the conjuncture of various kinds of defective figures of “productive-possessive individuals”. But if this is the picture of this huge elephant, then this elephant is not just an elephant, but are the “endless turtles” below it, including the self-enlightenment of the proletariat, Mao’s mass politics, the cultural elites’ traumatic experience and their retreatment toward interiority, the Red Guards’ revolutionary spirit and their atheist enlightenment, the wild individual and his radical evilness as the result of Mao’s radical politics, the war between proletarian culture and bourgeois culture in Mao’s China, the aesthetics of the laboring body, the ethics of labourer and small producer, the unlimited internalizing energy of the first possessive individual as a proto-capitalist. “Ah, Sahib, after that it is turtles all the way down,” or in Althusser’s words, “another plain stretching out before [me].” I will not say it is an endless process, but I have to admit my thick interpretations are intrinsically incomplete. I give the above classifying and counting of figures only as my escape. I need a closure, but I don’t want to make a monologue and offer a clear conclusion. Rather, I will extend my invitation for further explorations, debates, critiques and refinement, in order to plunge into the midst of the existential dilemma of life of this unclear world.

But I have to give some temporarily conclusion, at least to show my target and the path I have cleared, and therefore to show my labour of deconstruction. I need also give some final interpretation of the “wild individual,” which appears in my title and in the whole dissertation several times in passing. What do I mean by “wild individual”?

What is “wild individual”? To answer it, I want first to explain what the “tamed individual” is. In Chapter One I have discussed the ideological investment upon the *Hibiscus Town*. I have shown that in the final output of Xie Jin’s film, the Crazy Qin became a Rightist hero, whose humanism, romanticism and heroism constituted an ideal figure of human, - “Human writ large.” We know such a figure shadows on Teacher Zhang in *The Class Master* and on He Jingfu in *Human, Ah, Human*, and I would add that at the middle of the 1980s, such a figure becomes an ideal image for the intellectual class, culminating in Liu Zaifu’s theory of subjectivity in 1985, a Kantian subjectivity.¹ Besides, in Xie Jin’s *Hibiscus Town*, we find the ideological relationship between Qin Shutian and Hu Yuyin is that of an intellectual “enlightening” a country girl, and the relationship between Qin and Wang Qiuhe is one between an enlightened intellectual and an ignorant lumpen proletariat. I discuss such an enlightenment discourse of civilization/barbarism in Chapter Two and Chapter Three, which has become the imaginary resolution and wish fulfillment of the new ruling class. Finally, at the end of the story, we find the resuscitation of Yuyin’s beancurd stand that symbolically indicates the resuscitation of China in the Reform Era, while Hu Yuyin takes on the image of an economic woman, a laboring

¹ Liu Zaifu, “On Literature Subjectivity” (“Lun wenxue de zhutixing” 论文学的主体性), in *Literature Review* (*Wenxue pinglun* 文学评论), No.5(1985) and No.6(1986).

body fitting smoothly with a possessive individual, which endorses a kind of property right with sufficient charity and enforced with sufficient predictability to encourage individuals and firms to expend effort, plan, invest, and bear risks. From all these three aspects and their unfolding in post-Mao China, we can sense that an idealist system about individual subject is taking shape or has already accomplished.

Therefore, if I say the individual subject has already been tamed, I mean that a meaningful world has already taken form and taken hold and therefore a materialist world gives birth to the idealist Forms, just as water “takes hold” and forms into ice. But in this dissertation I want to show, the tamed world is just the tip of the iceberg. I want to discover the elephant and the turtles, and I will argue that the elephant and the turtles are much wilder than the tamed individual subject on the surface of the idealist system.

Now, I think it is necessary to introduce Althusser’s later thoughts on “philosophy of encounter” or his “wild materialism” to explain the philosophical implication of this “wildness.” What is wild materialism? Using Marx’s case, Althusser argues, when Marx says “capitalist mode of production arose from the ‘encounter’ between ‘the owners of money’ and the proletariat stripped of everything but his labour-power,”¹ it is a materialist way of thinking; when Marx and Engels say that the proletariat is “the product of big industry,” they are “positioning themselves with the logic of the accomplished fact of the reproduction of the proletariat on an extended scale,”² that is to say, they use the “accomplished fact” to interpret

¹ Louis Althusser *Philosophy of the Encounter: Later Writings, 1978-87*, 187.

² *Ibid.*, 198.

the first encounter and therefore tame the wildness of the proletariat and in turn help to legitimize the logic of capitalism. As for Rousseau, Althusser points out, his “social contract” is determined by a historical conjuncture. Under Althusser’s reinterpretation, the meaning of “social contract” does not point to a transcendent, abstract assumption, but “to give men laws,” “take full account of the way the conditions present themselves, of the surrounding circumstances, of the ‘there is’ this and not that.”¹ Therefore the wild materialism emphasizes the contingency of the world, a real world of encounter. My study follows such a realist and materialist attitude in understanding the formulation of post-Mao Chinese world. My purpose is not to find the origin at this unclear beginning, or the seed of the later established ideas of “subject” and “human”, but try to get rid of them and to discover the first encounter of this world, a not yet tamed world. About such an encounter, Althusser writes down:

The “materialism” of the rain, the swerve, the encounter, the take [form, hold]...²

This rain of course is Epicurus’ rain of atoms, before the formation of the world, an infinity of atoms falling parallel to each other in the void. Here, at the first stage, for both Althusser and for me, the most important issue is the void. Void means no meaning. A world of existence without a meaning system. I think Althusser’s fond of void comes from Spinoza, who by reinterpreting God suspends the finality, morality and religion of his period and endows it with an infinite number of infinite attributes, the individuality. In Preface, I use Dirlik’s observation to point out the nihilist situation of the immediate post-Mao era, the socialist future loses its

¹ *Ibid.*,186.

² *Ibid.*,167.

immanence in the present. Therefore, it is a world of void. But I will argue such a nihilism starts from the “Cultural Revolution.” In both Chapter Two and Chapter Three, when talking about the red guards’ radical individualism, I use Mao’s philosophy and poem to prove such a rebellious spirit comes from Mao and argue it is his motive for the “Cultural Revolution,” –“In the freezing air of a million creatures compete/ for freedom.”¹ Here the void contributes to an atomistic world. Just as Epicurus’ rain of atoms, the simplest figure of individuality, Mao’s philosophy also encourages the radical egalitarianism and wild individualism. Before the formation of the world, there is no meaning, therefore each atom, every commoner, exists and means for itself. Thus, we arrive at the second stage, the *Causa Sui* and the swerve.

If void is the precondition, then the swerve is the decisive step for the world of encounter.

Let’s first have a close look at Althusser’s articulation of such a “swerve” or “clinamen:”

The clinamen is an infinitesimal swerve, “as small as possible;” “no one knows where, or when, or how” it occurs, or what causes an atom to “swerve” from its vertical fall in the void, and braking the parallelism in an almost negligible way at one point, induce an encounter with the atom next to it, and, from encounter to encounter, a pile-up and the birth of a world - that is to say, of the agglomeration of atoms induced, in a chain reaction, by the initial swerve and encounter. ²

The swerve is the atom’s swerve, and it does not exist for some End, Reason, or Meaning; it comes from the atom, an atom from nowhere, and it is only its infinitesimal swerve, but it may create a world. Such a philosophy justifies the meaning of the atom’s infinitesimal practice. And I believe it is crucial for our understanding of the post-Mao egalitarianism and

¹ This famous poem is titled “Changsha,” written in 1925, the translation is Willis Barnstone’s. See, Mao, Zedong, *The Poems of Mao Zedong*, 31.

² *Ibid.*,169.

individualism. In Chapter Four, I have mentioned Wang Zengqi's short story *The Earthworm Seller*. The earthworm seller sells the earthworm, it is an infinitesimal practice of an aged man from nowhere, but Wang argues for the existential meaning of his selling, labour and life, as well as the aesthetic and political energy of such an individual.¹ It is not the only case of the period; there is also Qiaoyun's bitterness and happiness in her life world, Song Baoqi's self-enlightenment, the atheist guiding light in the sunset, Li Qiaolin's "sacred purpose" of returning home, as well as Little Carpenter's desperate desire for wealth, each has his or her own passion, imagination and action. These swerves might pile up and contribute to the birth of the "world," but such a world is no longer a homogenous one. Each individual experiences the world in its dispersion and at such a utopian moment, there has not yet been a universal meaning system – whether socialist construction or capitalist wealth. Therefore, the meaning opens up before us in the facticity of this world, a wild world "a million creatures compete for freedom."

But if the swerve caused by the clinamen is "designed" only to prove the existence of human freedom even in the world of necessity, it is still a providential world. By eliminating this last onto-theological remainder, Althusser, a crazy man, tells us a real materialist world after the first encounter – it is a diabolical, entirely unknown one. Such an atomistic society, constituted by individuals endowed with conatus, that is, "the power and will 'to persevere in their being' and create a void in front of themselves in order to mark out the space of their

¹ See Wang Zengqi, *Completed Collection of Wang Zengqi (Wang Zengqi quanji, 汪曾祺全集)*, vol(3), Beijing: Beijing shifan daxue press, 1998, 64.

freedom there,¹ is a Hobbesian society in the perpetual war of all against all. In Chapter Three, when telling Li Qiaolin's story of "returning home," I have shown such a diabolical world and the radical evilness of a Hobbesian hero. It is a world in which everyone pursues freedom and self-preservation; it is also a world with collusions of powers everywhere, because the world is full of people, the Hobbesian hero has to clear the way before his own conatus. But I need to add that such a Hobbesian world is a world without the Leviathan, it is a world without the protection of contract theory and therefore without any form and law. Thus a Hobbesian hero is a Machiavellian hero, in the sense that not only a person from nowhere can establish himself somewhere, but also because he has courage to practice, to fulfill the "virtù". A "virtù" of doing everything he could to take hold of the situation. There is no God, no Principle, no Reason and no morality that precedes the hero's action and practice. "First go into the real battle, then we will know the results."² We see such quality not only on Li Qiaolin, but also on Little Carpenter in Chapter Four, who desperately tries to maximize his present interest by maneuvering every resource he could utilize to accumulate his capital and wealth, a devilish wildness with enormous aesthetic and political power. That is, the wild individual!

Good or Bad? Anyway, I conclude, it is real!

¹ Louis Althusser, *Philosophy of the Encounter: Later Writings, 1978-87*, 181.

² Jingfan and others, *The Public Letters*, 93.

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