



ACTA UNIVERSITATIS CAROLINAE  
**PHILOGICA 3/2021**



ACTA UNIVERSITATIS CAROLINAE

# Philologica

3/2021

JIŘÍ HUDEČEK and OLGA LOMOVÁ (eds.)

CHARLES UNIVERSITY  
KAROLINUM PRESS  
2022

Editors: Jiří Hudeček  
Olga Lomová

<https://karolinum.cz/journals/philologica>

© Charles University, 2022  
ISSN 0567–8269 (Print)  
ISSN 2464–6830 (Online)

## CONTENTS

---

Editor's note . . . . .	7
Jan Vrhovski: Traverses Between Cognitive Consonance and Existential Crisis: Notes on Jiang Menglin's Pragmatist Notion of <i>Rensheng Guan</i> and His Views on Suicide from 1919 . . . . .	9
Lenka Chaloupková: The Chinese Art Song, <i>yishu gequ</i> : Between Tradition and Modernity . . . . .	29
Martin Blahota: Hayama Yoshiki's "The Prostitute" in Taiwanese and Manchukuo Proletarian Literature . . . . .	47
Dušan Andriš: Writing Personal Essays between the Hundred Flowers Campaign and the Cultural Revolution: Feng Zikai, Conformist and Authentic . . . . .	61
Mariia Guleva: Through the Looking Glass of Intimate Friendship and Common Enemies: Images of Sino–Soviet Relations in Chinese and Soviet Political Cartoons of the 1950s . . . . .	79
Mingwei Song: A Topology of Hope: Utopia, Dystopia, and Heterotopia in Contemporary Chinese Science Fiction . . . . .	107
Jana S. Rošker: Intercultural Methodology in Sinology: Transculturality, Textual Criticism and Discursive Translations . . . . .	135
Contributors . . . . .	153



## EDITOR'S NOTE<sup>1</sup>

---

This volume includes seven case studies dedicated to various aspects of the twentieth-century intellectual and cultural history of China, including colonial Taiwan and Manchukuo. They cover a period of roughly one hundred years, from the 1910s to today. These case studies are supplemented with an essay contemplating new methodological paradigms for Sinology and Chinese studies as academic disciplines.

The research articles in this volume focus on diverse topics, such as the intellectual-value and human-life-oriented debates of the May Fourth period (Vrhovski), the creation of new music during the Republican period (Chaloupková), the circulation of ideas and literary forms between Japan and its colonies of Taiwan and Manchukuo (Blahota), the implementation of new ideology in literature and propaganda in the 1950s and early 1960s (Andrš, Guleva), and projections of the utopian belief in science in science fiction and the transformation of this genre from early twentieth-century China to the contemporary Sinophone world (Song).

On the most general level these topics are united by a process that the actors involved perceived as “modernization”, that is, the import of new ideas from the vaguely understood “progressive West” in opposition to “backward China”. As ample previous research has documented and as the case studies collected here confirm, this was not a simple copy-paste process. Quite the contrary, it involved uncertainty, difficult deliberations and interpretations (sometimes complex, in other cases superficial), adaptations, and conscious or unconscious transformation of the imported models. New evaluations and reconceptualizations of the domestic tradition to fit the paradigm of modernity were an indispensable part of this process.

Most research that examines modernization, juxtaposing it with tradition in China, does so in the context of the late imperial and Republican periods. However, we also included articles exploring literature and propaganda from the People's Republic of China (PRC); one paper also examines the broader Sinophone world. The post-war geopolitical situation sometimes obscures the fact that after 1949 the new political regime in the PRC did not abandon China's modernization programme. Instead, only the perceived source of modernity was changed: the Soviet Union became the new model to follow instead of

---

<sup>1</sup> This volume was initiated and prepared within the European Regional Development Fund project “Creativity and Adaptability as Conditions of the Success of Europe in an Interrelated World” (reg. no.: CZ.02.1.01/0.0/0.0/16\_019/0000734). English language editing was partly supported also from the Chiang Ching-Kuo Foundation International Sinological Centre at Charles University.

previous templates based on Chinese intellectuals' personal experience of and knowledge about the U.S.A, France, and Germany, partly mediated through Japan.

Despite the diversity of topics and approaches of the studies in this volume, the authors have revealed two aspects of the Chinese search for modernity. The first was the close relationship between intellectual and cultural practices on the one hand and social issues on the other. We specifically addressed this aspect in the call for papers for this volume, expressed there as “mirroring the present”. The editors certainly did not have in mind Lenin's theory of reflection, well known to Chinese scholars from their obligatory classes of Marxism-Leninism. Mirroring in our case does not imply images mechanistically projected from matter to mind; rather it is understood as a metaphor of the inescapable presence in some way or other of the socio-political conditions of the historical moment in which the ideas and cultural production under discussion arose. Thus, the selected cases presented in this volume, each in its own way, demonstrate the situatedness of the intellectual and cultural endeavours of Chinese intellectuals in their search for modernity. Even Mingwei Song, who presents multifaceted variations of utopia, dystopia, and heterotopia primarily as discursive constructs employed by contemporary writers for whom “words are worlds”, still has to situate the science-fiction works under scrutiny in contemporary reality.

Given the focus on modernization, it is natural that the second shared concern of these case studies is the relationship between new breakthroughs and old traditions, including modern transformations of the old culture. In some articles the question of tradition is prominent, like Jan Vrhovski's discussion of Jiang Menglin's contribution to the *rensheng guan* 人生觀 debate, Lenka Chaloupková's exploration of creative dialogue between Western and Chinese musical traditions, and Dušan Andrš's perceptive reading of Feng Zikai's essays written in response to his life in the “new society” of the PRC.

Positionality and tradition, or rather traditions, are also at the centre of Jana Rošker's conceptual article about methodological issues in contemporary Sinology and Chinese studies. With her proposal of “transculturally aware research” she joins a long and still open debate about knowledge production in Sinology, including its position between the humanities and social sciences. This debate has been evolving for decades, and Rošker summarizes here the important arguments that have been raised. Unlike most previous participants in these discussions, she draws on her expertise in philosophy and approaches the problem from the general perspective of epistemology and cultural translation theory. To our knowledge this is also the first attempt to open such a discussion in post-Communist Europe, where Sinologists have thus far largely avoided this topic, and it is hoped it will open new discussion on this important issue.

*Olga Lomová, Jiří Hudeček*



---

## TRAVERSES BETWEEN COGNITIVE CONSONANCE AND EXISTENTIAL CRISIS: NOTES ON JIANG MENGLIN'S PRAGMATIST NOTION OF *RENSHENG GUAN* AND HIS VIEWS ON SUICIDE FROM 1919<sup>1</sup>

JAN VRHOVSKI

### ABSTRACT

The article explores Jiang Menglin's philosophy of life and his notion of *rensheng guan* ("view on life") in the period between his studies in the USA and the year of the May Fourth events in 1919. In the first part, the paper traces the origins of Jiang's idea back to the then-prevalent version of pragmatism propagated by John Dewey and other pragmatist thinkers gathered at Columbia University, while in the subsequent parts it aims to illuminate the later developments of Jiang's own version of pragmatism in the context of the May Fourth intellectual discourse. While the article aims at presenting a positive outline of Jiang's philosophy, it also endeavours to expose its less explicit aspects through its apophatic (exposition by negation or denial) expositions in Jiang's writings from the period. Finally, it focuses on Jiang's contributions to the debate on suicide that developed after Lin Deyang's suicide in November 1919.

**Keywords:** *rensheng guan*; Jiang Menglin; pragmatism; May Fourth Movement; suicide

---

### 1. Introduction

By the mid-1920s the term *rensheng guan* 人生觀 ("view on life, life-view") came to represent one of the defining ideas underpinning the major dilemmas of contemporary intellectual debates. Above all else, it designated the deepening ruptures between several philosophical currents and ideological options that dominated the Chinese intellectual landscape in the years immediately following the events of 1919. Although one could claim that the emerging divisions had already taken form over the seminal period of the radical transformation of the Chinese intellectual world at the beginning of the twentieth century, the influx of Western science and philosophies, which fundamentally marked the May Fourth period, provided Chinese intellectuals with new theoretical and conceptual means with which they could reassert their own internal differences and identities in light of new worldviews.

---

<sup>1</sup> The author acknowledges financial support from the Slovenian Research Agency (ARRS) in the framework of research project N6-0161 (Complementary scheme) Humanism in Intercultural Perspective: Europe and China. I would also like to express my deepest gratitude to Professors Olga Lomová and Jana S. Rošker for their invaluable assistance in writing this essay.

However, most importantly, the ebbs and flows in the Chinese intellectual world at this time represented a natural and inherently Chinese process, which encapsulated and entailed not only purely rational modes of appropriation and adaptation, but also a profoundly psychological process in which the transition from the constancy of the traditional order to the precarious abolitions of traditional social norms and moral inhibitions in Western scientific modernity incised deep cuts in the ideal worlds of Chinese intellectuals.

Among the emerging notions connected to the arising theoretical issues of the time was also the term *rensheng guan*. Although the term, designating “view on life” in the most general sense, had been used by scholars from the early twentieth century onwards, it acquired more specific connotations in the several years following the year of the May Fourth events (1919), until finally becoming a critical notion in the major intellectual debates of 1923 and 1924, one of chief manifestations of which was also the debate on “Science and the View on Life” (*Kexue yu rensheng guan* 科學與人生觀), also known as the debate on “Science and Metaphysics” (*Kexue yu xuanxue* 科學與玄學; see Zhang Junmai et al. 1997). At this later stage, the term *rensheng guan* was used to denote a broad philosophical view on life, which, in accordance with the standards of strict scientific objectivity, would eventually be branded a subjective abstraction of facts, intuitive insights into the general principles of life, non-objectivist ethics, and so forth. Or in the terminology of contemporary scientific realists and materialists: metaphysics. On the other hand, by the mid-1920s, the term *rensheng guan*, used by the proponents of the “philosophy of life,”<sup>2</sup> accumulated a variety of connotations, drawn generally from Western philosophical schools, which had in the preceding years gained prominence in China, most notably, pragmatism and vitalism. As strongly indicated by the name of the latter, the vocabulary utilized in the theoretical expositions of these two schools depended heavily on notions of life and its evolution.

In 1919, when this term first began to be used with greater frequency in Chinese written discussions, its later set of connotations were still not closely linked together as they would be in the years to come. As I will try to show in this essay, an important conceptual source for the later understanding of the term *view on life* was American pragmatism, which at the time was propagated by philosophers at the prestigious National Peking University. Here, I shall focus on the early work of the renowned educator Jiang Menglin 蔣夢麟 (1886–1964), who, along with the philosopher Hu Shi 胡適 (1891–1962), played

<sup>2</sup> However, the evolution of such a “philosophy of life,” which came to life in the process of the Sinicization of the Western philosophical current of vitalism, cannot be confused with the genuinely Chinese “philosophy of life” (*shengming zhexue* 生命哲學) developed by several proponents of the neo-conservative revival of Chinese ideational tradition, for instance, Fang Dongmei 方東美 (1899–1977). This stream of the Chinese philosophy of life cannot be confused with the philosophical movement that spread in Germany in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries known as *Lebensphilosophie* (also referred to as German vitalist philosophy), even though the two discourses share some commonalities, such as a critique of purely materialist and mechanistic approaches to human existence and thought. These two philosophical discourses also proceeded from similar lines of thought in their basic epistemology, for both were rooted in the supposition that a comprehension of life can only be obtained by and through life itself, and from within itself. In the European philosophy of life, these epistemological bases were mainly established upon the foundation of the ideas of Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche, while in Chinese philosophical vitalism these basic notions go as far back as to the oldest written sources of the Chinese tradition, e.g., to the *Book of Change* (see Rošker 2021, 66).

a key part in disseminating American pragmatism in late-1910s and 1920s China. In the following discussion I will first try to cast some light on Jiang's original conception of philosophy of life and the related notion of "view on life" during his studies at Columbia University in New York, which were epitomized in his doctoral dissertation entitled "A Study in Chinese Principles of Education". In doing so, I shall also reflect on the pragmatist origins of Jiang's views on life and education. Second, this study will provide a closer look at the development and expression of Jiang's view on life in the later Chinese period of his intellectual path, focusing on the year of the May Fourth events, 1919. In this context, in the last, central part of this paper I will discuss Jiang's contribution to the 1919 debate on suicide, casting some light on his notion of life through a negative, apophatic perspective.

## 2. Jiang Menglin and Pragmatism

Born in 1886, Jiang belonged to the generation of young intellectuals who grew up under the formative influence of the pioneers of Chinese modernization and disseminating Western science and political and philosophical thought in China. Jiang's profound interest in "things Western" was thus kindled by the writings of figures such as Liang Qichao 梁啟超, and his understanding of Western civilization was developed through reading periodicals such as the *New Citizen* (*Xinmin congbao* 新民叢報), founded by Liang in 1902 (Jiang 2004, 69–70). Jiang's interest in Western science and his propensity to engage in a Chinese search for a bright new tomorrow, which was sparked by the reform movement, caused Jiang to seek a Western education. Consequently, after completing his studies at Zhejiang Advanced College (Zhejiang gaodeng xuetang 浙江高等學堂) in 1908, Jiang enrolled at University of California, Berkley.<sup>3</sup> As a freshman at Berkeley, Jiang initially pursued a major in agriculture. According to his memoirs, he chose this field out of a sense of duty to contribute to strengthening the Chinese economy, which, he believed, depended on a strong domestic agricultural sector (*ibid.*, 99). Only six months later, Jiang decided to change his major to pedagogy. This time, Jiang's decision was motivated by one of his friends, who persuaded him to drop agriculture for the social sciences. Eventually, Jiang chose pedagogy after he realized that studying how to foster talent might be more important than studying how to cultivate plants (*ibid.*, 101). In the remaining years of his undergraduate studies, in addition to a major in pedagogy, Jiang also read history and philosophy, which enabled him to become more familiar with the prevailing trends in American philosophy. Thus, it was only a matter of time before Jiang was drawn to a philosophy that integrated all key concepts in his academic interests, from the notion of life to pedagogy. This fashionable and progressive American philosophy of the period was pragmatism, the academic centre of which was at Columbia University in New York. Apart from its comprehensive view, which strung together the pillars of humanism and philosophy, pragmatism also contained another quintessential feature that attracted Jiang's attention: the proximity of its cosmological view to traditional Chinese thought – while the reverse could have been true for West-

---

<sup>3</sup> Jiang's decision to continue his undergraduate studies in the USA was also influenced by his visit to Japan in 1907 (Jiang 2004, 90–91).

ern philosophy related to the physical sciences. It was probably pragmatism's seemingly human life-centred notion of objectiveness, especially in the work of John Dewey, that convinced Jiang of this philosophy's highest relevance for both his education in the West and his future work in China; throughout his studies in the USA, Jiang always sought to link Western thought to Chinese thought (see *ibid.*, 102–3). Another important aspect of Dewey's pragmatism, which was highly relevant for the contemporary Chinese intellectual climate, was his non-dualistic approach towards human nature and experience, built on his interpretation of Darwinian evolution (see Wang 2019, 17–19).<sup>4</sup>

Motivated by his newly awakened interest in pragmatism, following his graduation from Berkeley in 1912, Jiang decided to continue his graduate studies at Columbia University (*ibid.*, 121–3). At Columbia, the heart of the American pragmatist movement, Jiang's initially narrow idea of the pragmatist philosophy of education started to mature into a more comprehensive worldview. Under the guidance of Dewey, the latter's pupil and colleague, the pedagogue William H. Kilpatrick (1871–1965), and others, an important part of his formative experience at Columbia was epitomized in his doctoral dissertation, “A Study in Chinese Principles of Education,” which he submitted in June 1917. This document does not merely reveal the manner and extent of Jiang's appropriation of pragmatist ideas; more importantly, it provides testimony of Jiang's effort to gain an objective, new, and above all potentially beneficial and practically applicable understanding of the Chinese intellectual past and its role in a modernized Chinese society. In contrast with Hu Shi's dissertation, which was, at least nominally, devoted to the modern (pragmatist) rediscovery of ancient Chinese logical thought, Jiang's work aimed to reveal the historical roots of “Chinese principles of education” and “Chinese ideals of life” as well as potential solutions to the inherited limitations of their contemporary version. Jiang also reserved some place for a discussion of what later became known as “the Needham Question”, that is, the question of “why China has not developed modern science” (Jiang 1918a, ii), which was followed by an extensive comparison of modern Western and Chinese ideas about society. In this study we shall take a closer look at the notion of life in Jiang's dissertation.

### 3. Forming a Pragmatist View on Life: Jiang's Dissertation

As a student of the pragmatist philosophy of education at Columbia, Jiang deeply immersed himself in the pragmatist worldview. Between 1912 and 1917, Jiang witnessed the key moments in the formation of Deweyan pragmatism. While Jiang was at Columbia, Dewey's works, such as *Moral Principles of Education* (1909), *The Influence of Darwin*

---

<sup>4</sup> First, in the above statement the expression “non-dualistic” refers to the idea of “dualism” as a contradictory opposition of binary categories, concepts, principles, and so on, whereas its reverse, “non-dualism”, implies a complementarity or continuity between entities, which in that case one still recognizes as diverse in nature and substance. Put into an epistemological perspective, such “non-dualism” would imply a continuum between objective and subjective experience, between the totality and the individual. It is at this point that I tentatively draw the connection between Dewey's cosmology/epistemology and traditional Chinese thought. Second, the cosmological implications of the Darwinian theory of evolution were highly in vogue in the late-nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century Chinese intellectual discourse (see Furth 2002, 19, 26, 28, 51).

on *Philosophy* (1910), *How We Think* (1910), and his writings on logic (1910) and epistemology, were still at the forefront of pragmatism at the university, but when it came to Jiang's ideas probably the most influential was Dewey's *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education*, which was completed in 1915 and first published in 1916.

Generally speaking, Dewey's philosophical outlook was rooted deeply in the pragmatist notion of life as the fundamental epistemological and ontological category. In this regard, the epistemological premise stipulated that the value of knowledge and cognition is determined by its practical utility and effectiveness both in the short-term perspective of a singular human life as well as human evolution in the long term. On the other hand, apart from the idea of a constantly changing universe, the main ontological category of pragmatism was biological existence as such. In this context, human knowledge, logic, education, and ethics all served a single purpose: the development, enrichment, and preservation of human life. The pragmatist worldview was profoundly linked to contemporary philosophical and social interpretations of the Darwinian theory of evolution, which was very probably the main source for this philosophy's conceptions of "usefulness" and "effectiveness". Most importantly, pragmatists like Dewey maintained that rational utilities such as logic and knowledge, the final product of human cognition, ought to be regularly realigned with the perpetually changing physical reality, which, in the ontological sense, embodies the main conditions of preserving and enriching life as such. This is the principal basis of Dewey's concept of "experimentalism" as the main methodological principle of the pragmatist worldview.<sup>5</sup>

With regard to education, the above views were epitomized in Dewey's *Democracy and Education*, which, as its content reveals, served as an important source for Jiang's dissertation. The main arguments of Jiang's dissertation not only were built on the idea of "education as a necessity of life", expounded in the first chapter of Dewey's book, but also completely adopted the principles and aims of education as outlined in the mentioned work. As mentioned above, Dewey regarded education as an important means of human survival and the key conduit for transmitting human experience, for the "renewal of life by transmittance" (Dewey 1916a, 1–5). On the other hand, the guiding principles of education as imagined by Dewey consisted of scientific naturalism, humanism based on individualism, and, as revealed by the title of the book, democracy.

Drawing from Dewey's views on life and education, Jiang endeavoured to put the evolutionary dimensions of Dewey's theory into the context of China, its historical experience, and contemporary problematics – as seen from a, so to say, "modernist" perspective. This urge to establish a broader historical context originated in pragmatism's rootedness in a variety of natural evolutionism, while, at the same time, it was also an important ingredient in the premises of most modernist objectivisms. On the other hand, the necessity to regard Chinese histories (of education, philosophy, etc.) as descriptions of particular strains within the general current of human intellectual evolution also entailed a certain degree of cultural relativism, a notion which at that time was still in its earliest

---

<sup>5</sup> For the textual source of the views summarized in this paragraph, see, e.g., Dewey 1916b, 1–2, 10, 12–13.

stage of formation at Columbia as well as in the Chinese intellectual world.<sup>6</sup> However, akin to his colleague and the other Chinese doctoral student of Dewey's, Hu Shi, in his dissertation Jiang seems to have completely adopted the pragmatist perspective. Whereas Hu Shi in his dissertation "An Outline of Logical Method in Ancient China" (1917) set out to locate proto-pragmatist ideas in traditional Chinese logic, Jiang used pragmatist ideas not only as a background for his evaluation of the, as it were, "evolutionary" inadequacies of Chinese culture and its system of education but, above all, as the foundation for their modern reformation.

Akin to Hu Shi, Jiang also proposed his own vision of Chinese intellectual history, which served as the foundation upon which he reconstructed the main characteristics of the notion of life in Chinese society and its basic requirements with regard to education. Jiang's study rested heavily on the pragmatist notion of life. Already in the opening lines of the first chapter of his dissertation, Jiang pointed out one of the main premises of his treatise: "One of the most fundamental ideas of the life of the Chinese is duty. To live is to fulfil the duties of life" (Jiang 1918a, 1). In Jiang's view, this notion of life was intricately linked to the Chinese system of education because "education is the method of life and thought, and life and thought are the contents of education" (*ibid.*). In the light of this notion of life, Jiang's subsequent revision of Chinese intellectual history revolved mainly around Confucianism as the main source of the idea of duty, which underpinned Chinese notions of the individual and society. Because, according to Jiang, in Confucianism the "fulfilment of duty" was seen as "the only way to happiness", the Chinese idea of life was "socialistic rather than individualistic" (*ibid.*, 2). In the context of this "socialistic" turn in the Confucian notion of life, institutions became "the [principle] expressions of life" (*ibid.*, 3), while the "peace and wellbeing of people" fell into the exclusive domain of the state or its supreme ruler as the highest institution. As the highest authority in a society established upon the principle of duty, the state was also in charge of education in general (*ibid.*, 4).

To substantiate his view of the Confucian essence of Chinese culture, Jiang also devised a corresponding narrative of the Chinese history of ideas. In his vision of Chinese intellectual evolution, the Confucian school was portrayed as one of three contesting schools in the seminal period of Chinese philosophy, the pre-Qin period (before 221 BCE), which Jiang chose to designate as "the creative period" (*ibid.*, 5). Thus, he set what he called the "Politico-ethical school" of Confucianism against the "Naturalistic school" of Daoism, which advanced a social philosophy based on "radical individualism" and

---

<sup>6</sup> What is referred to as "cultural relativism" ought to be disambiguated from forms of cultural syncretism, which recognized Chinese subjectivity as historically parallel to that of other cultures and traditional ideas associated with Chinese identity and as equally essential to China's future as the advancements of Western materialist culture. In contrast to these harmonistic visions of Chinese modernity – as either positively or negatively assumed, for example, in the early thought of Zhang Shizhao 章士釗 (1881–1973), Du Yaquan 杜亞泉 (1873–1933), Liang Shuming 梁漱溟 (1893–1988), and Zhang Shenfu 張申府 (1893–1986) – cultural relativism was a form of constructive evolutionism set within the context of early ethnology and anthropology. As a current it gained momentum at Columbia in the 1920s, while in China it took more concrete shape in the early 1930s (see Li Guannan 2012). Strikingly, in the late 1910s, before Dewey visited China, his philosophy already contained inklings of awareness about cultural relativity, which raises an interesting question about the role of his Chinese doctoral students and his stay in China in the development of his later thought and its impacts at Columbia University.

“anti-institutionalism” (ibid., 10). Jiang also listed the “Humanitarian school” of Mohism as a sort of middle current. Jiang simply evaluated the nature of other periods in the history of Chinese ideas based on their accord or discord with the Confucian politico-ethical line of thought. Unlike Hu Shi, who invested all his hopes in the logical thought of late Mohism (see Vrhovski 2020, 513–5), describing it as the repository of proto-pragmatist philosophy in China (Hu 1919, 8–9), Jiang saw the rudiments of pragmatist thought in Confucius, who was “a thoroughly practical man” (Jiang 1918a, 8).

In the spirit of contemporary Chinese modernist denunciations of Confucian tradition, Jiang passionately advocated the view that this politico-ethical school of Chinese philosophy was also the cause of the very problems responsible for China’s lack of modernity. In Jiang’s opinion, the notion of life and the social system given rise by Confucianism were also responsible for the vital problems of Chinese education, which were thus entirely socio-political in nature (ibid., 36). Similarly, according to Jiang, the nature of this prevalent school of ideas in Chinese society was also the main cause behind the lack of modern scientific thought in China.<sup>7</sup> This view led Jiang to conclude that since the main ailments of Chinese society and education were politico-ethical in nature then so too must be a part of their modern remedies. The other part of the solution included introducing perspectives other than political and ethical ones as well as extensively introducing the scientific method of inquiry into school curricula. Since “education is the method of life and thought”, reforming the Chinese system of education entailed a necessary “change of national life” (ibid., 147). Instead of moral collectivism, emancipated Chinese life ought to be derived from individualism based on rational morality (ibid., 148). But the moral problem of Chinese life ought not to be resolved overnight, for while rationality is universal, the collective or individual experience is not. In the “moral transition” of Chinese subjectivity envisaged by Jiang, a pivotal role was to be played by comparative ethics, which would be able to bridge the disparate strains of Chinese and global experience. Furthermore, the key role of experience in transforming “Chinese life” also implied the vital importance of improving its social conditions.<sup>8</sup> Finally, the new notion of life in China also ought to be informed by modern natural science, in particular the “theory of organic evolution.”<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> In summary, Jiang attributed China’s lack of modern science to the absence of “a systematic approach towards reason” in Confucianism, its propagation of a “unitary ideal instead of particular” (Jiang 1918, 77), its “aphorical” (aphorismic) approach towards knowledge (ibid., 72), and the exclusive preference for practical philosophy (ethics and political philosophy) in Chinese society (ibid., 71).

<sup>8</sup> Jiang claimed that Chinese philosophy essentially lacked such a “sociological definition of rational morals” (Jiang 1918, 148). Regarding the relationship between social conditions and moral change, Jiang remarked: “The change in moral ideas and method is generally brought about, either consciously or unconsciously, by the change of social forces. Therefore, a reconstruction of moral ideals is not only to be based upon the rational power of man, but also the social conditions in which he lives” (ibid., 148–9).

<sup>9</sup> “One of the most important factors by which modern science has influenced education is the theory of organic evolution – that is to say, life grows from simple to complex. The process of evolution brings about variations; and through the struggle for existence and natural selection, the fittest survives. From this theory, the problem of life and environment, nature and nurture, or heredity and education, extends to the field of education. Evolution does not, however, mean progress. For progress implies the element of the conscious effort of man. Survival of the fittest does not necessarily mean survival of the most desirable according to human purposes. Education implies the conscious effort of man to create situations in such a way that they would favor the growth and survival of the most desirable in reference to purpose or purposes.” (ibid., 185)

In the conclusion of his dissertation, Jiang also proposed a list of concrete solutions for China's inherited problems. Not surprisingly, all solutions were derived from the pragmatist thought found in Dewey's works. First, Jiang suggested that the Chinese duty-centred notion of life could be enriched by the "Ancient Greek" (i.e., Aristotelian) view on life, in which the central place is occupied by the idea of happiness itself.<sup>10</sup> While, as Jiang was strongly convinced, in Confucius' philosophy the right purpose of happiness was realization of social duty, in Aristotle's philosophy its ultimate purpose was "rational power" (ibid., 155). Second, according to Jiang, Chinese life should also be enriched through intellectualized morals as an alternative to the traditional normative notion of "moralized intellect" (ibid., 156). Third, Chinese life ought to be also enriched through Western notions of individualism and personal freedom. Jiang pointed out that the latter ought to be introduced to China through Roman law to substitute the traditional code of "propriety" (*li* 禮) and the lack of the idea of freedom in Chinese traditional thought (ibid., 159); the legalist concept of law (*fa* 法) was an institution subjugated to the will of the sovereign.<sup>11</sup> In combination with the classical idea of freedom, Western individualism was thus to set free the Chinese individual, who in traditional society was "sacrificed for maintaining social order" (ibid., 160).<sup>12</sup> Third, while in Jiang's vision Confucianism was to be replaced with "Hellenism",<sup>13</sup> old Chinese religions were to be replaced or at least supplemented by the "Christian idea of God" and the principles of Christian ethics (ibid., 164–7).<sup>14</sup> Finally, Jiang claimed that "the future of China depends upon, besides other things, patriotism combined with modern science" (ibid., 167). All these ideals and objectives were to be achieved by means of the "science and art of education". As the main means of transmitting human experience and knowledge and as the principal means of enriching life, Jiang's pragmatist concept of education was also a means of social progress, training citizenship and leadership, promoting individual development, and spreading culture (ibid., 184).

---

<sup>10</sup> Jiang adopted this definition of happiness from Aristotle and Dewey. In Dewey's philosophy, ultimate happiness is defined as a state of psychological/mental transcendence of physical sensations and the material conditions of one's life: "an abiding consequence or result, which is not destroyed even by presence of pains" (ibid., 154).

<sup>11</sup> He enunciated that "the new Chinese is an individual and a citizen instead of a particle of the family. New freedom is fighting against the principles of propriety, and new citizenship against the family membership" (ibid., 178).

<sup>12</sup> Jiang posited that something similar was attempted by the pre-Qin school of Daoism, or "the radical individual school", which "did not succeed in setting him free by attacking the social system of ancient China" (ibid., 160).

<sup>13</sup> In addition to the above-described idea of life, the notion of Hellenism that Jiang spoke about also included the aesthetical conception of humans' bodily "perfectness" and the Hellenic "sense of beauty" (ibid., 156–7).

<sup>14</sup> Specifically, Jiang asserted that "the future of Chinese civilization will be the coexistence of Christian-Confucian-Hellenic, Mohammedan-Confucian-Hellenic, and Buddhist-Confucian-Hellenic. The great old unifying forces are Confucianism, and the great new unifying forces in China will be Hellenism" (ibid., 167).



#### 4. The Dawning of New Life: Jiang's Philosophy of Life in the Context of the May Fourth Movement, 1919

The main reason I deemed it worthwhile to elaborate at length on the content of Jiang's dissertation is that, in the years following its defence, his lectures and publications in China were more or less recapitulations or minor extensions of the views presented in his dissertation. Following his return to China in 1917, in more than fifty articles and transcribed lectures published in 1918–19, Jiang expounded mainly his notions of a “new view on life” (*xin rensheng guan* 新人生觀), a new type of education, individualism, and personal freedom.<sup>15</sup> Jiang's propagation of pragmatist notions of life and education was significantly amplified in a series of newly founded journals devoted exclusively to pedagogy, one of which, *New Education* (*Xin jiaoyu* 新教育), he even cofounded. Following the appointment of Hu Shi as professor of philosophy at Peking University, pragmatism started gaining momentum in the Chinese intellectual world. In the year of the May Fourth Movement, 1919, Jiang was appointed professor of pedagogy at Peking University. Finally, the presence of pragmatism at the university reached its peak with the arrival of Hu's and Jiang's mentor, John Dewey.<sup>16</sup>

What is of special interest to us, however, is Jiang's notion of a “view on life”, in particular in the context of the developments surrounding the May Fourth events. Understanding Jiang's advancement of the above-described theory at this time is even more important considering that expressions like *rensheng guan* and *ziyou* 自由 (freedom) had become key concepts associated with the movement. In fact, a superficial survey of writings by the movement's leading intellectuals reveals that, apart from socialist vocabulary and generic terms such as *reform* (*gaizao* 改造), by 1919, the term *new view on life* had become one of the key expressions synonymous with the universal reformation of Chinese society urged for by the movement. As I shall briefly indicate below, it appears that the term was, moreover, in general use among intellectuals of all ideological denominations. This became apparent in a public discussion that developed shortly after the May Fourth events. The debate, which revolved around the problem of suicide among Chinese youth, was provoked by the suicide of Peking University student Lin Deyang 林德揚 in mid-November 1919. Having been the first such incident at the university since the May Fourth events, Lin's suicide prompted an intense debate between the movement's leaders at the university, including Cai Yuanpei 蔡元培 (1868–1940), Luo Jialun 羅家倫 (1897–1969), Chen Duxiu 陳獨秀 (1879–1942), and Jiang. The public discussion was also joined by other prominent intellectuals such as Dewey and Dharma Master Taixu 太虛法師 (Lü Peilin 呂沛林, 1890–1947).<sup>17</sup> Most importantly, to present their own views on students'

<sup>15</sup> E.g., “Education after the European War” (“Ouzhan hou zhi jiaoyu” 歐戰後之教育, 1918), “Education and Vocation” (“Jiaoyu yu zhiye” 教育與職業, 1918), “Society-Evolving Character Education” (“Jinhua shehui de renge jiaoyu” 進化社會的人格教育, 1918), “The Relationship of the Value of the Individual to Education” (“Geren zhi jiazhi yu jiaoyu zhi guanxi” 個人之價值與教育之關係, 1918), “Dewey's Ethics” (“Duwei zhi lunlixue” 杜威之倫理學, 1919), “Students' Autonomy” (“Xuesheng zizhi” 學生自治, 1919), “Individuality and Individualism” (“Gexing zhuyi yu geren zhuyi” 個性主義與個人主義, 1919).

<sup>16</sup> On Dewey and China, see, e.g., (in the English language) Dewey 1973; Wang 2007; Wang 2019.

<sup>17</sup> On the incident and the general discourse on suicide in China in this period, see, e.g., Liu 2008; Wang 2018; Zhang 2017, 142–7; and Lu 2008 (MA thesis). On the role of Dharma Master Tai Xu in the modernization of Chinese philosophy and religion, see Dessein, 2020.

giving up on life or self-sacrificing themselves, all these important figures of the May Fourth Movement had to state their own views on life. Through their apophatic expositions of the value and social or psychological evolution of life, these scholars often revealed aspects of their thought that had not been adequately enunciated in their positive historical narratives.

For Jiang, this discussion came as an important opportunity to restate his philosophy of “new life”, which he had been disseminating for the past two years. Moreover, the student incident of November 1919 fell exactly into the context of his lectures and writings in the months following the May Fourth events and prior to Lin’s suicide. As mentioned above, in the intellectual ferment of the May Fourth Movement, *rensheng guan* became one of the key notions associated with the general psychological and intellectual change advocated by the movement. More specifically, it was one of the synonyms for its ultimate objective. Although, at this point, we are unable to establish the exact relationship between pragmatism and its terminology on one side and the ideational basis and terminology of the movement on the other, it can be claimed with some certainty that Jiang’s propagation of a “new view on life” predated the sudden emergence of the term in the year of the May Fourth events. On the other hand, the May Fourth events also caused Jiang to write more extensively on the “new view on life”, the attitude required for the transformation or change (*gaibian* 改變) of Chinese life, and related notions (e.g., Jiang 1919e, 1919f). Thus, in the article “Changing the Attitude towards Life” (“*Gaibian rensheng de taidu*” 改變人生的態度), in addition to reiterating the views formulated in his dissertation, Jiang also pointed out that one’s attitude towards life needs to undergo the following transformations: from a narrow to a comprehensive, and from a simple to a complex view on life; from family life to social life; from solitary life to communal life; from emulation to creativeness; from obedience to the ancient doctrines to free thinking; and so forth (Jiang 1919e, 4).<sup>18</sup> Jiang listed the following methods for reforming one’s life: “repudiating old customs and ideas; studying Western literature, philosophy, science and art; and considering oneself as an individual brimming with life” (*ibid.*). Jiang also composed an article on “The Tolstoian View on Life” (“*Tuoersitai rensheng guan*” 托爾斯泰人生觀), which he, rather strikingly, considered to be in some ways exemplary (see 1919f).<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, far less surprising was Jiang’s appreciation of Tolstoy’s combining individualism with altruism.

In September and October 1919, Jiang carried out a lecture tour from Peking to Hangzhou, speaking on the above-mentioned topics (Jiang 1919g, 113). Among other things, in his lectures he discussed the “psychological disposition of the youth” with respect

<sup>18</sup> In an endnote Jiang also indicated that the term life used in his article encompasses the meanings “individual life” (*rensheng* 人生), “life” (*shenghuo* 生活), and “the life of humanity” (*renlei de shenghuo* 人類的生活).

<sup>19</sup> In certain respects, Tolstoy’s view on life as described in Jiang 1919f differed significantly from the view expounded in Jiang’s dissertation. Jiang enumerated five major postulates of the “Tolstoian view on life”: “(1) There was life (*shenghuo* 生活) before one’s life (*rensheng* 人生), and there will be life after one’s death; human life (*rensheng* 人生) is imperishable. (2) This life (*xianshi* 現世) represents only a stage of life as a whole. (3) This life contains two different aspects: (a) rational life and (b) a physical and brutal form of life. Rational life continues what was before birth and enlightens what follows after death. It is infinite... (4) Rational life promotes universal love. It is a life of service, forgetting oneself. It is mutualistic and unafraid of death. (5) Brutal life is selfish, conflicting, murderous, and terrified of death.” (Jiang 1919f, 6)

to the governmental repercussions against student protesters in June 1919. In the article “The Psychological Disposition of the Youth after Student Protests and the Optimal Method of Guidance” (“Xuechao hou qingnian xinli de taidu ji lidao fangfa” 學潮後青年心理的態度及利導方法), which he subsequently published in the journal *New Education*, Jiang took up his pen in defence of the students who took part in the May Fourth Movement, endeavouring to explain the psychological state of mind to those in charge of China’s institutes of education. Jiang emphasized that after the May Fourth events, Chinese youth embarked upon the path of a “revolution of the heart” (*xin de geming* 心的革命), along which they encountered various psychological challenges related to the reinvention and reestablishment of their selves. According to Jiang, this process included three main elements: a critical reevaluation of everything (identity, customs, values, etc.), autonomous thought and expression (*ziji xiang ziji shuo* 自己想自己說, “thinking and speaking for oneself”), and seeking a new view on life (*xin rensheng guan*; *ibid.*, 113–15). Most noteworthy, in the subsequent parts of his essay Jiang indicated that such a radical process of reinventing one’s life-views also entails challenges and pressures, which emanate from the destructive side of psychological rebirth and the restraining mechanisms of the traditional establishment and political authority (cf. *ibid.*, 115). Correspondingly, Jiang recommended those in charge of Chinese universities support China’s social transformation by means of the following mechanisms: encouraging students’ autonomy, giving students the chance to attain freedom of thought, assisting students in their studies of social problems, and helping them to attain a rich life (*ibid.*, 116–17). These and other solutions proposed by Jiang were all, more or less, consistent with the views explicated in his dissertation.<sup>20</sup> However, now, when Jiang was witnessing the reality of social transformation and his notion of a “new view on life” was challenged by the concrete psychological complexities of intellectual reform, much darker visions started to emerge on the horizon of Chinese history. Thus, when in October 1919 Jiang was discussing student protests with a few “foreign colleagues” in Shanghai, asserting that their psychological disposition includes general scepticism, intellectual freedom, and a change of life-views (*gaibian rensheng guan* 改變人生觀), one interlocutor pointed out that the current intellectual transformations in Chinese youth comprise “a very dangerous undertaking, because of which, I am afraid, in the future many young people are going to commit suicide” (Jiang 1919h, 349). Jiang allegedly (*ibid.*) received the same warning from Dewey, whom he met later in the same year. One day after his discussion with the latter, Lin Deyang committed suicide, an incident which reverberated through Chinese intellectual circles. The incident was met with an intense response, not only because it was the first such incident at the prestigious Peking University, but more so because of its apparent symbolical value and overall “intellectual context”, since it took place at the height of the May Fourth Movement’s revolutionary fervour, which promulgated the beginning of a new era in Chinese intellectual history. In the penultimate section of this paper, I will briefly summarize the discussion on suicide that followed the aforementioned incident of November 1919, focusing on Jiang’s contribution.

---

<sup>20</sup> E.g., Jiang particularly stressed that professors at Chinese universities ought to encourage and assist students in their studies of ethical problems, foster their interest in natural sciences, and encourage playing musical instruments and performing theatre (Jiang 1919g, 117).

## 5. Against Self-Resignation: Jiang's Contribution to the 1919 Polemics on Suicide

One of the earliest Chinese debates on suicide started with a proclamation made by the university president, Cai Yuanpei, in the school's daily newspaper. It was followed almost immediately afterwards by a series of articles written by a few leading Chinese intellectuals. Among the first was a response from Luo Jialun 羅家倫 (Zhixi 志希, 1897–1969), one of the founders of the reformist *New Tide* (*Xinchao* 新潮) journal and a leading member of the May Fourth intellectual elite. In his article “A Suicide of a Young Person or Society's Murder of a Young Person” (“Shi qingnian zisha haishi shehui sha qingnian” 是青年自殺還是社會殺青年), Luo described the late student Lin as an exemplary personality and a genuine patriot whose self-sacrifice was not entirely without meaning (Luo 1919a, 347).<sup>21</sup> For Luo, the most natural and logical explanation for Lin's sacrifice resided in his existential and psychological discord with the social injustice and intellectual backwardness of Chinese society. However, in his essay Luo inquired further into the reasons students like Lin would consider suicide as the only way of affecting the order under heaven (*tianxia* 天下). He claimed that in contrast to foreign students who “commit suicide mostly because of problems [related to] love or failing an exam”, the existential anxiety and discord of Chinese students stemmed from their “lack of artistic life” (*meishu de shenghuo* 美術的生活) and their “lack of social life” (*shejiao de shenghuo* 社交的生活), while the main cause of students' suicides during the May Fourth events was the “negative countereffect of the change of life-views (*rensheng guan*)” (ibid.). Luo also added that “after the ‘May Fourth’, great enlightenment will occur in our youth's view on life, by which it will overthrow the idols of old and which will give rise to a mentality of being sceptical of everything” (ibid.). Finally, Luo also pointed out that he was not against the suicide of world-weary people, nor did he consider it to be an immoral act.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, he claimed that suicide can be the most honourable and natural thing to do after one has run out of all means and energy for changing this “detestable world” (*keyan de shi* 可厭的世). Following the same rationale, Luo defined the reformist sentiment of “world-weariness” (*yanshi* 厭世) as an inherent anxiety or discontent with the onto-moral order of this world (society), which is a sign of one's superior moral fibre. In contrast with the Confucian idea that, in times of disorder, the sage ought to leave this world and go into seclusion,<sup>23</sup> Luo's modern sage embodied

---

<sup>21</sup> Luo's article was originally published in *Chenbao* 晨報 and reprinted in Vol. 2, No. 2, of the journal *Xinchao* 新潮, where an entire section was dedicated to a discussion of suicide.

<sup>22</sup> In one of his earlier papers Luo (1919b) pointed out the following: “This generation of our youth must, above all, go out and struggle, and engage actively in reformation of the current circumstances, transforming the detestable world into a non-detestable one. If in their struggle their strength wears out and they run out of resourcefulness and viable plans, so that they are incapable of undertaking the slightest bit of action and receive not even an iota of support from this world, then they will [be forced to] commit suicide... This kind of suicide is the most honourable thing in this world... If in this world there were no people willing to commit suicide, we would not be able to get anything in order.” (Luo 1919b, 684)

<sup>23</sup> E.g., Confucius' *Analects*, “Tai Bo”: “Let yourself be seen when the Way prevails in the Empire, but keep out of sight when it does not” (Lau 1992, 73; “*Tianxia you dao ze jian, wu dao ze yin*” 天下有道則見，無道則隱). See also Huang 2019, 35.

in the revolutionary youth was supposed to go one step further and dauntlessly sacrifice his or her life for the benefit of the community. In this sense, life in seclusion offered no alternative mode of existence that would alleviate the psychological pressure from the reformist's anxious soul. Moreover, Luo's notion of modernist reformation presupposed a radically mundane hero, who recognizes the ontological imperative of change and understands that the transcendent world can offer no consolation whatsoever. Hence, the only locus of "life" was exclusively here and now, while its quality was to be measured exclusively after the material and psychological state of the youngest among the enlightened members of the community. Most importantly, this view also presupposed a quasi-Mencian notion of innocence,<sup>24</sup> which, in combination with the moral purity of the reformist, gave his or her act of her self-sacrifice its tremendous and more than symbolic power. Thus, when Luo concluded that "Lin did not commit suicide but was murdered by society" (Luo 1919a, 348), this also implied that the act of self-resignation still took part within a world order in which a universal moral tissue formed a unity with the physical, ontological aspect of the world, for the cause and ends of suicide were considered to be essentially moral and its repercussions, fundamentally cosmological in nature. What is even more important for our debate, Luo's view on suicide implied that the positive notion of "the view on life" was essentially also tantamount to a spontaneous externalization of human nature<sup>25</sup> in its still untarnished and morally purest form. Because, concurrently, his idea of *rensheng guan* also encompassed the objectivist segment of awakening to the true nature of the world, his objectivist idea of weariness – these sentiments were considered the ultimate standard of the verity and rightfulness of the general state of society – as the underlying cause of suicide in youth was still rather close to the Confucian concept of "anxiety" (*bu'an* 不安) of the people as a critical gauge for measuring the state's accordance with the course of heaven (and never the state of the

---

<sup>24</sup> It could be claimed that a similar notion of innocence was assumed via the Confucian idea of duty related to one's social position and role in society (as in "jun jun, chen chen, fu fu, zi zi" 君君, 臣臣, 夫夫, 字字 [A ruler is a ruler, a minister a minister, a husband a husband and a son a son], *Lunyu* 論語, "Yan Yuan" 顏淵, 12.11). In my opinion, the Mencian notion of the fundamental goodness of human nature and his advocacy of the right of the people to reproach an inhumane ruler are consistent with the Confucian notion of responsibility towards others as one of the highest standards of human conduct, which forms an essential part of the Confucian concepts of *ren* 仁 (humaneness) and *yi* 義 (appropriateness). The innocence or purity achieved through complete fulfilment of one's duties makes one susceptible to disharmony or harmony with the way of the heaven, which consists in the kingly way (*wangdao* 王道) of governance and its opposite, the hegemonic way (*badao* 霸道) of governance (*zhi* 治; see Huang 2020, etc.). The same innocence could be recognized in the Neo-Confucian discourse on the path leading to the perfection of one's "innate moral nature and life" (*daode xingming* 道德性命), which, in a certain sense, bridges the spheres of "inner sageliness" (*nei sheng* 內聖) and "outer kingliness" (*wai wang* 外王; cf. Lee 2020, 28–33). Similarly, the nexus between inner cultivation and the external assertion of the right principle depends heavily on the notion of "original knowledge" (*liangzhi* 良知) and the possibility of its extension to society (i.e., *min* 民). Although this was not explicitly expressed in the classical Confucian discourse, I believe that, as noted in the summary of Jiang's dissertation, this notion of duty was inadvertently maintained by some of the modern Chinese intellectuals under discussion. I further believe that a certain concept of innocence is the main precondition for disobedience (*buzhong* 不忠, "disloyalty") and revolt, especially when it comes to social orders founded on onto-moral conceptions of reality. However, without further analysis and additional evidence the above claims remain pure speculations.

<sup>25</sup> Here, I am not referring to the traditional Chinese concept of *renxing* 人性.

latter as the external objective cause) and one of the possible reasons for “revolution”.<sup>26</sup> All these dimensions of the notion of *rensheng guan*, which crystallized in Luo’s May Fourth expositions of the problem of suicide, are also of tremendous importance for understanding Jiang’s notions of life and death.

Jiang Menglin’s notion of life also became best apparent in his views on suicide. If, in the terms of Durkheim’s theory of suicide, Luo’s understanding of Lin’s suicide was predominantly altruistic, Jiang’s notion of suicide could be regarded as a combination of egoistic and anomic suicide.<sup>27</sup> Although Jiang agreed with Luo’s assumption that the main solutions to the suicide problem resided in enabling the youth to live artistic lives, encouraging social interaction with their peers, and helping them to establish new views on life, he categorically opposed Luo’s views on the nature and acceptability of suicide as a final means of social reformation (Jiang 1919h, 349). As noted in the above summary of Jiang’s dissertation, he understood the transition between traditional and modern Chinese society to be a process of emancipating the individual, in which duty as the sole purpose of life ought to be replaced with happiness in the first place and the intellectual and material progress of society in the second place. Thus, although the goal of liberation was to overturn the traditional relationship between the individual and the collective, the evolutionary categorical imperative of undertaking such change was based on an entirely different conception of morals and innocence. A significant disparity between the idea of the individual in Luo’s and Jiang’s views on life and suicide resided in the latter’s strong propensity towards American individualism, whereas in Luo’s case the liberation of the individual was still imagined to be in direct service to communal progress and awakening. Thus, the consequences of disharmony between the state of society and the psychological state of the individual in Luo’s view on life and the consequences of self-sacrifice were entirely different from those conceived in Jiang’s pragmatist individualism. Jiang’s turn from duty-based innocence to the duty of personal cultivation meant that the happiness and enlightenment of the individual, although closely bound to the intellectual progress of society as a whole, were positioned above that of one’s community. While recognizing the urgency of attaining personal and social liberty was a direct consequence of human intellectual advancement, enlightenment was primarily required of the individual. An important addition to Jiang’s view on life was also related to his adoption of a “vitalist” notion of life, which established its sanctity within the context of the theory of the natural evolution of life. As mentioned earlier, this caused pragmatists like Dewey to view survival as the principal driving force behind all human endeavours and the capacity to adapt to the changing circumstances of the world as the highest means of guaranteeing this survival. A major corollary to that was that one’s view on life ought to be liberated from “transcendental morality”, while the highest form of morality was to become immanent, situational, and more closely associated with the concrete causalities of the physical world that our survival depends on. Ethics, on the other hand, became associated with the general principles derived from humans’ knowledge of the enrichment and preservation of life.

---

<sup>26</sup> The term *revolution* is a conceptual approximation of the traditional Chinese term *geming* 革命, which can be neutrally translated as “changing the mandate of heaven”, etc.

<sup>27</sup> See Durkheim 2002, 175–200. Durkheim described egoistic suicide as a result of excessive individuation, and altruistic suicide as a result of insufficient individuation (*ibid.*, 175).

Consequently, in contrast to the later Chinese version of vitalism (cf. Bodenhorn 2002), as a pragmatic vitalist, Jiang's main infatuation was with life as an individual entity, which made its destruction the highest form of transgression. One of the most defining features of Jiang's idea of sanctity of life was that he believed it to be an essential characteristic of Christian morality. Akin to his idea of enlightenment, Jiang regarded happiness and survival as an individual's own responsibility, and therefore refuted Luo's notion that Lin's suicide was a crime committed by society. Moreover, Jiang hinted that this very view was symptomatic of the backwardness of traditional Chinese socio-political thinking. Although Jiang did concur that the society to which Luo had referred to was indeed "abominable" (*elie* 恶劣), he added that "society cannot improve itself, but needs us to do so. If we commit suicide before society has been changed for the better, will there ever come a day when this society will be improved?" (Jiang 1919h, 349). In this way, transgression against the sanctity of one's own life was ultimately also tantamount to a crime against society. Moreover, in Jiang's view suicide was nothing but a portrayal of not only one's personal weakness but also the weakness of spirit inherent in the traditional Chinese mentality (*ibid.*). Although Lin's suicide was "equal to killing a respected member of society", the guilt for this murder must be attributed to Lin himself. Most importantly, Jiang regarded Lin's suicide as a resignation that took place in the context of the Chinese youth's collective struggle for a new view on life, which was thus the primary objective of the May Fourth Movement: "a new view on life cannot be created in a moment. In the interim, there will constantly occur numerous difficulties and hopeless causes... Difficulties are the path to success. In the endeavour to break new ground, one will always stumble upon thorns" (*ibid.*, 350). And at the end of this path Jiang envisaged a new life, which cannot be attained in a moment, but through ceaseless everyday effort: "it must be attained by means of experimental attitude" (*ibid.*). It thus follows that, in Jiang's view on life, the anxiety encountered by the individual undergoing mental transformation is a universal ingredient of the struggle for the preservation and progression of life as well as a psychological factor confined to the individual's experience. As such, anxiety is a key component of personal growth shared by all members of the species and not primarily an internalization of the external onto-moral order as in the case of Luo's view on suicide, while one of the pivotal tasks of education is to alleviate such psychological pressure emanating from the deconstruction and reconstruction of one's view on life. Akin to Luo's theory, Jiang's notion of anxiety also represents the cognitive dissonance between the recognized true nature of the universe (imperative in a temporal perspective) and the current state-of-affairs in human society – or one's cognitive consonance with the universe – the main difference between them being the moral dimensions of the materialization of anxiety in the act of "altruistic suicide". Jiang regarded suicide as unacceptable because the main goal of transforming the "view on life" resided in the establishment of "new life" primarily at the individual level, and only secondarily at the level of human society as a whole. We could also call this a form of non-transcendental individualist vitalism, in contrast to the standpoint that the idea of collective life transcends individual existence. However, at the same time Jiang retained a certain degree of moralism or duty, which was now reduced to the intimate relationship between the struggling individual on one side and the transcendental idea of perpetual life (totality of life or *bios*) on the other. Arguably,

this could be regarded as the main point of contention between the collectivist and individualistic notions of “revolution” in the framework of the May Fourth Movement, while in both cases cognitive consonance with the underlying pattern of reality was regarded as a moral and existential precondition for the revolutionary prerogative.

Jiang’s response was followed by Chen Duxiu’s lengthy analysis of suicide from the perspective of social problematics and other contributions on the topic.<sup>28</sup> Although Jiang did not contribute any other papers to the debate, he superficially touched upon the topic in his lectures and publications on youth and education, which he delivered and published together with Hu Shi around the first anniversary of the May Fourth Movement.<sup>29</sup> In the year immediately after the May Fourth events, the focus of Jiang’s writing shifted to general problems of education, its relationship with politics (partisanship), and youth-related questions, while his attention seemed to have moved slightly away from his philosophy of life as one of the central backgrounds of his discussion. He also gradually adopted new terminology denoting the process and the final destination of the wave of Chinese modernization that started in 1919.<sup>30</sup>

## 6. Concluding Remarks

The above analysis has shown that the socially and morally most significant features of Jiang’s notions of a new “view on life” and “life” were revealed in their apophysis (negative definition), that is, in the discussion on suicide that took place in late 1919. As demonstrated in the initial part of this study, the positive description of Jiang’s philosophy of life was derived theoretically from the version of pragmatist philosophy in vogue at Columbia University at the time of Jiang’s doctoral studies.

Since the main aim of this study has been to give a more concise picture of Jiang Menglin’s notion of *rensheng guan* and its position in Jiang’s pragmatist philosophy, this shall be given in the following few points recapitulating and supplementing the findings made in the study:

(1) In the period under observation, Jiang’s philosophy and notion of life were deeply rooted in pragmatist ontology. In his dissertation he posited that the main developmental problem of Chinese society resided in its Confucian foundations, which disrupted the optimal relationship between the individual and society, which would enable human life to prosper at the same level as in the West. Consequently, to ameliorate the deteriorating consequences of Chinese tradition, he proposed a change in the “view on life” and

<sup>28</sup> Chen’s article “Theory of Suicide” (“Zisha lun” 自殺論), which was published in *Xin qingnian* 新青年 (*La Jeunesse*) and closely resembled Durkheim’s analytical approach in terms of style, systematically presented the social causes of suicide amongst youth. Chen’s profoundly socialistic theory of suicide was opposed by one of the leading members of the contemporary Chinese Buddhist community, Dharma Master Taixu (Taixu fashi 太虛法師). Later in December a discussion of suicide also appeared in the magazine *The New Society* (*Xin shehui* 新社會, 11 December 1919).

<sup>29</sup> E.g. Hu and Jiang 1920, etc.

<sup>30</sup> By the mid-1920s, for example, Jiang’s terminology became more “revolutionary” in the sense that he more often resorted to terms such as *revolution*, *age of revolution*, and so on to describe the reformation of society (see Jiang 1927). Because at the same time, more “humanistic” terms such as *view on life*, *Hellenistic culture*, etc. started to appear less often in Jiang’s texts and lectures, we could understand this terminological peculiarity as distantly reflective of Jiang’s intellectual development.



ultimately also the establishment of “new life”, which would be based on the Hellenistic ideal of human life, Roman legal individualism, natural science, and relativistic (i.e., universalist) ethics.

(2) Because of pragmatism’s inherent bent towards certain segments of contemporary biological science (evolutionary theory and its notion of biological life) and its concurrent reestablishment of a kind of ethical relativism based on the idea of individual growth and freedom, Jiang’s notion of life, on the one hand, antagonized the traditional (Confucian) idea of individual life and, on the other hand, contained an internal schism between social individualism and evolutionary collectivism manifested in the institute of public education. The issues associated with this onto-moral gap manifested themselves in the apparent lack of in-depth analysis of the psychological mechanism of the change of the “view of life” so optimistically propagated in Jiang’s seminal work. Hence, while Jiang was mainly concerned with the ailment–medicine approach towards the problem of Chinese society, drawing the idea of life from the contemporary pragmatist discourse, he almost completely neglected the negative aspects of such a transformation in the first place.

(3) While Jiang adhered to the Aristotelian idea that “happiness” instead of “duty” ought to be the main goal of one’s life, he entirely neglected the antithetical concepts of discord and anxiety, which would turn out to be integral to extending his theory into more practical issues related to social reformation and its educational aspects. These inadequacies of Jiang’s original exposition of a “view on life” became more apparent in the debate on suicide in November 1919. The contrast between Luo Jialun and Jiang, the first two participants in the debate, revealed a fundamental turn in morality and the “vitalist” and “social” transcendentalism assumed in different cases of *rensheng guan* as philosophical worldviews, and hence also conceptions of *rensheng* or “human life”. As pointed out in the penultimate chapter of this study, Jiang’s divorce from traditional holistic morals, which was importantly attested in his notion of human life, thus became the essential ingredient of his individualist vitalism, in which society was exempt from one’s primal internal relationship to the transcendental ideal of life as a whole and hence de-essentialized. The former idea of complementarity between all modes and forms of existence, endowed with the onto-moral ideal of all-pervading (internal and external, etc.) harmony, was replaced with a primarily personalized relationship with the preservation and enrichment of life as the objectivized (through natural science) transcendental ideal. Although in Jiang’s philosophy this position did not eliminate altruism as an important ethical value and pragmatic category, the latter was considered secondary in the case of phenomena such as the psychological, spiritual, or mental transformation underlying the “change of (views on) life”. Hence, forms of anxiety and discontent sanctified in other segments of revolutionary discourse became disconnected from the old onto-moral tissue of the universe. As a consequence, one’s suffering in the process of transformation could not result in society-changing mechanisms of guilt, shame, and collective spiritual experiences of self-sacrifice, but in a mere obstacle experienced in personal growth. However, even if it would appear as if this perspective managed to break away from one aspect of the “antiquated” Confucian ideology, in fact, it merely managed to obscure one aspect while immersing itself more deeply in its other aspect.

---

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bodenhorn, Terry (2002). "Chen Lifu's Vitalism: A Guomindang Vision of Modernity Circa 1934." In: Terry Bodenhorn (ed.), *Defining Modernity: Guomindang Rhetorics of a New China, 1920–1970*. Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, The University of Michigan, 91–123.
- Chen, Duxiu 陳獨秀 (1919). "Zishalun: sixiang biandong yu qingnian zisha" 自殺論: 思想變動與青年自殺 [Theory of Suicide: Intellectual Change and Suicide in Youth]. *Xin qingnian* 新青年 7:2, 1–13.
- Dessein, Bart (2020). "The Heritage of Taixu." *Asian Studies* 8:3, 251–77.
- Dewey, John (1909). *Moral Principles in Education*. Boston, New York: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Dewey, John (1910a). *How We Think*. Boston, New York: D. C. Heath & Co. Publishers.
- Dewey, John (1910b). *The Influence of Darwin on Philosophy, and Other Essays on Contemporary Thought*. New York: Henry Holt and Company.
- Dewey, John (1916a). *Democracy and Education*. New York: Macmillan.
- Dewey, John (1916b). *Essays in Experimental Logic*. Chicago: University of Chicago.
- Dewey, John (1973). *John Dewey: Lectures in China, 1919–1920*. Translated and edited by Robert W. Clopton and Tsuin-Chen Ou. Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii.
- Durkheim, Émile (2002). *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*. Edited by Georg Simpson, translated by John A. Spaulding and Georg Simpson. London and New York: Routledge & Keegan Paul.
- Furth, Charlotte (2002). "Intellectual Change: From the Reform Movement to the May Fourth Movement, 1895–1920." In: Merle Goldman and Leo Ou-Fan Lee (eds.), *An Intellectual History of Modern China*. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Guo, Hua-qing 郭華清 (2000). "Jiayin shiqi Zhang Shizhao de zhaxue sixiang – tiaohelun" 甲寅時期章士釗的哲學思想 – 調和論 [Zhang Shizhao's Philosophical Thought in the Period of Jiayin (The Tiger) – The Theory of Harmony]. *Supplement to the Journal of Sun Yatsen University (Social Science Edition)* 20:3, 150–62.
- Huang, Chun-chieh (2019). *The Debate and Confluence between Confucianism and Buddhism in East Asia*. Göttingen: V&R Unipress.
- Huang, Chun-chieh (2020). "Between Humane Governance and Hegemony: A Study of East Asian Confucian Discourse on Guan Zhong and Related Questions." *International Communication of Chinese Culture* 7:4, 411–43.
- Hu, Shi 胡適 (1919). *Shiyan zhuyi* 實驗主義 [Pragmatism]. Nanjing: Xueshu jiangyan hui.
- Hu, Shi 胡適 and Jiang, Menglin 蔣夢麟 (1920). "Yi nian lai xuechao zhi huigu he xiwang: Women duiyu xue-sheng de xiwang" 一年來學潮之回顧和希望: 我們對於學生的希望 [A Look Back and Hopes One Year after Student Protests: Our Hopes for the Students]. *Xin jiaoyu* 新教育 2:5, 89–94.
- Hu, Shih (1922). *The Development of the Logical Method in Ancient China*. Shanghai: The Oriental Book Company.
- Jiang, Menglin [Monlin Chiang] (1918a). *A Study in Chinese Principles of Education*. Shanghai: Commercial Press, Ltd.
- Jiang, Menglin 蔣夢麟 (1918b). "Ouzhan hou zhi jiaoyu" 歐戰後之教育 [Education after the European War]. *Xin minde* 新民德 3:2, 10–12.
- Jiang, Menglin 蔣夢麟 (1918c). "Jiaoyu yu zhiye" 教育與職業 [Education and Vocation]. *Dongfang zazhi* 東方雜誌 15:12, 149–50.
- Jiang, Menglin 蔣夢麟 (1918d). "Jinhua shehui de renge jiaoyu" 進化社會的人格教育 [Society-evolving Character Education]. *Jiaoyu zazhi* 教育雜誌 10:6, 79–82.
- Jiang, Menglin 蔣夢麟 (1918e). "Geren zhi jiazhi yu jiaoyu zhi guanxi" 個人之價值與教育之關係 [The Relationship of the Value of the Individual to Education]. *Jiaoyu zazhi* 教育雜誌 10:4, 59–62.
- Jiang, Menglin 蔣夢麟 (1919a). "Xin jiu yu tiaoho" 新舊與調和 [The New and the Old and Their Mediation]. *Jiefang yu gaizao* 解放與改造 1:5, 76–9.
- Jiang, Menglin 蔣夢麟 (1919b). "Duwei zhi lunlixue" 杜威之倫理學 [Dewey's Ethics]. *Xin jiaoyu* 新教育 1:3, 38–45.
- Jiang, Menglin 蔣夢麟 (1919c). "Xuesheng zizhi" 學生自治 [Students' Autonomy]. *Xin jiaoyu* 新教育 2:2, 19–22.
- Jiang, Menglin 蔣夢麟 (1919d). "Gexing zhuyi yu geren zhuyi" 個性主義與個人主義 [Individuality and Individualism]. *Jiaoyu zazhi* 教育雜誌 11:2, 27–29.
- Jiang, Menglin 蔣夢麟 (1919e). "Gaibian rensheng de taidu" 改變人生的態度 [Changing the Attitude towards Life]. *Xin jiaoyu* 新教育 1:5, 1–4 [451–54].

- Jiang, Menglin 蔣夢麟 (1919f). “Tuoersitai rensheng guan” 托爾斯泰人生觀 [The Tolstoian View on Life]. *Xin jiaoyu* 新教育 2:1, 1–6.
- Jiang, Menglin 蔣夢麟 (1919g). “Xuechao hou qingnian xinli de taidu ji lidao fangfa” 學潮後青年心理的態度及利導方法 [Psychological Disposition of the Youth after Student Protests and the Optimal Method of Guidance]. *Xin jiaoyu* 新教育 2:2, 113–18.
- Jiang, Menglin 蔣夢麟 (1919h). “Beida xuesheng Lin Deyang jun de zisha: jiaoyu shang shengsi guantou de da wenti” 北大學生林德揚君的自殺：教育上生死關頭的大問題 [Peking University Student Lin Deyang's Suicide: The Big Question of the Juncture between Life and Death in Education]. *Xinchao* 新潮 2:2, 349–50.
- Jiang, Menglin 蔣夢麟 (1927). “Geming shidai zhi qingnian” 革命時代之青年 [The Youth in the Age of Revolution]. *Qingbai* 青白 1:1, 8–9.
- Jiang, Menglin 蔣夢麟 (2004). *Jiang Menglin zizhuan: Xichao yu xincho* 蔣夢麟自傳：西潮與新潮 [Jiang Menglin's Autobiography: Tides from the West and New Tides]. Beijing: Tuanjie chubanshe.
- “Jiangxueshe huanying Luosu zhi yanji” 講學社歡迎羅素之演詞 [Welcome Speech for Russell at the Chinese Lecture Society]. *Jiaoyu gongbao* 教育公報 7:12, 23–24.
- Lau, D. C. trans. (1992). *The Analects*. Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press.
- Lee, Ming-huei (2020). “The Problem of ‘Inner Sageliness and Outer Kingliness’ Revisited: On the Controversy Raised by Yu Shiyong's Work *Zhu Xi's Historical World*.” In: Jana S. Rošker (ed.), *Modern and Contemporary Taiwanese Philosophy: Traditional Foundations and New Developments*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 22–38.
- Li, Guannan (2012). “Cultural Policy and Culture under the Guomindang.” In: Arif Dirlik, Guanna Li, and Hsiao-pei Yen (eds.), *Sociology and Anthropology in Twentieth-century China: Between Universalism and Indigenism*. Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 109–37.
- Liu, Changlin 劉長林 (2008). “Lin Deyang zisha de yiyi” 林德揚自殺的意義 [The Meaning of Lin Deyang's Suicide]. *Wuhan ligong daxue xuebao (shehui kexue ban)* 武漢理工大學學報 (社會科學版) 21:4, 574–78.
- Lu, Kexia 魯克霞 (2008). “Minguo qianqi zisha wenti yanjiu zhi tanxi (1912–1930)” 民國前期自殺問題研究之探析 [An Analysis of the Discourse on Suicide in the Early Republican Period (1912–1930)]. MA thesis. Hangzhou: Suzhou University.
- Luo, Jialun 羅家倫 [Zhixi 志希] (1919a). “Shi qingnian zisha haishi shehui sha qingnian” 是青年自殺還是社會殺青年 [A Suicide of a Young Person or the Society's Murder of Youth]. *Xinchao* 新潮 2:2, 346–48.
- Luo, Jialun 羅家倫 [Zhixi 志希] (1919b). “Chushi?” 出世? [Withdrawing from the World]. *Xinchao* 新潮 1:4, 682–84.
- Ma, Yong 馬勇 (1997). *Jiang Menglin jiaoyu sixiang yanjiu* 蔣夢麟教育思想研究 [A Study of Jiang Menglin's Educational Thought]. Shenyang: Liaoning jiaoyu chubanshe.
- Nelson, Eric S. (2020). “Zhang Junmai's Early Political Philosophy and the Paradoxes of Chinese Modernity.” *Asian Studies* 8:1, 183–208.
- Rošker, Jana S. (2021). “Chinese Philosophy of Life, Relational Ethics and the COVID-19 Pandemic.” *Asian Philosophy* 31:1, 64–77.
- Vrhovski, Jan (2020). “From Mohism to the School of Names, from Pragmatism to Materialist Dialectics: Chinese Interpretations of *Gongsun Longzi* as a Text and Source of Chinese Logic, 1919–1937.” *International Communication of Chinese Culture* 7:4, 511–38.
- Wang, Jessica Ching-Sze (2007). *John Dewey in China: To Teach and to Learn*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Wang, Lei (2019). *John Dewey's Democratic Education and Its Influence on Pedagogy in China, 1917–1937*. Wiesbaden: Springer VS.
- Wang, Song 王頌 (2018). “Cong Taixu dui Chen Duxiu 'Zisha lun' de piping guankui qi rensheng zhexue” 從太虛對陳獨秀《自殺論》批評管窺其人生哲學 [A Look on Taixu's Philosophy of Life from the Perspective of His Critique of Chen Duxiu's “Theory of Suicide”]. *Beida foxue zazhi* 北大佛學雜誌 1, 212–26.
- Zhang, Junmai 張君勱 et al. (1997). *Kexue yu renshengguan* 科學與人生觀 [Science and the View on Life]. Jinan: Shandong renmin chubanshe.
- Zhang, Xueqian 張學謙 (2017). “Tuise de ‘chongbai’: wusi moqi zhishi qingnian jiazhi xingxiang de fenqi yu chonggou” 褪色的‘崇拜’：五四末期知識青年價值形象的分歧與重構 [Fading “Worship”: The Divergences and Reconstructions of Images of Value in Intellectual Youth of the Late May Fourth Period]. *Xiandai Zhongguo wenhua yu wenxue* 現代中國文化與文學 23:4, 139–54.



## THE CHINESE ART SONG, *YISHU GEQU* : BETWEEN TRADITION AND MODERNITY<sup>1</sup>

LENKA CHALOUPKOVÁ

“Die größte Kunst und das meiste Können erfordert, in eine kleine Form einen großen Inhalt zu gießen.”

(Nikkels 1989, 11)

### ABSTRACT

The Chinese art song, *yishu gequ* 藝術歌曲, is a typical genre of New Music (Xin yinyue 新音樂) of the May Fourth Movement. Such pieces were primarily composed by Chinese graduates of European and American universities who found inspiration in European Romantic art songs, especially nineteenth-century German lieder. The existing Western literature about this genre emphasizes the connections between the Chinese art songs of the twentieth century and European Romantic songs and does not consider any relationship with the domestic Chinese tradition. Publications by Chinese scholars also do not examine in any detail specific connections to the Chinese tradition at the ideational level.

As this paper demonstrates, the Chinese art songs that emerged during the May Fourth Movement were not created solely by following a Western model. Their uniqueness is the result of combining the search for “new culture” with the significant traces of domestic roots in the social role of music and the tradition of joining words and music in a single artistic whole.

The paper first explores the emergence of the art song in the context of Chinese musical modernization, and then, through citing theoretical works and analyses of select compositions by three of the most famous art song composers – Xiao Youmei 蕭友梅 (1884–1940), Zhao Yuanren 趙元任 (1892–1982), and Huang Zi 黃自 (1904–38) – it demonstrates the various approaches to creating art songs, especially in terms of how they were related to the domestic tradition. I have chosen examples that allow us to observe the gradual adoption of an originally European genre in the Chinese cultural environment and various factors that influenced how this genre changed. I also examine the changing ways in which this foreign genre interacted with the domestic Chinese environment.

**Keywords:** Chinese New Music; Chinese art song; tradition; Xiao Youmei; Zhao Yuanren; Huang Zi

---

<sup>1</sup> This paper was supported by the European Regional Development Fund project “Creativity and Adaptability as Conditions of the Success of Europe in an Interrelated World” (reg. no.: CZ.02.1.01/0.0/0.0/16\_019/0000734).

## Little great art

Of the many genres of New Music (*Xin yinyue* 新音樂) from the first half of the twentieth century that combined Chinese material and Western compositional approaches, the art song, *yishu gequ* 藝術歌曲, is the ideal subject of study. The connecting of the German song tradition – which reached its apex during Romanticism – with traditional Chinese ideas about the social use of music as a means for influencing the mentality of its listeners makes the art songs of the 1920s and 1930s unique in many ways.

A leading expert on New Music,<sup>2</sup> Professor Liu Jingzhi, considers the period from the May Fourth Movement until the end of the Cultural Revolution (1919–76) to be an era when the work of Chinese composers was marked by often feeble attempts at imitating Western compositions (Liu Jingzhi 2000, 8). He claims that art songs were imitations of works by composers such as Franz Schubert, Robert Schumann, and Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy.<sup>3</sup> Surprisingly, Liu draws no link between the creation of these pieces and so-called school songs (*xuetang yuege* 學堂樂歌) even though the most prominent composers of art songs also wrote school songs and the forewords to collections of both types of songs share many similarities. Many Western scholars also share this view that Chinese art songs were often unsuccessful attempts at imitating German lieder. That these two kinds of works share a certain idea is ignored, that is, the didactic conception of music as a means for morally improving the individual and creating a harmonious society. In the existing literature, the main yardstick by which Chinese compositions are assessed is the extent to which they are similar to nineteenth-century German lieder.

In recent years, the genre of art song has become a popular topic of theses written by students at Chinese universities. Chinese authors attribute a nationalist dimension to this genre, claiming that it was an equal to its “Western counterparts” (Sun Yung-Wei 2012). This view of the Chinese art song genre, which side-lines any connection with the domestic tradition, is the result of the vestiges of ideas that emerged out of the May Fourth Movement.

In this paper I will attempt to demonstrate, by using primary sources and analysing selected songs, that art songs are not just imitations of German lieder, nor do they comprise a “modern” Westernized genre of Chinese New Music with no relation to the domestic tradition but a genre firmly embedded within the sociohistorical context in which they emerged, in which Western influences were eagerly borrowed and modified and adapted to mesh with Chinese cultural conventions. As I will show in this paper, the choice of Western models was made easier by existing domestic patterns. Chinese art songs are unique at two levels. First is the specific historical-cultural circumstances of the search for “new culture”, which opened the door to the import of foreign models and their adaption in a new context to meet specific values held by early-twentieth-century China: the importance of progress, scientificness, and national self-determination. Second is interest in the art song, even though it was a foreign music genre, which was supposed

---

<sup>2</sup> I.e., music combining Western compositional techniques and instruments with Chinese tonality.

<sup>3</sup> This approach can be found in other works by this composer. Especially in the largest book on New Music written to this date: Liu, Jingzhi (2009). *Zhongguo Xin Yinyue Shi Lun* 中國新音樂史論. Hong Kong: Zhong wen daxue chubanshe. In 2010 an English translation titled *A Critical History of New Music in China* was published.

to contribute to burgeoning Chinese artistic modernism. Many of the ideas behind this genre had deep domestic roots and correspond with the didactic understanding of music as a means of perfecting the individual and ensuring a harmonious society, an idea contained primarily in Confucian texts.

In a certain sense the very principle of combining poetic text and music in the Chinese art song was a return to tradition. The art song can be understood as something that re-established the long-lost balance between both forms of artistic expression – words and music – a commonplace occurrence in China's history. The classic *Book of Songs*, like works in the popular *yuefu* 樂府 and *ci* 詞 genres, was originally meant to be performed with musical accompaniment. However, the melodies gradually fell into oblivion and what were once songs turned into poems meant primarily to be read or recited.<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, there was always a vivid awareness about the close link between poetic verse and music.

Even though Chinese composers of art songs often wrote magazine articles emphasizing the necessity of severing links with domestic traditions and promoted transitioning to modernism, this new genre in many ways bore traces of the Chinese tradition – in the lyrics to songs, compositional approaches, recommendations for how songs should be performed, and the very motivation of creating this genre.

The typical features of Chinese art songs from the May Fourth Movement period are as follows:

- 1) The genre of art song is firmly connected with the development of Chinese New Music in the twentieth century. The nineteenth-century German lied was an ideal choice of model to adopt by Chinese composers because it allowed them to connect traditional awareness about music's social role with the “progressiveness” attributed to Western music in this period.
- 2) From the beginning, Chinese composers adapted works in this genre to suit current values and topics, and the subjective portrayal of feelings typical of German lieder was replaced with themes related to national revival.
- 3) Over time, these songs ceased to play an exclusively didactic role, and their artistic dimension was more fully developed. Approaches borrowed from European models as well as methods specific to Chinese music and interpretation were critical in this transformation. Composers also turned to classical Chinese poetry as a new source of inspiration.
- 4) In addition to imitating a musical model, which at first was presented as the modernization of the “backwards” domestic musical tradition, there was renewed interest in tradition and incorporating elements of the domestic musical tradition into the framework of this adopted European genre. Hence, a unique form of artistic expression emerged.

It would be a grave mistake to view the genre of Chinese art song as only a poor imitation of European Romantic songs. Indeed, the works of composers of Chinese New Music from the May Fourth era do have much in common with Western Romantic songs – especially German lieder – but we cannot ignore their specific formal features, their con-

---

<sup>4</sup> Cai, Zongqi (2008). *How to Read Chinese Poetry: A Guided Anthology*. Columbia University Press, pp. 330.

tent, their social role, and the historical-cultural context in which they were created. If we recall the words of Gustav Mahler that “writing songs is the most difficult art because it requires a great deal of knowledge and the ability to pour a great volume into a small form” (Nikkels 1989, 11), then we can view the composition of the Chinese art song as a most demanding task, for in it composers attempted to combine the content and form of two different cultural traditions. During the May Fourth Movement, questions regarding naturally combining the traditional and the modern, the Chinese and the Western, became a central point of creation in this genre.

### **Music as a means for transitioning to modernity: From the school song to the art song**

A series of events in the second half of the nineteenth century in China led to increased interest in European music, beginning with China’s defeat in the Opium Wars, when China was fully confronted with the West’s technological superiority.<sup>5</sup> After these conflicts China started importing modern technology and modern science with the goal of “strengthening” the country and making it prosper. At first, the cultural aspects of modernization were not a priority. In 1884, broad segments of the population still rated domestic music higher than its Western counterpart. J. A. van Aalst, a Belgian customs official working in China in the late nineteenth century, authored a book titled *Chinese Music*, in which he made the following observation:

Western music is not at all appreciated in China. The Chinaman seems to pity us for being still so far back in this particular line when we have shown our superiority in all other branches of science. It may be very patriotic for the Chinese to have the best opinion possible of their own music, but it will not prevent foreigners finding it monotonous, noisy, and disagreeable. (J. A. Van Aalst 1884, 6)

Nonetheless, the successful Meiji-era reforms in Japan, together with Qing China’s declining position in the world, led a segment of Chinese intellectuals to increase their efforts at achieving the same level of development as the Western powers, which resulted in, among other things, greater interest in Western music. In the eyes of the reformers, music, alongside technological and scientific achievements, philosophy, aesthetics, and literature, was seen as an essential component of modernity that could help China overcome its “backwardness”.

The ideas of the first generation of educated reformers, who often lacked a musical education, were formed in keeping with traditional notions about the close link between music, personal morals, and social order. Writings about the history of Chinese music from this period regularly attribute music the ability “to cultivate in people a feeling for rules” and “to cultivate one’s noble personality” (Sun Shi 1919 in Zhang Jingwei 1998, 286). These reformers therefore promoted Western musical genres because they believed

---

<sup>5</sup> In this article I use the terms *Western* (to mean European and North American culture in general) and *Chinese*. Here, I am using the terminology featured in the Chinese discourse at the time, although I am aware that it is a gross simplification of both cultural complexes.



they could be a suitable means for morally edifying broad swathes of the public in the spirit of the new values of patriotism created following European models and pushed to have these genres incorporated into school syllabi. In the eyes of these intellectuals, the ideal genre for doing this was the art song.

Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873–1929), a reformer, politician, and influential journalist, who was the first to introduce Western songs in China, emphasized the ability of music and poetry to affect the mentality of Chinese people: “In order to transform the quality of the people, poetry and music are one of the essential elements of spiritual education, which can be understood by those with a little knowledge” (Liang Qichao 1999, 5333).

An example of how this educational effect was supposed to look comes directly from Liang’s “Patriotic Song” (“Ai guo ge” 愛國歌) from 1902, which, in an attempt to encourage patriotism, lauds China as “the greatest country on the greatest continent” (*zui da zhou zhong zui da guo* 最大洲中最大國) “with a history more than 5,000 years old” (*wu qian yu sui lishi gu* 五千餘歲歷史古).<sup>6</sup>

Early-twentieth-century educational reforms, which led to the creation of a new type of school and greater numbers of Chinese students travelling abroad, had an effect on musical education, especially through the adoption of what was known as “school songs” (*xuetang yuege* 學堂樂歌). This genre was adopted from Japan, whose entire system of musical education was built upon school songs. Thanks to the activities of associations founded by Chinese students who had studied abroad, these compositions became an essential part of the musical education lessons that had been freshly introduced in China (Ho 2011, 31).

These school songs, which were often created by setting the texts of existing Chinese poems to famous melodies from different genres of Western music, were primarily seen as a tool for strengthening national consciousness and a means for indoctrinating the people. There was heavy emphasis on the quality of the lyrics. The notion that school songs could be used to foster patriotism was based on two sources, a Western one and a domestic Chinese one. It was inspired by the lied movement, a product of Western Romantic nationalism. The ground for this movement had already been prepared in China, thanks to the similarities with the Confucian state ideology of late imperial China, according to which “correct” music could cultivate the human soul and bring harmony to social relationships (Yao Xinzong 2015, 136). Even after the fall of the empire and the rejection of Confucianism as the state ideology, basic notions about the relationship between music and social order remained unchanged.

In the first half of the twentieth century, thanks to increased contact with the West, ideas about what values “correct” music was supposed to awaken in people changed dramatically. The original notion of achieving social harmony, grounded in the values of traditional society, turned into the idea of strengthening national consciousness and spreading ideas about modernization.

In this stage of modernization traditional Chinese music was rejected, or rather Chinese reformers active within the field of domestic music could not identify a traditional genre suitable for proclaiming the ideas of modernization. The court music of the Opium

---

<sup>6</sup> This song was published in Liang, Qichao 梁啟超 (1902). *Shao nian zhongguo zhi shaonian* 少年中國之少年, *Ai guo ge si zhang* 愛國歌四章. *Xin xiao shuo* 1: 183.

Wars era slowly lost its influence, largely because it was closely linked with the political and social order that the reformers wanted to change. The music of the literati was viewed as a noble genre connected with the private life of intellectuals. It was too individualistic to contribute to social change. On the other hand, the reformers thought folk songs were primitive and lacked the “maturity” of Western music. Moreover, they were linked to traditional values and what the modernizers considered to be a backwards society. Xiao Youmei, one of the composers of art songs that I will discuss in this paper, made the following comment about traditional Chinese music: “Our cultivated music, *yayue*, is nothing more than an antique, and folk music, *suyue*, still has a malignant influence on common people” (Xiao Youmei 2004, 679–81).

The art song genre followed in the footsteps of the school song in terms of both ideas and forms of expression. Creators working in both genres saw them as means for edifying listeners and performers. They were intended for didactic use in schools and use compositional techniques typical of Romantic European music. The difference between these two genres, however, lay in the fact that art songs relied on newly composed melodies whereas school songs used existing melodies. Moreover, art songs were more musically elaborate, both in terms of vocals and accompaniment. After 1920 many composers wrote art songs, including Xiao Youmei; Zhao Yuanren; Huang Zi; Liao Shangguo 廖尚果, better known as Qing Zhu 青主 (1893–1959); Ying Shangneng 应尚能 (1902–73); He Luting 贺绿汀 (1903–99); and Xian Xinghai 冼星海 (1905–45).

This generation of composers included piano accompaniments in their songs and to the many features adopted from school songs gradually added an emphasis on the aesthetic quality of music. Compositions from the May Fourth period often reflect this emphasis. The outbreak of the Anti-Japanese War in 1937, however, led to an emphasis on mobilizing the nation to fight against the occupiers through art. Music output was dominated by the mass song and the revolutionary song, which often sacrificed the artistic qualities of the compositions. Their form and content were fully subordinated to efforts at mobilizing the masses (through easy-to-remember melodies, persuasive lyrics, etc.). In the work of Chinese composers of New Music the revolutionary song gradually replaced the art song. The conditions in the post-war People’s Republic of China were not conducive to the popularity of the art song; this genre would only reappear after the Cultural Revolution.<sup>7</sup>

Today, art songs from the May Fourth period can be encountered nearly solely in the repertoires of vocal students at Chinese art schools. This year, in 2020, the various activities being held at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music to commemorate the one-hundredth anniversary of the art song should bring a desirable change in how the art songs of the 1920s and 1930s are viewed by performers.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> For more on the history of Chinese music in the twentieth century, see Ming, Yan 明言 (2017). *20 shiji Zhongguo yinyue piping shi* 20世纪中国音乐批评史. Shanghai: Shanghai yinyue xueyuan chubanshe.

<sup>8</sup> Efforts to present Chinese songs to Western audiences include Mei Zhong’s twenty-six-song album from 2009, *Traditional and Modern Chinese Art Songs*. The album contains transcriptions of the Chinese texts, including phonetic transcriptions and English translations.

## ***Yishu gequ*: Between tradition and modernity**

In the Sinophone world the term *art song* (*yishu gequ*) denotes a musical composition that is usually intended for a solo vocalist with piano accompaniment.<sup>9</sup> Such compositions are based on poems, which are set to music, and are meant to be performed at concerts or salons.

Chinese composers gravitated towards this genre at a time of great social and cultural upheaval, that is, in the period from the beginning of the May Fourth Movement to approximately 1937. During these nearly twenty years, the Chinese art song took on many forms. The composers of these songs used them to demonstrate the unique nature of Chinese culture and to have an ideological effect on listeners (Xiao Youmei), to popularize the spoken language (Zhao Yuanren), and, later, to emphasize the essential nature of this genre's aesthetic qualities (Huang Zi).

Like with European songs, here too the basis was the text, to which music was added. In selecting the texts themselves, the composers faced a dilemma – whether to find inspiration in the domestic tradition or to create a “new culture”. Chinese composers sometimes chose the texts of classical poems and thus engaged in dialogue with the Chinese tradition. They used traditional Chinese themes that they set to music using Western compositional techniques. Other times though they used works of “New Poetry” (*xin shi* 新詩) by contemporary poets, which were written as literary experiments and explicit manifestations of breaking with tradition. The development of the art song genre in China is linked to language reforms, efforts to promote the spoken language (*bai hua* 白話), and the emergence of new literature. These efforts led some composers of art songs to seek out lyrics in works of New Poetry and to formulate new rules for how to approach interpreting them.

For most artists the main impetus for creating art songs came from their time studying music abroad<sup>10</sup> and from their efforts to lift up Chinese music and create New Music in a Chinese style using the advanced techniques of Western composition. In 1920s China the art song represented two ideas connected to the May Fourth Movement<sup>11</sup>: science (in music this meant using “advanced” Western music techniques – harmonies, modulation, contrasting rhythmic schemes, etc.) and the importance of national self-determination (emphasized in the “Chinese style”; it was usually reflected in the text of the songs and in the use of pentatonic melodies; Zhao Yuanren also utilized Chinese singing techniques).

After 1920 the art song became the first genre of Chinese New Music to heavily incorporate piano accompaniment. Piano music in China has always been connected with the adoption of Western musical elements, for the piano was always viewed as the main symbol of the Western musical tradition, an understanding that resonated with the ideas of Western writers (recall the famous quote from Max Weber, who claimed that the piano

---

<sup>9</sup> In the 1920s several songs of this type were written for solo vocalists, but later piano accompaniment would become a fundamental part of art songs.

<sup>10</sup> Even the author of the first Chinese art song, “A Great River Flows to the East” (“Da jiang dong qu” 大江東去), Qing Zhu 青主, composed it in 1920 after returning from Germany (Yu Quanheng 2013, 32).

<sup>11</sup> The two main demands of the May Fourth Movement focused on science and democracy. See, e.g., Schwartz, Benjamin (2020). *Reflections on the May Fourth Movement*. Brill, pp. 46. A major theme in art songs is patriotism rather than democracy.

is a “significant piece of middle-class furniture” [Weber 1958, 124]). In China, the piano embodies the “otherness” of European culture.<sup>12</sup> In the early twentieth century the piano was still a novelty for most of the Chinese population. After the first Opium War in 1842 missionaries came to China bringing pianos, which they used to accompany the liturgy and at the same time as an aid for teaching European music theory. With the arrival of the European bourgeoisie to China’s open ports, pianos began to be imported as an essential part of the cultural life of Western elites.<sup>13</sup> The surprising speed with which this instrument gained a prominent place in China is testified to by the fact that the first factory making Western musical instruments in China opened in 1895 to produce pianos.<sup>14</sup>

The first art songs were composed at a time when there was an ongoing debate about “aesthetic education” (*mei yu* 美育), which was meant primarily to round out the education of talented individuals and in general to develop morals in society. It immediately resonated with many composers of art songs. One of the most prominent modernizers from the early twentieth century, the famous rector of Peking University during the May Fourth Movement, Cai Yuanpei 蔡元培 (1868–1940),<sup>15</sup> advocated exactly this type of approach to teaching. He spoke on the importance of musical education and, partly influenced by reading the works of Friedrich Schiller, he claimed that music could unite and help people accept moral guidance. The following quote sheds light on his emphasis on combining aesthetic and moral education: “Aesthetic education is meant as the application of aesthetic theory in education, where the main objective is to cultivate emotions. Life is nothing more than will, interpersonal relationships, and good behaviour. So that everyone behaves suitably, it is necessary for the centre of education to be moral education” (Cai Yuanpei 1912, 2).

Aesthetic education was understood as one path to personal refinement, and hence, to the formation of a new citizen and the modernization of society. Even though Cai was an advocate of educational reform, in his writings he often quoted from the Confucian canon to defend his arguments. Another proponent of aesthetic education was one of the earliest composers of art songs, Xiao Youmei. Similar to Cai Yuanpei’s concept of aesthetic education and his idea that musical activities have the potential “to model characters” (Cai Yuanpei 1918, 4), the Chinese art song is the result of combining traditional Chinese ideas about music’s potentially beneficial effect on the emotions and mentality of listeners with efforts to reach the masses. Even though the new generation of composers often explicitly rejected Chinese tradition (in both its folk and official forms), in reality their works are in many ways rooted in tradition – namely, in the understanding that songs can educate and cultivate, in the focus on songs about a prosperous society, and

---

<sup>12</sup> One reason the Chinese emperor was so fascinated by the harpsichord when it was demonstrated to him by Ricci in 1601 was that no traditional Chinese instrument created sound in the same way.

<sup>13</sup> One example is the Moravian engineer Vítězslav Veselý (1877–1964), who would later serve as the rector of the Brno University of Technology in Czechoslovakia. In the early twentieth century he worked in the glass factories in Suqian. After arriving in Shanghai, he purchased a piano at an auction and wrote home asking for the sheet music to songs by his favourite composers. Veselý, Vítězslav (2003). *O mé cestě do Číny*. Brno: Vutium, 100–103.

<sup>14</sup> For more information, see Kraus, Richard (1989). *Pianos and Politics in China: Middle-Class Ambitions and the Struggle over Western Music*, Oxford University Press.

<sup>15</sup> For details about the life of Cai Yuanpei, see Yin Xueman 尹雪曼 (1979). *Cai Yuanpei* 蔡元培, Taipei: Hua xin wenhua shiye zhongxin.

sometimes in the use of formal elements connected with the Chinese tradition before the arrival of Western music.<sup>16</sup>

### **Three composers of art songs, three different viewpoints**

I will now focus on three composers of Chinese art songs who contributed significantly to the development of this genre and who each had their own approach to the creative process: Xiao Youmei, Zhao Yuanren, and Huang Zi. Studying their songs reveals different perspectives on the social role of music and the possibilities for using art songs to improve society, for choosing texts to set to music, and for different extents of musical inventiveness. Above all, these composers tried to reflect various aspects of their present day in their works, which was manifested in their different compositional approaches.

#### **Xiao Youmei: Songs for didactic use**

“The life of a work of music is definitely not related to its form and interpretation but relies on its content.” (Xiao Youmei 1993, 539)

Xiao Youmei is a typical representative of the composers active from the May Fourth Movement period until the outbreak of the Anti-Japanese War. In 1901–10 he studied in Japan, and in 1912–20 in Germany. He graduated from conservatories in Tokyo (piano and voice), Leipzig (composition and musical theory), and Berlin (composition, theory, conducting). Clearly, Xiao Youmei was not narrowly focused on just one aspect of making music; he was mainly motivated by the desire to contribute to various aspects of developing musical education in China. The time he spent in Leipzig, where he met Hugo Riemann (1849–1919), a composer of many lieder and a musical theorist, had a major influence on his decision to create art songs (Zhang 1982, 41).<sup>17</sup>

Although Xiao Youmei is often presented as a critic of Chinese tradition or as an opponent of reviving ancient Chinese music,<sup>18</sup> this does not mean that he had no interest in traditional Chinese music. Just the opposite was true. His dissertation, which he defended in 1916 in Leipzig, was about traditional Chinese music, specifically about the history of Chinese orchestral music before the seventeenth century.<sup>19</sup> In China, this study is now celebrated as the first Chinese musicology work for which a doctoral degree was

---

<sup>16</sup> For more on the relationship between modernization and Confucianism, see Kyong-Dong, Kim (2017). *Confucianism and Modernization in East Asia*. Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan.

<sup>17</sup> For detailed bibliographical information about Xiao Youmei, see the introduction in Xiao Youmei 萧友梅 (2004). *Xiaoyoumei Quanji* 萧友梅全集. Shanghai: Shanghai yinxueyuan chubanshe.

<sup>18</sup> E.g., in Gild, Gerlinde (2004). “The Evolution of Modern Chinese Musical Theory and Terminology Under Western Impact” In: Lackner, Michael (ed.) *Mapping Meanings: The Field of New Learning in Late Qing China*. Leiden, Brill, 571.

<sup>19</sup> The title of the dissertation was “Eine Geschichtliche Untersuchung über das Chinesische Orchester bis zum 17. Jahrhundert”, which was translated into Chinese as “17世紀以前中國管弦樂團的歷史研究”. It was defended in 1916 in Leipzig.

awarded at a non-Chinese university. Nonetheless, it was first translated into Chinese in only 1990.<sup>20</sup>

Like many other composers in this period, when Xiao returned from Europe, he primarily concentrated on musical education. He worked first at the conservatory in Peking and later in Shanghai, compiling suitable teaching materials and teaching practical courses. He authored textbooks on harmony<sup>21</sup> and on playing the organ,<sup>22</sup> the piano,<sup>23</sup> and the violin<sup>24</sup>.

Most of Xiao Youmei's works were written for a solo vocalist. Their didactic nature and patriotic zeal revealed the enduring legacy of the school song tradition. Like the school songs, many of his art songs were published in collections. The most well-known include *The First Collection of Contemporary Music (Jinyue chujī 今樂初集)* from 1922, the first collection of Chinese music to be fully accompanied by piano written using Western musical staff notation, and the three-volume *Collection of Songs (Geji 歌集)* from 1924. Unlike school songs, the works contained in these books indicate a higher standard of compositional techniques and therefore should be considered art songs. They were also intended for didactic use, and as we shall see in the following example, they adopted several typical features of school songs.

Xiao Youmei avoided setting classical poems to music. Although he considered Song- and Yuan-period Chinese poems easy to set to music, he felt they contained inappropriate themes. He explicitly writes that “they do not meet the requirements of the present day and their melancholy nature is not suitable for the needs of musical education in schools and society” (Xiao Youmei 1931). Although most of Xiao's songs use texts in the traditional *ci* 詞 song genre, they were written by the composer's collaborator of many years Yi Weizhai 易韋齋 (1874–1941), a member of the Southern Society (Nanshe 南社) and an active participant in the Xinhai Revolution that put an end to the empire.

We can study how poetry in this genre was set to music by examining one of Xiao's most famous songs, “A Question” (“Wen” 問), whose lyrics were written by Yi Weizhai. The song was written in 1922 and was published in *The First Collection of Contemporary Music*. The lyrics in both verses reflect the chaotic, difficult situation in China under military rule (“Do you know how many tears there are in the country?,” “Ni zhidao jinri de jiang shan, you duoshao qihuang de lei?” 你知道今日的江山，有多少淒惶的淚) and the general atmosphere of insecurity, introduce questions about the true identity of the Chinese nation (“Do you know who you are?,” “Ni zhidao ni shi shei?” 你知道你是誰), and make a call for immediate action in a time of crisis, before it is too late (“Do you know that the years of youth are like water?,” “Ni zhidao nianhua ru shui?” 你知道年華如水?).

Xiao used long ligatures in many long phrases. The song hence includes more than just syllabic word setting, one of the typical features of early school songs from the beginning of the twentieth century. The progress of the melody reflects the occurrence of questions

<sup>20</sup> The translation was published in Xiao, Youmei 蕭友梅 and Liao Fushu 廖輔叔 (1990). *Xiao Youmei yinyue wenji* 蕭友梅音樂文集, Shanghai yinyue chubanshe.

<sup>21</sup> Xiao Youmei 蕭友梅 (1932). *Heshengxue* 餽聲學, Shangwu yinshu guan.

<sup>22</sup> Xiao Youmei 蕭友梅 (1925). *Xin xuezhi fengqin jiaokeshu* 新學制風琴教科書, Shangwu yinshu guan.

<sup>23</sup> Xiao Youmei 蕭友梅 (1926). *Gangqin jiaokeshu* 鋼琴教科書, Shangwu yinshu guan.

<sup>24</sup> Xiao Youmei 蕭友梅 (1927). *Xiaoti qin jiaokeshu* 小提琴教科書, Shangwu yinshu guan.

in the original poem only in some places. Whereas the first phrase (“Do you know who you are?”) ends on the mediant and truly acts like a question, the second phrase (“Do you know that youth is like water?”) ends on the tonic and sounds like an answer. Here, to create his own melodic line, Xiao used triplets, which combined with the syllabic word setting, make the music seem leaden. Unlike in earlier periods, here attention is paid for the first time to the dynamics and minor nuances of the performance, such as agogics, slowing down the tempo, and so forth. Xiao used staff notation, and following Western models, he always noted the tempo of his songs (here *adagio*). The piano accompaniment of the song is very simple and copies the main melody, and arpeggios are used several times to underline the song’s melancholic mood.

Xiao Youmei studied music in Germany, a country where the Romantic song has its roots, but in some respects his music clearly diverges from the fundamentals of *lieder* composition, for example, in his choice to apply highly contrasting rhythmic patterns that interrupt the flow of the melody. In many ways, they are reminiscent of the incoherence of the lyrical and musical elements of school songs.

Xiao Youmei was a proponent of modernizing Chinese music, which in his eyes meant using modern European instruments such as the piano, introducing reliable musical notation, and using counterpoints and modulation. Interestingly, most of his songs do not contain modulation. A majority of Xiao’s songs are characterized by their rather graceless combining of complicated poetic lyrics written in a form that calls for the alternating of verses of various lengths with forgettable melodies layered over primitive arpeggios.

The difficult themes and the complicated forms of the poetry genre of *ci*, whose irregular metrical pattern is not adequately transferred into the musical adaptation, may contribute to why Xiao’s songs are not popular today. Thus, many of Xiao’s songs, like some less successful German *lieder* that did not resolve “Das Wort-Ton-Problem” (Whitton 1984, 5), do not combine lyrical and musical elements in a non-forced manner.

Like the song “Question”, Xiao’s later works reflect the author’s emphasis on the didactic potential of the original texts. In 1931, in a section dedicated to recommendations for song composers contained in his *Manifesto of the Song Club* (*Geshe chengli xuanyan* 歌社成立宣言), Xiao states that they should select comprehensible texts that have the potential to contribute to transforming the Chinese national character (Xiao 1993, 32). Xiao’s statements about the interconnections between music and morals in his some of works (e.g., “A Song in Memory of Confucius” 孔子紀念歌) demonstrate that the predominant understanding of Xiao Youmei as an anti-traditionalist needs to be reevaluated.

### **Zhao Yuanren: Comprehensibility, musicality, and a Chinese–Western synthesis**

“Performers must thoroughly dedicate their attention to the title of the composition, the structure of phrases and sentences contained in it, and the overall arrangement. Sometimes it is also important to study the intents of the composer, the historical context, and the motivation giving birth to the work. Only then can performers make beautiful music.” (Zhao Yuanren 1996, 271)

“I consider it important that we in the music world first achieve the necessary level. Then it is necessary to add the individual or Chinese character as a personal contribution.” (ibid.)

Zhao Yuanren, a graduate of Cornell and Harvard, is not known so much as a composer but more as a linguist who contributed to standardizing new spoken Chinese, the national language (*guoyu* 國語). At the same time though he wrote popular art songs, which in 2020 were regularly included in recitals celebrating the one-hundredth anniversary of this genre in China. This fact is quite remarkable considering that Zhao had no formal musical education and that music for him was only a marginal interest.<sup>25</sup> What motivated Zhao to use the form of the German *lieder* is revealed in his article “A Discussion of Musical Education Materials” from 1917: “Western music should do everything it can for the Chinese people” (Zhao Yuanren 1917 in Zhang Jinwei 1998, 284).

His most famous collection is *A Collection of Songs Based on the Lyrics of New Poetry* (*Xinshi geji* 新詩歌集) from 1928, which contains most of his art songs. With the exception of “A Flower in a Vase” (“*Pinghua*” 瓶花), which is a musical version of verses by Song-era poet Fan Chengda 范成大 (1126–93), all of Zhao’s songs are based on the work of modern poets, especially Liu Bannong 劉半農 (1891–1934). Zhao Yuanren thus set to music contemporary experimental poetry, which like New Music, acknowledged its European inspiration. Even more interesting, some component of every song referred to Chinese culture, whether it was in the choice of theme, where a modern poet might reach for a traditional motif, or the use of an existing pentatonic melody.

In the foreword to the collection Zhao writes:

A poem is a poem and a song, a song. A bad poem will certainly not become a good song, but a great song does not necessarily have to be a good poem [...]. The authenticity of a poem, transformed into the form of a song meant to be sung, will experience certain damage. [...] When singing, you cannot use the natural intonation of speech and cannot therefore directly express ideas. [...] At the same time, to express emotions we can rely on musicality for help. [...] In singing songs, we add a musical dimension, which can enhance the shared aesthetic perception of listeners, the *raison d'être* of the art song. (Zhao Yuanren 1987, 260)

He also writes about how to select poems that can be suitably set to music as art songs. In his opinion, the original text must be easy to comprehend, have a regular structure, and feature frequent repetition. Only thus can a composer be sure that the original meaning of the text is preserved in a comprehensible form when it is sung (ibid.).

Zhao was a proponent of through-composed songs and combining pentatonic melodies with poetic texts in *Guoyu*. In several works, he focuses on how to sing appropriately in spoken Chinese, especially as concerns what he proclaimed to be standardized pronunciation. He preferred that, when sung, Chinese syllables be equally split into the initial, the vowel, and the final, although the vowel was supposed to be just slightly longer than the other two parts. Zhao considered the most demanding aspect of song performance to be combining the necessity of the lyrics to be comprehensible with singability. He consid-

---

<sup>25</sup> For more information, see Zhao Rulan. 趙如蘭 (1996). *Zhao Yuanren jinian zhuankan* 趙元任紀念專刊, Taipei: Xingzheng yuan wenhua jianshe weiyuanhui.



ered the ideal solution to be if the delivery was as natural as possible and emphasized the musicality of the whole without the necessity of using the bel canto technique.

In a 1977 interview Zhao spoke about the specifics of setting texts written in the spoken language to music and the issues related to accent. He differentiated between classical poetry, where there was the assumption that each syllable (which was usually one word) would be equally stressed in the verse, unlike poetry in the modern living language, where there were many polysyllabic words with the stress on the first syllable. Zhao Yuanren identified the stress where a full word is accompanied by a grammatical particle: “The matter of stress is not important when the words are in the classical verse, but in modern colloquial wording, the stress should fall on the so-called full words rather than the empty words.”<sup>26</sup>

In terms of themes, Zhao set to music both poems about social topics, such as ones promoting democracy, and lyric poems. With one exception, the choral “Sea Rhymes” (“Hai yun” 海韻), all his songs were written for solo vocalists.

This collection also contains what is likely his most famous song, which fully demonstrates Zhao’s patriotic fervour: “How Not to Think about Her” (“Jiao wo ruhe bu xiang ta” 教我如何不想她) for piano, violin, and voice. It exemplifies the synthesis of Chinese melody with Western compositional techniques.

When it comes to performing art songs, Zhao generally welcomed the use of the traditional Chinese singing technique of *huayin* 花音, typically marked by a more relaxed approach to the interpretation of staff notation and the frequent use of ornaments (trills, mordents, etc.) and portamento. In a 1936 recording of “How Not to Think about Her” performed by Zhao Yuanren, the song feels like an aria from the Peking Opera,<sup>27</sup> which is enhanced by the use of a melodic line typical of opera intermezzos. The composition is interesting thanks to its ample use of modulation, which conjures up the atmosphere of the changing seasons and is based on Western Romantic music. The text of the poem also explores the changing of the seasons, and each stanza is about a different one. The author of the text is Liu Bannong, a poet, linguist, and enthusiastic collector of Chinese folk songs, who stylized his texts based on traditional Chinese and folk works. Liu Bannong wrote this poem in 1920, when he was studying in England. Zhao Yuanren likely chose it based on its regular structure and fluid text. The song also contains linguistic innovations. It was the first work by a Chinese author to use a character with the radical of a woman to denote the feminine third-person pronoun.<sup>28</sup>

A contemporary recording of this song performed by Zhao Yuanren demonstrates that, despite the singing technique used, which straddles the boundary between the method typical of the Peking Opera and European songs, Zhao, fully in keeping with his theoretical ideas, made a point of properly pronouncing the words and maintaining

---

<sup>26</sup> Zhao Yuanren (1997). *Chinese Linguist, Phonologist, Composer and Author, Yuen Ren Chao: Interview Conducted by Rosemary Levenson*. Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley China Scholars Series. 161. Accessible at: [http://content.cdlib.org/view?docId=hb8779p27v&brand=calisphere&doc.view=entire\\_text](http://content.cdlib.org/view?docId=hb8779p27v&brand=calisphere&doc.view=entire_text)

<sup>27</sup> The recording is accessible on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UceaEkSnAGk>

<sup>28</sup> Inspired by practices in Western languages, Liu Bannong was the first to propose different ways of denoting the third person in the feminine (她) and in the neuter (它) while maintaining the same pronunciation (tā). For more information, see Wang, Wei. (2020). *Analysing Chinese Language and Discourse across Layers and Genres*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 115.

the length of vowels and consonants so that the lyrics would be fully comprehensible to listeners (Zhao Yuanren 1987).

Zhao Yuanren, unlike his contemporaries, considered the performance to be an important part of the art song. His ideas about the ideal delivery were reflected in the process of selecting texts and how they were set to music. Because his works emphasize the unstrained combination of text, melody, and accompaniment, modern audiences are still receptive to his works even though singers now use a different approach to interpreting them and the texts have already lost their connection to the historical context in which they emerged.

Zhao Yuanren's work is characterized by setting works of New Poetry to music using pentatonic melodies intended to be sung using techniques from traditional Chinese opera, harmonized in the spirit of Romanticism, with the frequent use of modulation. Zhao Yuanren thus demonstrated one of the possible ways to combine Western and Chinese music, which then inspired many other composers. The influence of tradition in Zhao Yuanren's work is clear, especially in terms of the style of delivery he preferred.

### Huang Zi: Combining content and form

"Music is capable of expressing the inclination of human nature and mentality. [...] The essence of music is not mimicry; it is an expressive art." (Huang Zi 1997, 73)

At a tender age Huang Zi<sup>29</sup> played the piano and sang in a choir. Like Xiao Youmei, he also studied abroad, in the USA, first at Oberlin College (psychology) and later at Yale University. There he studied composition, orchestration, and musical analysis. The overture "In Memorium" ("Huai jiu" 懷舊), which he composed as a graduation piece, was very well received. It was the first Chinese orchestral piece ever composed and also the first of its kind to be performed in China.<sup>30</sup>

After returning to China, he taught alongside Xiao Youmei as a professor at Shanghai Conservatory (from 1930 until his death in 1938) and served as an expert on musical education at the Ministry of Education. One of his most important deeds was establishing the first purely Chinese symphony orchestra in 1936.

Huang Zi, along with other teachers from the Shanghai Conservatory, was among the composers whose legacy was tarnished during the anti-right-wing campaign in the late 1950s. Huang Zi was posthumously labelled a rightist due to his time abroad. Huang Zi's students were also subjected to criticism (in 1958 the music theorist and teacher Qian Renkang 錢仁康 was admonished for writing articles about the anniversary of Huang Zi's death), as were Huang Zi's works.

Like Xiao Youmei, Huang Zi was not just a blind critic of the Chinese musical tradition. He studied the history of Chinese music and Chinese music theory his entire life. Several of his articles were about the importance of evaluating the quality and characteristics of individual compositions based on the social and historical circumstances at the time they were created and about Confucian ideas about the ability of music to have

<sup>29</sup> For a detailed biography, see Qian Renkang 錢仁康 (1997). *Huang Zi de shenghuo yu chuanguozuo* 黃自的生活與創作. Beijing: Renmin yinyue chubanshe.

<sup>30</sup> By Maestro Paci in Shanghai in 1930.

a positive effect on the morals of listeners. Most of his music theory articles, however, were about composing New Music and creating a new national compositional style (Huang Zi 1997, 73).

Huang Zi also examined the perception of music, which he divided into three categories: sensory, emotional, and rational perception. Whereas everyone is capable of perceiving music with the senses, the other two types of perception were in his opinion typical of more learned listeners, especially rational perception, which required an understanding of music theory. Huang Zi criticized composers who tried to only write works that played to the senses and downplayed the other two categories or even intentionally ignored them to attract listeners. In his opinion, holistically perceiving music in all three ways and fully appreciating a composition can be achieved by combining the ability to discern aesthetic qualities with knowledge of the rules of musical language (Huang Zi 1997, 7–13).

Huang Zi considered music to be a unique form of art in which connecting the subject (meaning) and form (the structure of the composition corresponding to its message) is essential. Here, Huang Zi cites the 1877 essay “The School of Giorgione” by English art critic Walter Pater (2017): “All art constantly aspires towards the condition of music (i.e., the arts seek to unify subject-matter and form, and music is the only art in which subject and form are seemingly one).”

The collected works of Huang Zi include ninety-three art songs as well as classical *shi* and *ci* poems and texts in the New Poetry style. Huang Zi preferred lyric poetry, and in setting it to music he masterfully used the melodic structure to emphasize critical moments in the text of the poem. He worked with the piano accompaniment in a similar manner. It is an integral part of the song and helps elicit images of the environment in which the poem is set. Most of his songs have an ABA rhyme scheme and religiously follow Western rules of functional harmony, where we can clearly observe the influence of his studies at foreign conservatories. The accompaniment often features extracts from the melodic line of the vocal part, sometimes in the form of a dialogue. Seventh chords and ninth chords appear in his later songs, in which the use of modulation is also more frequent.

The 1932 song “Nostalgia” (“Sixiang” 思鄉) deals with the popular motif of homesickness. The New Poetry-style text was written by Wei Hanzhang 韋瀚章 (1905–93), who would later become a professor at the Hong Kong School of Sacred Music. This song has two parts. The first is marked by a melancholic mood; the second contrasts with the first. The melodic apex of the song is preceded by an ascending chromatic series that is enhanced by the accompaniment. Its main feature is the elaborate piano accompaniment, which comes to the forefront in the beginning, middle, and end. In the introduction, the accompaniment employs the canon technique to evoke the sense that home is somewhere too far away to reach. Here we observe the clever use of triplets to lighten the melody and non-chord tones to enhance the feelings of insecurity.

Although the text does not address such serious social themes as those contained in Xia Youmei’s “A Question”, its comprehensibility and elaborateness, with its ideal ratio of contrasting parts that enhance turning points in the text, make “Nostalgia” an emotive composition of high artistic merit.

The works of Huang Zi, who also wrote songs on Confucian themes, share the same features as songs by the other two composers mentioned above when it comes to

following the domestic tradition. He used citations from Confucian texts to support his ideas about the importance of music in society and believed in the association between music and social morals. His works also make direct reference to the domestic tradition, especially in terms of the themes of the texts he chose to set to music.

### **Conclusion: Even little things can be precious**

The art song genre appeared in China during the May Fourth Movement, when Chinese culture underwent radical transformations, and enjoyed great popularity until the outbreak of the Anti-Japanese War. Although European songs from the Romantic era (primarily German *lieder*, and to a lesser extent French *mélodie*) were the initial impetus behind the creation of this genre, Chinese art songs were not mere imitations of their Western counterparts. This genre was a meeting place of the domestic tradition (ideas about music's social role, pentatonic melodies, traditional singing techniques, texts from classical poems) and modernity (ideas about modernization, Western compositional techniques, piano accompaniment, "New Poetry" texts). The hybrid nature of the art song, which permeates all aspects of this genre, was the result of a more general question of the era: how could composers help Chinese culture toss off the yoke of tradition and stand side-by-side with "advanced" Western culture, but at the same time keep its national distinctiveness?

The very inclination of Chinese composers to this genre is in fact the logical culmination of the domestic tradition. May Fourth-era art songs incorporate traditional ideas about music's social role, which were typical of Chinese music during the imperial era. Here, just like in the New Music genre that preceded the art song – the school song – music played a new role in society: to strengthen Chinese national self-determination and to boost Chinese national pride. Chinese songs, unlike the products of European Romanticism, did not focus on being original or expressing the subjective feelings of the individual. Instead, they tried to develop the patriotism of listeners and contribute to teaching them new values. This process included the introduction of music education into the general school curriculum in the belief that music at school can contribute to cultivating the Chinese nation. The emphasis put on developing music education by all composers of New Music associated with the May Fourth Movement<sup>31</sup> was reflected in art songs. The fact that composers included in collections of their art songs instructions for how to perform them to best communicate the messages they contain or theoretical essays stressing the role of singing songs in the modernization process demonstrates the interconnectedness of this genre with social objectives and efforts to create a new Chinese culture.

Adherence to the European tradition in the spirit of the ideas of the May Fourth Movement and the Movement for a New Culture does not mean that songwriters completely abandoned domestic sources of inspiration, but rather modified and adapted them. They used domestic pentatonic melodies that were familiar to Chinese audiences, but in new

---

<sup>31</sup> Proponents of music education who also composed New Music for educational purposes include essayist, painter, and translator Feng Zikai 豐子愷 (1898–1975) and teacher, dramatist, musician, and painter Li Shutong 李淑同 (1880–1942). Both also composed art songs.

ways, and explicitly spoke about “the modernization of Chinese music”. By this term they meant accepting Western inspiration in the form of new compositional techniques that were considered “progressive” or even “scientifically more advanced”. The hybrid nature of Chinese art songs is also manifested in their combining of traditional domestic singing techniques with piano accompaniment.

The issue of balancing the demands of the May Fourth Movement to break away from the old culture with efforts to create new works that contained something specific to Chinese culture manifested itself in the texts of new art songs. Chinese composers chose to set to music the texts of classical poems as well as works of New Poetry that were created in opposition to the Chinese literary heritage. In a certain sense the very principle of combining poetic text and music in the Chinese art song was a return to tradition. The shift toward creating art songs in China was in a way a return to older ideas about the connections between poetry and music, in an entirely new form, a modern-era attempt to revive tradition. Viewed in this context, the art song gains a new dimension confirming that it was not just the result of transplanting a foreign genre into a new environment.

Although the works of great composers of art songs, whether they be by Xiao Youmei or Huang Zi, who were both composers and teachers, or the linguist Zhao Yuanren, shared many features, each of these composers introduced new elements into the developing genre. Art songs by all three composers reflect each of their perspectives on the period they lived in and represent efforts to contribute to the development of a new Chinese culture. Their works reflected not only motifs that could be found in Western Romantic songs (such as being away from home or descriptions of natural beauty) but also themes that were related to current events (fears about China’s fate under militarist rule, the promotion of necessary modernization) and ideas about how to, at least partly, incorporate traditional values into modern society (reflections on the qualities of Confucian values and how they can be adapted for modern society in the work of Huang Zi).

The first song contained in *Italienisches Liederbuch* by the master of the German art song, Hugo Wolf, published in 1891, starts with the following two lines: “Auch kleine Dinge können uns entzücken, Auch kleine Dinge können teuer sein”, or “Even little things can delight us, even little things can be precious.”<sup>32</sup> It is equally as true that art songs from the May Fourth period are unique historical sources that can tell us about the creation of works of art that straddle the boundary between tradition and modernity and which should not escape our attention.

---

<sup>32</sup> The translation is taken from here: BREITZER, Donna. 2003–11–09, *The LiederNet Archive*. Retrieved from: Even little things (Heyse, set by (Hugo Wolf)) (The LiederNet Archive: Texts and Translations to Lieder, mélodies, canzoni, and other classical vocal music).

---

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Cai, Yuanpei 蔡元培 (1912). "Duiyu xin jiaoyu zhi yijian" 對於新教育之意見 [Opinions on the New Education]. In: Cai Yuanpei 蔡元培 (1997), *Cai Yuanpei quanji* 蔡元培全集. Vol. 2., Hangzhou: Zhejiang Jiaoyu chubanshe.
- Cai, Yuanpei 蔡元培 (1918). *Beijing daxue yinyue tuan* 北京大學音樂團 [Peking University Music Group]. Beijing Daxue Rikan, pp: 63.
- Ho, Wai-chung (2011). *School Music Education and Social Change in Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan*. Leiden: Brill.
- Huang, Zi 黃自 (1997). *Huang Zi yizuo ji* 黃自遺作集 [Collection of Huang Zi's Posthumous Works]. Hefei: Anhui wenyi chubanshe.
- Liang, Qichao 梁啟超 (1999). *Liang Qichao quanji* 梁啟超全集 [The Complete Works of Liang Qichao]. Beijing: Beijing chubanshe.
- Liu, Jingzhi 劉靖之 (2000). *Chaoxi, mofang, yizhi - zhongguo xinyinyue fazhan de sange jieduan* 抄襲、模仿、移植 - 中國新音樂發展的三個階段 [Plagiarism, imitation, Transplantation- the Three Stages of the Development of New Music in China]. Nanjing: Nanjing yishu xueyuan xuebao 3, 7-10.
- Nikkels, Eveline (1989). "O Mensch! Gib Acht!": *Friedrich Nietzsches Bedeutung für Gustav Mahler*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- Pater, Walter (2011). *The Works of Walter Pater*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Sun, Shi 孫時 (1919). "Yinye yu jiaoyu" 音樂教育 [Musical Education]. In: Zhang Jingwei (ed.), *Zhongguo Jindai Yinyue Shiliao Huibian* 中國近代音樂史料彙編. Beijing: Renmin chubanshe.
- Sun, Yung-Wei (2012). "A Performance Guide to Mandarin-Chinese Diction and Selected Art Songs." PhD. Dissertation. Ohio State University.
- Van Aalst, J. A. (1884). *Chinese Music*. Shanghai: Statistical Dept. of the Inspectorate General of Customs.
- Weber, Max (1958). *The Rational and Social Foundations of Music*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Whitton, Kenneth (1984). *Lieder: An Introduction to German Song*. London: Julia MacRae.
- Xiao, Youmei 蕭友梅 (1993). "Guanyu woguo xin yinyue yundong" 關於我國新音樂運動 [About My Country's New Music Movement]. In: Xiao, Youmei 蕭友梅, *Xiaoyoumei quanji* 蕭友梅全集. Shanghai: Shanghai yinxueyuan chubanshe, 679-81.
- Xiao, Youmei 蕭友梅 (1993). *Xiao Youmei yinyue wenji* 蕭友梅音樂文集 [Xiao Youmei's Music Collection]. Shanghai: Shanghai yinyue chubanshe.
- Yao, Xinzong (2015). *The Encyclopedia of Confucianism*. London: Routledge.
- Yu, Quanheng 禹權恆 (2013). *Xuetang yuege yu zhongguo xinshi de shanbian* 學堂樂歌與中國新詩的嬗變 [School Music and the Evolution of Chinese New Poems], *Jinyang xuekan* 晉陽學刊 3, 30-35.
- Zhang, Jigao 張繼高 (1982). *Xiao Youmei xiansheng zhi shengping* 蕭友梅先生之生平 [The Life of Mr. Xiao Youmei]. Taipei Shi: Yazhou zuoqujia lianmeng Zhonghua minguo zonghui.
- Zhao, Yuanren 趙元任 (1937). *Gecizhong de guoyin* 歌詞中的國音 [Guoyin in the lyrics], *Yinyue yuekan* 音樂月刊 1, Shanghai yinyue chubanshe.
- Zhao, Yuanren 趙元任 (1987). *Zhao Yuanren yinyue zuopin quanji* 趙元任音樂作品全集 [Complete Musical Works of Zhao Yuanren]. Shanghai: Shanghai yinyue chubanshe.
- Zhao, Yuanren 趙元任 (1996). "Shuo Shi" 說時. In: Zhang Jingwei (ed.), *Zhongguo Jindai Yinyue Shiliao Huibian* 中國近代音樂史料彙編. Beijing: Renmin chubanshe.

## HAYAMA YOSHIKI'S "THE PROSTITUTE" IN TAIWANESE AND MANCHUKUO PROLETARIAN LITERATURE<sup>1</sup>

MARTIN BLAHOTA

### ABSTRACT

In the 1920s and 1930s, the Japanese proletarian literary movement had an enormous impact on East Asian writers, who often translated and adapted Japanese tales. Amongst them, Hayama Yoshiki's 1925 short story "Inbaifu" (The Prostitute) enjoyed great popularity. This paper focuses on the Taiwanese writer Lang-shi-sheng's adaptation of "Inbaifu", the 1935 "Yami" (Darkness), and Manchukuo writer Yuan Xi's adaptation of the same Japanese source text, the 1938 short story "Shi tian" (Ten Days). By comparing the Taiwanese and Manchukuo stories, this paper suggests that both versions of "Inbaifu" reflect the Japanese debate on proletarian literature that was fashionable in East Asia in the 1930s. However, by resetting the stories in Taiwan and Manchukuo, respectively, the authors created cultural products that defy borders and simple nationalist interpretations.

**Keywords:** Manchukuo; Taiwan; Japan; China; twentieth century; proletarian literature; Hayama Yoshiki; Yuan Xi; Lang-shi-sheng

Word War I challenged the regimes of many empires around the world and put into motion colossal social changes. In 1917, the Bolsheviks seized power in Russia in the October Revolution. In the same period, workers in Spain, the USA, Brazil, and Japan launched large-scale strikes. Side by side with these events, several cultural initiatives emerged in Europe that began to spread Marxist, anti-war, and anti-imperialist ideas around the world. Amongst them were the first international writers' association, Clarté, which applauded Vladimir Lenin's (1870–1924) founding of the Comintern in 1919, and the Russian proletarian cultural movement known as Proletkult, both of which had a considerable influence in East Asia. Although Chinese, Taiwanese, and Korean booms in "proletarian literature" (Chinese: *wuchanjieji wenxue* 無產階級文學 or *puluo wenxue* 普羅文學; Japanese: *puoretaria bungaku* プロレタリア文学) would not occur until the late 1920s, in Japan, this modernist genre that promoted class struggle from the perspec-

<sup>1</sup> This research was supported by the Taiwan Fellowship 2020. It was created as part of the project "Borders and Identities in the Interconnected World", subproject "Leftist Literature in Manchukuo" realized at the Faculty of Arts of Charles University, with additional financial support from a specific university research grant in 2020. I am most grateful to Liu Shu-chin and Olga Lomová for their thoughts and comments.

tive of labourers already began developing at the beginning of the decade (Bowen-Struyk 2006, 252–53).<sup>2</sup>

At the end of the nineteenth century, Japan became the first modern nation-state in East Asia. Even though Chinese, Taiwanese, and Korean intellectuals often felt humiliated by Japanese imperialism, they commonly looked up to Japan as a gleaming example of successful nation-building. Also, proletarian literature first flourished in East Asia in Japan, and Japanese writers of proletarian literature served as role models for East Asian intellectuals. Therefore, it is not surprising that when East Asian writers aimed to resist Japanese imperialism, they used translations and adaptations of Japanese anti-imperialist proletarian literature for this purpose (Bowen-Struyk 2006, 263–64). For example, the Esperanto-named Korea Artista Proletaria Federacio (KAPF), which organized left-wing Korean writers, worked closely with Japanese proletarian writers such as Nakano Shigharu 中野重治 (1902–79; Thorber 2009, 47).<sup>3</sup> The Japanese NAPF (Nippona Artista Proletaria Federacio), which was formed in 1928, was instrumental in spreading proletarian literature to Taiwan around 1930 (Liu Shu-chin 2019, 511).

China was essential for the development of the Japanese left-wing movement. Japanese radicals, who sought to establish the Japanese Communist Party, met with Russian Comintern representatives in Shanghai in the early 1920s. However, a vocal left-wing literary movement began in China only after 1927, when Chiang Kai-shek's (1887–1975) Kuomintang violently suppressed its former ally, the Communist Party of China. In response to growing authoritarianism of the KMT government, the League of Left-wing Writers (Zhongguo zuoyi zuojia lianmeng 中國左翼作家聯盟), headed by Lu Xun 魯迅 (1881–1936), was established in 1930 in Shanghai (Bowen-Struyk 2006, 254–55).

The concept of “Proletarian revolutionary literature” (*wuchan jieji geming wenxue* 無產階級革命文學) began being discussed in China in 1927. However, most scholars assert that the Chinese proletarian literary movement, unlike its Japanese, Korean, and Taiwanese counterparts, was proletarian in name only and that it did not produce literature worthy of the title, namely, literature that focuses on factory wage-labourers. Some scholars even suggest that in China, mainly due to the low level of industrialization, no proletarian literature was produced before 1949.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, several recent studies have demonstrated that a proletarian literary movement emerged in the 1930s in Chi-

---

<sup>2</sup> The term *proletarian literature* was used by self-styled “proletarian” organizations and writers in East Asia during the 1920s and 1930s in a very broad sense as literature that strives to promote class struggle amongst members of the working class. It was mostly interchangeable with the term *left-wing literature*. In this paper I use the term *proletarian literature* in this broad sense. Accordingly, by *proletarian writers* I mean authors of proletarian literature, regardless of whether they actually came from a working-class background or not.

<sup>3</sup> From 1925 until its demise in 1935, the KAPF dominated the Korean literary scene (Hughes 2013: xi). The KAPF communicated both directly and indirectly with Russian and Japanese proletarian organizations and was thus involved with the Comintern (Kim Yoon-shik 2006: 408).

<sup>4</sup> For example, Sylvia Chan has noted that the most influential literary and dramatic works from the early 1930s written by Mao Dun 茅盾 (1896–1981), Tian Han 田漢 (1898–1968), Ding Ling 丁玲 (1904–86), and Ba Jin 巴金 (1904–2005) are concerned with the life of the upper classes, or, when they try to reflect the life of workers, they are not written from the perspective of the working class (Chan 1983: 57–65). Volland has noted that “the majority of the leftist literary works written before 1949 depict the vast Chinese countryside and focus on the class struggle among the peasantry and on the peasants’ fight against exploitation and their landlords.” In his view, the few novels that take place in an urban setting do not focus on workers or on industrial development (Volland 2009, 99).



na's Northeast under Japanese occupation, that is, in Manchukuo (Manzhouguo 滿洲國, 1932–45), the Japanese puppet state in northeast China (see Okada 2001, 115–66; Liu Heng-Hsing 2017; and Ōkubō 2019).

In this paper I analyse the Taiwanese writer Lang-shi-sheng's 琅石生<sup>5</sup> 1935 Japanese-language short story "Yami" 闇 (Darkness) and Manchukuo author Yuan Xi's 袁犀 (1919–79) Chinese-language "Shi tian" 十天 (Ten Days), published in 1938.<sup>6</sup> Both stories rework a classic of Japanese proletarian literature, Hayama Yoshiki's 葉山嘉樹 (1894–1945) 1925 short story "Inbaifu" 淫売婦 (The Prostitute). The results of my exploration suggest that "Yami" and "Shi tian" can be read as literary answers to debates on proletarian literature in Taiwan and Manchukuo in the 1930s. Attempting to bring literature closer to the "masses", they reflect the distinct conditions and forms of oppression in both territories controlled by the Japanese Empire.

### East Asian Proletarian Literature and Hayama Yoshiki's "Inbaifu" (The Prostitute)

"Inbaifu" was one of the earliest and most popular works of Japanese proletarian literature. Hayama Yoshiki, who published it in 1925 in the radical journal *Bungei sensen* 文藝戰線 (Literary Front), claimed to come from a working-class background; in fact, his father was an official working in Kyoto, and Hayama himself was enrolled at Waseda University for a period of time. However, after he left the university, he worked as a sailor and held a job as an accountant at a cement factory, from which he was fired for attempting to establish a labour union. Later he was imprisoned for his association with the first Japanese Communist Party. It was in 1923 in Chigusa Prison where he began writing proletarian literature and finished "Inbaifu" (Bowen-Struyk 2016, 52).

Karen Thornber has already noted that Korean revolutionary writers reworked Hayama's stories, often emphasizing Japanese colonial oppression in Korea. Taiwanese proletarian writers, such as Yang Kui 楊逵 (1905–85), had close personal ties with Hayama and other Japanese proletarian writers (Thornber 2009, 56, 224), and it is therefore not surprising that an adaptation of "Inbaifu" appeared in Taiwan. In fact, Hayama's own essays on Taiwanese proletarian literature were published in Taiwan in 1935 (Lo Shih-Yun 2011, 172–75). Thanks to the numerous translations of Hayama's stories that appeared in Shanghai and Beijing in 1929 and 1930, he was not unknown in China either. Since several adaptations of "Inbaifu" were published in Manchukuo, it can be assumed that Hayama's works were well known in Manchukuo, too.<sup>7</sup>

The narrator of "Inbaifu" recalls a strange experience from his youth. At that time, he was nicknamed Minpei 民平 ("Commoner"). He was walking the streets of the port of Yokohama in his sailor's uniform so proudly that he completely forgot what class he

<sup>5</sup> Lang-shi-sheng is the pen name of an unknown author.

<sup>6</sup> Yuan Xi is the most prominent pen name of Hao Weilian 郝維廉, born in Shenyang. He also used other pen names, for example, Liang Dao 梁稻 and Li Keyi 李克異.

<sup>7</sup> For example, I discovered that also Jue Qing's 爵青 (1917–1962) 1937 short story "Jieji yu chuan-shang" 街妓与船上 (On a Boat and a Hooker) reworks Hayama's "Inbaifu". However, because I consider this story to be a parody of proletarian literature rather than proletarian literature as such, in this paper, I do not focus on it.

belonged to, as he recalls. Suddenly, a man jumped out in front of him and offered him a prostitute. Minpei was hesitantly going to dismiss his offer, but two other men appeared, seized him by the arms, took his money, and dragged him to nearby Chinatown.

After walking through numerous narrow alleys, he found himself in a dark warehouse. Instead of being killed for his liver to be used in Chinese medicine, as he feared, he was indeed brought to a prostitute, who was breathing heavily and resembled a corpse. Her depiction attacks the reader's senses and evokes disgust:

そこには全く惨酷な畫が畫かれてあった。  
ビール箱の蓋の蔭には、二十二三ぐらいの若い婦人が、全身を全裸のまま仰向きに横たわっていた。彼女は腐った一枚の畳の上にいた。そして吐息は彼女の肩からおのおのが最後の一滴であるように、搾り出されるのであった。  
彼女の肩の邊から、枕の方へかけて、まだ彼女がいくらか、物を食べられる時に嘔吐したらしい汚物が、黒い血痕と共にグチャグチャに散らばっていた。髪の毛がそれで固められていた。それに彼女の (twelve characters missing; MB) ねばりついてゐた。そして、頭部の方からは酸敗した悪臭を放ってゐたし、肢部からは、癌腫の持つ特有の悪臭が放散されてゐた。こんな異様な臭氣の中で人間の肺が耐え得るかどうか、と危ぶまれるほどであつた。(Hayama 1925, 7)

The scene confronting me was an utterly atrocious one.

Behind the beer case lids lay faceup a woman of twenty-two or twenty-three; she was completely naked. She lay on top of a rotting tatami mat. Her shoulders heaved with each breath that she seemed to wring out of herself as though it were her very last.

Muck that she had apparently vomited when she was still able to take food was spattered from shoulder to pillow, intermingled with dark blood stains. Her hair was matted with it. And her XXXXXX was stuck to XXXXXX. A sour stench rose from her head, and her limbs gave off the vile smell peculiar to cancerous growths. This abnormal reek was such that I doubted human lungs could withstand it. (Hayama 2016, 59)

Minpei's first thought was that he felt sorry for this human being. However, despite the smell of her body, he also indulged in observing her and felt sexual desire, because, as he states, he was a young seaman who was always longing for women. But he overcame his passion and realized that her condition reminded him of that of a member of the proletariat, who must also destroy his or her body to eat. He imagined she was suffering from tuberculosis, the consequence of breathing bad air in a cotton factory, had been fired, and ended up on the street. Eventually he decided not to abuse her but to save her.

After this point, the story becomes difficult to interpret. To Minpei's surprise, she started to talk to him and refused his help. When the man who had brought him there, Kujiname 蝸 (‘‘Slug’’), returned, Minpei attacked him with his fists, infuriated by his abuse of the woman. At that moment, the woman scolded Minpei, saying that the three men who had brought Minpei to her were her protectors. Kujiname later explained to Minpei that they were not pimping her; they were carefully choosing who to bring here. It is not clear whether through prostitution or only through tricking the men they have carefully selected that they were making money for medication, because it was not only the woman who was sick, but all of them (Hayama 1925, 1–19).

The story comes to an end when the protagonist recalls returning to see the woman the next day. This time she was asleep, and he experienced an epiphany, a sudden recognition of class consciousness:

私は淫売婦の代りに殉教者を見た。  
彼女は、被搾取階級の一切の運命を象徴してゐるやうに見えた。  
私は眼に涙が一杯溜まった。私は音のしないやうにソーツと歩いて、扉の所に立ってゐた蝸へ、一圓渡した。渡す時に私は蝸の萎びた手をカー杯握りしめた。

そして私は表へ出た。階段の第一段を下るとき、溜ってゐた涙が私の眼から、ボトリとこぼれた。(Hayama 1925, 18-19)

I was looking at a martyr, not a prostitute.

She appeared to me to symbolize the fate of the entire exploited class.

My eyes filled with tears. I walked away, careful not to make a sound, and gave Slug, who was standing by the door, my one yen. As I gave it to him, I grasped his wizened hand with all my might.

I went outside. As I started down the stairway, tears fell from my welling eyes. (Hayama 2016, 68)

The ending explicitly explains the story as a proletarian allegory of class exploitation. Bowen-Struyk regards “Inbaifu” as “typical of a type of masculinist proletarian literature that tended to foreclose issues of gender/sex and sexuality in the service of class consciousness”. She has also observed that unlike most other proletarian stories, this one presents an interesting dramatization of the conflict between class consciousness and sexual desire. Furthermore, the woman’s subjectivity that is mirrored in her refusal of help opens space for other alternative readings (Bowen-Struyk 2009, 10, 24). Lo Shih-Yun has noted that one of the reasons Hayama’s “Inbaifu” was so warmly received by critics and readers is that the author incorporated elements of the new sensation school (*shinkankaku-ha* 新感覺派) into the short story. In particular, by dramatizing the main character’s sexual desire and emphasizing his olfactory and visual perceptions, Hayama creates a protagonist with a distinctive subjectivity. This approach distinguished Hayama’s writing from the formulaic expression typical of the proletarian literature of the time (Lo Shih-Yun 2011, 183-86).

### Taiwanese Proletarian Literature and Lang-shi-sheng’s “Yami” (Darkness)

Ten years after Hayama published “Inbaifu”, Lang-shi-sheng’s adaptation, “Yami”, appeared in the February 1935 issue of the half-Japanese-language, half-Chinese-language literary journal *Taiwan bungei* 臺灣文藝 (Taiwanese Literature and Arts).<sup>8</sup> Lang-shi-sheng is clearly a pen name, but the true identity of this author has not yet been discovered (Hoshina 2007, 115).

<sup>8</sup> See Wang Yiwen’s 王姿雯 translation of “Yami” into Chinese in Chen Yun-Yuan 2007, 185-89.

The story is interesting in the context of the discussion on proletarian literature that was taking place in Taiwan at the time of its publication. The same February issue of *Taiwan bungei* included “Geijutsu wa taishū no mono de aru” 藝術は大衆のものである (Art is for the Masses), written by the leading Taiwanese proletarian writer Yang Kui, whose literary work also reached audiences in Japan and China. In this essay, Yang Kui introduced the Taiwanese reader to the Japanese debate on the “massification of literature” (*bungaku taishūka* 文学大衆化) and referred to several participants in this debate, including Hirata Koroku 平田小六 (1903–76) and Tokunaga Sunao 徳永直 (1899–1958), prominent Japanese proletarian writers. Their arguments should be understood in the context of the debates on “proletarian realism” (*puroretaria riarizumu* プロレタリアのリアリズム), which had been taking place since 1928, and on socialist realism (*shakaishugi riarizumu* 社会主義リアリズム) in the early 1930s.<sup>9</sup>

Yang Kui suggested bringing literature closer to the “masses” (*taishū* 大衆), in short, by rejecting proletarian writers such as Hirata and following those like Tokunaga. Yang Kui expressed regret that Hirata, who emphasized the artistic qualities of writing, was allegedly not interested in whether peasants understood his works about the countryside or not. For Yang Kui, he represented those proletarian writers who became captives of “pure literature” (*jun bungaku* 純文学) and who were writing only for themselves and not for the “masses”. In contrast, Yang Kui emphasized Tokunaga’s notion that for art to capture high ideas, it must be at most simple and comprehensible. Therefore, Yang Kui saw Tokunaga as someone who was stressing the importance of holding fast to the core ideas of proletarian literature, that is, choosing topics that were important in the real state of society and adopting the perspective of the proletariat. Only such writings could elevate the “masses” (Yang Kui 1935, 8–12).

Now let us briefly analyse Lang-shi-sheng’s “Yami”, which was published in the same issue alongside other proletarian works of fiction, namely Yang Kui’s “Nanzan” 難産 (Difficult Delivery) and Yang Hua’s 楊華 “Yi ge laodongzhe de si” 一個勞動者的死 (The Death of a Labourer). “Yami” is based on the main storyline of “Inbaifu” and can be briefly described as follows: the male protagonist is walking the streets of a port, and he is involuntarily dragged to a prostitute, who is sick and resembles a corpse (Lang-shi-sheng 1935, 56–63). In “Yami” the story is reset in Taiwan: the port is not Yokohama but Dadaocheng in Taipei. The protagonist, a factory worker who was fired for organizing a strike, who is called Azumi 阿泉 in this case, hates the middle class and their leisure life. For example, he swears when he sees people happily leaving a theatre. One rainy night, he ends up in one of the narrow arcades (*qilou* 騎樓) typical of Taiwanese cities, and he encounters a prostitute. The most substantial difference between “Yami” and “Inbaifu” lies in how the prostitute is presented. Hayama’s prostitute clearly functions as a metaphor for exploitation in industrial capitalist society. Besides Minpei’s imagining that she

<sup>9</sup> In simple terms, Japanese proletarian realism combined realism with a class perspective, and it was mostly associated with the realism pursued by dialectical materialism (Lippit 1992: 70). Hirata Koroku was a prominent writer concerned with depicting peasants and the countryside. Tokunaga Sunao was an important participant in the debate on socialist realism. In 1933 he argued that because Japan had not yet become a socialist country like the USSR, it was not appropriate for Japan to directly import Soviet-style socialist realism. Instead, he advocated rethinking proletarian realism. Most importantly, he proposed that proletarian realism be freed from the dialectical materialism that too strictly dictated the approach of an artist to reality (Pai Chunyen 2015, 62–67).

must have been fired from a cotton factory, she is actually located in a large dark hall, where she makes money for her male counterparts. This imagery enables the reader to see her body as a possible allegorical representation of a machine in a factory (Lo Shih-Yun 2011, 179).

In contrast, Lang-shi-sheng's prostitute is a poor country girl. When the protagonist's eyes become accustomed to the darkness of the small room she is in, he realizes that the prostitute is Azu 阿足, his peer from a village in southern Taiwan. She recollects how she became a prostitute:

それは一つの農村哀話だ。彼女の家は農家だつた彼女の十四の降一その年は例年  
にない凶作だつた。植付からニヶ月近くも無降雨状態の天気は彼女等一家を餓餓  
線上の人たらしめた。

然かも強慾なる地主は事由の如何なるを問はずして租谷の納入をせき立てた。金  
の為ならば命すら次にする程の地主だ。

いくら頼んで見た處で駄目だと知つた時、農家のとるべき道は娘を賣るか、さも  
なくば耕作用の牛を賣るかだつた。

だが生活の要素たる牛を賣れば彼等は直ちに生活におびやかされるのである。

彼等の選ぶ道は殆ど前者だ。娘無き家は高利貸よりの借金に依つて一時の逃れを  
圖るものである。

彼女は一家の生活の犠牲となつて売られたのだ。(Lang-shi-sheng 1935, 60)

It was a sad story from the countryside. Her family were farmers, and when she was fourteen  
years old, the harvest was unprecedentedly bad. Two months after planting the seedlings, it  
still didn't rain. The family was on the verge of starvation.

Nevertheless, the greedy landlord urged them to pay the rent without caring about the de-  
tails. The landlord was a man for whom life is even less valuable than money.

When a farmer sees that there is no way to agree, the only way for him to choose is to sell  
his daughter or sell his cow ploughing his field.

But when he sells the cow on which his life depends, he directly threatens his own life.  
Farmers usually chose the former solution.

The household had no daughter, but it was temporarily freed from dependence on money-  
lenders. Her sale was a sacrifice for the life of the family.

After Azu was sold four more times, she ended up here, in the filthy, decadent city of Taipei. And while "Inbaifu" metaphorically depicts the adverse effects of industry and international capital on the working class, "Yami" clearly portrays the clash between capitalist and feudal society (Lo Shih-Yun 2011, 177).

Considering the dominant contemporary art programme of proletarian literature that was formulated in Japan and advocated in Taiwan by Yang Kui, removing the factory motifs from the prostitute's story and transplanting her into the Taiwanese countryside can be seen as an attempt by Lang-shi-sheng to draw Hayama's story closer to Taiwanese reality. The encounter between Azumi, a factory worker, and the country girl Azu could be indeed more relatable to the Taiwanese "masses", that is, the exploited people, composed mainly of peasants but to some degree also of workers in small factories.

The other important part of the above-mentioned artistic programme, namely its rejection of "pure literature", seems to be reflected in "Yami", too. While Hayama won the affection of a wide Japanese readership by using elements characteristic of the new sensa-

tionism, we find neither the dramatization of sexual desire nor sensational portrayals of the lower class nor other remarkable depictions of sensual perceptions in “Yami”. It seems that Lang-shi-sheng was, in keeping with the principles of proletarian realism, concerned only with the “masses”, his intended readership. After all, the main protagonist, who hates society, was obviously not created to gain popularity amongst the middle class.

### Manchukuo’s Proletarian Literature and Yuan Xi’s “Shi tian” (Ten Days)

The beginnings of the debates on proletarian literature in Manchukuo can be traced back to 1929. In the 1937 essay “Manzhou xin wenxue zhi fazhan” 滿洲新文學之發展 (Development of Manchurian New Literature), published in the Manchukuo journal *Xin qingnian* 新青年 (New Young Man),<sup>10</sup> one of Manchukuo’s most important leftist writers, Qiu Ying 秋螢 (1913–96), states that from 1929 to 1931 proletarian literature (*puluo wenxue* 普羅文學) was one of the major literary movements in Manchuria. Even though most of the works produced by this movement were, in his opinion, “immature”, they were still published in a number of journals (Qiu Ying 1937a, 54–55). Hence we can assume that the debate on proletarian literature that took place in Shanghai after 1927 had a substantial early impact in the Northeast.

Taiwanese scholar Liu Heng-Hsing has analysed the literary debates between the socialist and liberal camps that took place in the Manchukuo newspapers *Minsheng wanbao* 民聲晚報 and *Manzhou bao* 滿週報 in 1935 and 1936. He has also focused on the first literary groups that emerged in southern Manchuria in 1933. One of them, the “Piaoling” 飄零 (The Wanderer) group, established by Qiu Ying, advocated socialist literature. Liu has also noted that due to the proximity of the Soviet Union, even groups that inclined to “pure literature” (*chun wenyi* 純文藝) were strongly influenced by socialist thought (Liu Heng-Hsing 2017, 135–36). Okubo Akio has analysed probably the most ambitious, however unsuccessful, project of the left-wing literary scene in Manchukuo – namely, the attempt to establish an independent literary association, the Mobei Literary Youth Association (Mobei wenxue qingnian hui 漠北文學青年會). Behind the attempt was a Manchukuo student in Tokyo, poet Luo Tuosheng 駱駝生 (1913–unknown), who proposed modelling the association, which was oriented towards proletarian literature, after the Tokyo Left-wing League (Tōkyō saren 東京左聯). When its establishment was announced in December 1934 in the Dalian newspaper *Taidong ribao* 泰東日報, many prominent Manchukuo writers of the period, along with Luo Tuosheng, Qiu Ying, and others, signed an official declaration (Ōkubō 2019, 214–18).

The association’s vision largely resembled Yang Kui’s artistic programme based on Japanese “proletarian realism”, which he promoted in Taiwan: writers should acknowledge the importance of the masses, faithfully depict reality, discard works that do not adhere to reality, keep the ideas of social responsibility in mind, and so on (Qiu Ying 1937b, 31–32).

<sup>10</sup> *Xin qingnian*, published from 1935 to 1940, was one of the most prominent literary platforms in Manchukuo. Its Chinese title is identical to the title of the famous May Fourth journal published from 1915 to 1926. The English subtitle “New Young Man” was used on the cover together with the Chinese title.

The declaration did not explicitly mention the concept of proletarian literature; however, in 1935 Luo Tuosheng began to write openly about it in *Minsheng wanbao*, where he also published several articles on the development of the Tokyo Left-wing League. He was later criticized by other Manchukuo writers, who indirectly suggested that he discussed proletarian literature too openly and could bring the others trouble. They also blamed him for insisting too forcefully on transplanting Japanese proletarian literature into Manchukuo (Ökubō 2019, 216–17).

Even though work on establishing the association came to a sudden halt at the end of 1935, the debates instigated by Luo Tuosheng obviously had a considerable impact on the Manchukuo literary scene. Yuan Xi's 1938 "Shi tian" (Ten Days), a Chinese-language adaptation of Hayama's "Inbaifu", which was published in the February edition of the literary journal *Mingming* 明明, can be seen as one of the fruits of these debates.

Yuan Xi, born in Shenyang, was arrested in 1942 for his involvement in guerrilla activities organized by the Comintern (Li Shifei et al. 2010, 9–22). However, when he was released, he became a prominent official writer in occupied Beiping.<sup>11</sup> The only available biography of Yuan Xi describes him as a Chinese patriot and a clandestine anti-Japanese fighter.<sup>12</sup>

During his early writing career, he split his time between his hometown of Shenyang and Beiping, which was not yet occupied by the Japanese, and published mainly in Manchukuo. In 1937, when Yuan Xi went back home from Beiping to Shenyang, he became associated with the above-described Manchukuo leftist literature movement. He was introduced to the leftist literary critic Meng Su 孟素 (1913–unknown), one of the members of the left-wing literary group Piaoling (Liu Heng-Hsing 2017, 135), who also signed the 1934 declaration of the establishment of the Mobei Literary Youth Association (Qiu Ying 1937b, 33). In 1937 Yuan Xi published a poem in *Manzhou bao*, where leftist writers continued to debate and publish proletarian literature, which ends with a revolutionary couplet: "There will be a day, you will see / when iron hammers burst<sup>13</sup> on their heads" 有那麼一天，你們看吧 / 鐵鎚在他們頭上開花 (Li Shifei et al. 2010, 9). Because of his literary activities with Meng Su and Luo Tuosheng, his flat was searched twice by the police; this pressure had a deleterious effect on Yuan Xi's physical health. Nevertheless, at the end of the year, he published two stories in the prominent Manchukuo literary journal *Mingming*. In February 1938, he wrote and published "Shi tian" in the same journal (Li Shifei et al. 2010, 9–10). In 1941, it was included in a collection of his stories published in Shenyang.

The protagonist of Yuan Xi's adaptation is not a sailor but a convict released from prison. After several days of wandering around the city, begging for food, and sleeping

<sup>11</sup> In 1943 he attended the second session of the Greater East Asian Writers' Congress (Da Dongya wenxue zhe dahui 大東亞文學者大會) in Tokyo, where his novel *Beike* 貝殼 (Mussel) won an award (Okada 2017, 128).

<sup>12</sup> When discussing Yuan Xi's life, scholars, including Okada Hideki, draw heavily from his biography, "Li Keyi nianpu" 李克異年譜 (The Chronological Life of Li Keyi). Li Keyi is Yuan Xi's other pen name (see above). This biography, which was first published in China in 1991, is very detailed and seems to be reliable to a large extent. However, there are reasons to treat the information it contains carefully. First, it is not signed, and hence its author is unknown. Second, the markedly anti-Japanese interpretation of most of the author's life events raises questions about the extent to which this information was constructed retrospectively under the influence of Chinese nationalism.

<sup>13</sup> Besides "to burst", *kaihua* can also mean "to blossom" in Chinese.

on the back stairs of a bank, on a rainy night, a prostitute blocks his way as he is walking through a narrow alley (*hutong* 胡同). Without an ulterior motive, he strikes up a conversation with her, and she, crying, tells him her story: she became a prostitute because her husband was arrested. It turns out that he was the protagonist's best friend from prison, who had been sentenced to death and executed (Yuan Xi 1941, 25–48). Hence, we can see that, like Lang-shi-sheng, Yuan Xi created a prostitute character with whom the protagonist has a connection. Like the motif of rain that both writers also added to the original version of “Inbaifu”, this literary theme seems to be borrowed from another of Hayama's writings about a prostitute, the 1926 short story “Minato-machi no onna” 港街の女 (A Harbour-town Woman). At the end of this story, the prostitute suggests, most likely as a metaphor, that the protagonist – the sailor – is her father (Hayama 1969, 72–80).<sup>14</sup>

But unlike in Lang-shi-sheng's story, the suffering of Yuan Xi's prostitute stems from the exploitation of workers, not peasants: the mother of her husband fell ill, and he wanted to borrow money to buy food for her at the factory where he was working, but the accountant there ignored him. He got in a fight with him, and the next day he was fired. Then his mother died. He had no money and became mentally unstable. The prostitute is not sure why he was eventually arrested, but she tells the protagonist that some people said he killed the accountant (Yuan Xi 1941, 41–44).

Moreover, the prostitute's suffering was exacerbated by the owner of her flat, “a fat moneylender”, who collected interest on her overdue rent in the form of daily sexual services. At the end of the story, Yuan Xi's protagonist, like the two sailors in the Japanese and Taiwanese stories, revisits the prostitute:

到第三天夜裡我又到這巷裡去，意外的，從漆黑的窗口射出一絲微弱的黃光來，我站在簷下聽著，屋內一個嘎啞的男子聲低矮的響著，她卻在尖利的哭泣，過一會忽然在屋中急劇的扭打起來。我從窗口向裡看著，一個短小的男人已騎在她身上拳如雨點似的打下去，她用啞著的嗓子痛罵著，我知道這男子就是她說的那個傢伙，一股怒氣從我心理燒起來了。(Yuan Xi 1941, 47)

The third day I went back to this alley again. Unexpectedly, a faint yellow light was shining from the pitch-dark window. I stood listening under the eaves; the hoarse voice of the man in the room was low, but she was crying sharply. After a while, suddenly, a struggle broke out in the room. I looked in through the window, and a short man was already riding on her body, his fists fell on her like raindrops, she scolded him with a dumb voice. I knew that he was the guy she was talking about; anger began to burn in my heart.

The protagonist then goes inside, grabs some chinaware, and kills the owner with a blow to the head. He returns to prison ten days after his release.

Yuan Xi, like Lang-shi-sheng, seems to alter Hayama's source story, introducing the principles of the above-mentioned Japanese version of “proletarian realism”. Like Lang-shi-sheng, Yuan Xi removes the elements that resemble the new sensationist fiction. He also tries to adapt the story to China (and the Chinese “masses”): his story is not only set in a city that somewhat resembles Beijing, but he also describes a scene of a poor father

<sup>14</sup> See Feng Xianzhang's 馮憲章 translation into Chinese in Hayama 1930, 91–115. Besides being published separately as a short story, “Minato-machi no onna” is also incorporated into Hayama's acclaimed novel *Umi ni ikuru hitobito* 海に生きる人々 (Men Who Live on the Sea).



killing a newborn without emotions because he had no chance to feed him anyway (Yuan Xi 1941, 37). When the protagonist states that this was commonplace, it brings to mind Lu Xun's well-known worries about the future of children in Chinese society.

He also adapts the character of the prostitute. Unlike Hayama's prostitute, who allegorically represents a machine in a factory, Yuan Xi's prostitute is a woman who became a widow because of the greed of an accountant in a factory. Hence, Yuan Xi simplified the motif of the oppression of factory wage-workers. Interestingly, the social reality of Manchukuo, where Japanese investment tripled industrial production between 1933 and 1942 (Duara 2003, 68), did not make Yuan Xi substitute the motif of a factory with the motif of the struggle of peasants as Lang-shi-sheng did in Taiwan, which remained mainly agricultural.

Out of the three stories studied in this paper – one from Japan, one from Taiwan, and one from Manchukuo – the last one seems to be the cruellest. And because a worker kills the exploiter, it is also the most radical one.

Furthermore, both the Taiwanese and Manchukuo stories include motifs that hint at important events from the life of the author of "Inbaifu", Hayama Yoshiki: the protagonist of "Yami" is fired from a factory for organizing a strike, whereas the protagonist of "Shi tian" is released from prison.

However, the distinct motif of imprisonment in Yuan Xi's story can also be understood as a reference to Yuan Xi's own experience with political persecution in 1934 and 1935. In this period, he left Shenyang for Beiping partly for political reasons because he learned from a friend that the Manchukuo police were investigating his letter. They suspected that he advocated radical leftist attitudes in it. In Beiping, he first lived on the street and was later admitted to a school for refugees from the Northeast. In 1935 he was branded leftist by the Kuomintang police in Beiping, arrested together with several classmates for an unknown reason, and held for one week (Li Shifei et al. 2010, 5–7). In "Shi tian", the protagonist's wandering around the city, which is described in great detail, dramatically resembles Yuan Xi's penniless arrival in Beiping. Considering the difficulties the author encountered because of his letter and his brief arrest, the protagonist's release from prison depicted in "Shi tian" and his subsequent reincarceration can be read as an allegory of the author's life in 1934 and 1935, when he fled Manchukuo but was later arrested in Beiping anyway.

Comparing the persecution of leftists in Manchukuo and in China was not exceptional in Manchukuo literature. For example, Qiu Ying's short story "Ye lu" 夜路 (The Night Road), published in the same year as "Shi tian", 1938, describes the mass murder of a group of people, most probably leftists, in Manchukuo. It compares the killing with the persecution of leftists in China by quoting a couplet by Lu Xun, which refers to the so-called Five Martyrs of the League of Left-wing Writers and eighteen other communists who were assassinated in Shanghai in February 1931 by the Kuomintang (Qiu Ying 1938, 104–11).

Such a reading of Yuan Xi's story challenges, to a certain extent, the overwhelmingly nationalist interpretation of his life and work offered by the biography mentioned above. Considering that he came from a military family (Li Shifei et al. 2010, 3) and the many accounts of his hostility towards the Japanese contained in his biography and his own memoirs, I do not doubt the nationalist dimension of his fiction work in general.

However, I do not find any hints of nationalist resistance in “Shi tian”. Instead, it seems to be a story that dramatizes the persecution of leftists, making no difference between its harshness in the Japanese-occupied Northeast and in Kuomintang-ruled China. The choice of the famous Japanese proletarian writer Hayama Yoshiki as a model also speaks for an anti-capitalist and anti-militarist reading rather than an anti-Japanese one.

## Conclusion

Japanese proletarian literature became a steady source of inspiration for East Asian writers in the 1920s and 1930s. This paper has explored the intertextualizing of Hayama Yoshiki’s work in Taiwan and Manchukuo. By comparing adaptations from these two territories that were controlled by the Japanese Empire, it has demonstrated that Hayama Yoshiki was influential in both regions. In the Taiwanese and Manchukuo adaptations of “Inbaifu”, I have identified elements that refer either to Japan and China or to the local settings of Taiwan and Manchukuo, and hence, these stories can be seen as examples of cultural products that create fluid spaces of transculturation and often defy binaries and borders (see Thornber 2009, 1).

Specifically, my findings suggest that both the Taiwanese and the Manchukuo versions of Hayama’s short story “Inbaifu” reflect the version of the Japanese “proletarian realism” that was fashionable in the 1930s and that stressed that writers should bring literature closer to the “masses”, as the self-proclaimed proletarian authors of these works would have said. Therefore, each version adapts the story to a different environment. Interestingly, despite being written in the Japanese language, the theme of the Taiwanese short story brings to mind Chinese left-wing literature, in which the countryside is depicted more frequently than the urban proletarian environment. In contrast, the Manchukuo story, which was written in Chinese, is more reminiscent of Japanese proletarian literature, which often dramatized the suffering of factory wage-labourers.

Nevertheless, the Manchukuo story refers to Chinese left-wing literature, too, but in a different way. Namely, it describes the killing of a newborn, which evokes Lu Xun’s fears about the future of China. Furthermore, if we take into account the suggested allegorical reading of Yuan Xi’s main protagonist’s reincarceration, it draws an analogy between the persecution of leftists in the Northeast under Japanese occupation and in China ruled by the Kuomintang.

Thus, both Lang-shi-sheng and Yuan Xi reshaped the Japanese model story for the purpose of twofold criticism. The depictions of capitalist oppression in Taipei and persecution in Manchukuo address Japanese imperialism, whereas criticism of the feudal system in the Taiwanese countryside and of the intimidation of workers, tenants, and leftists in Beijing challenges domestic forms of oppression. Also in this respect, both stories defy a simple interpretation based on the nationalist paradigm.

---

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bowen-Struyk, Heather (2006). "Introduction: Proletarian Arts in East Asia." *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique, Proletarian Arts in East Asia: Quests for National, Gender, and Class Justice* 14:2, 251–78.
- Bowen-Struyk, Heather (2009). "Sexing Class: 'The Prostitute' in Japanese Proletarian Literature." In: Ruth Barraclough and Elyssa Faison (eds.), *Gender and Labour in Japan and Korea: Sexing Class*. London: Routledge, 10–26.
- Bowen-Struyk, Heather (2016). "Labor and Literature." In: Heather Bowen-Struyk and Norma Field (eds.), *For Dignity, Justice, and Revolution: An Anthology of Japanese Proletarian Literature*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 49–53.
- Chan, Sylvia (1983). "Realism or Socialist Realism? The 'Proletarian' Episode in Modern Chinese Literature 1927–1932." *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* 9, 55–74.
- Chen Yun-Yuan 陳允元 (2007). "Daodu yu didu: er, san ling niandai Taiwan xiaoshuo de dushi tuxiang (1922–1937)" 島都與帝都：二、三〇年代臺灣小說的都市圖象（1922–1937） [The Island Capital and the Empire Capital: Urban Images in Taiwanese Fiction of the 1920s and 1930s (1922–1937)]. Master's thesis. National Taiwan University.
- Duara, Prasenjit (2003). *Sovereignty and Authenticity: Manchukuo and the East Asian Modern*. Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Hayama Yoshiki 葉山嘉樹 (1925). "Inbaifu" 淫売婦 [The Prostitute]. *Bungei sensen* 2:7, 1–19.
- Hayama Yoshiki 葉山嘉樹 (1930). *Hayama Yoshiki xuanji* 葉山嘉樹選集 [An Anthology of Hayama Yoshiki]. Shanghai: Xiandai shuju.
- Hayama Yoshiki 葉山嘉樹 (1969). "Umi ni ikuru hitobito" 海に生きる人々 [Men Who Live on the Sea]. In: Hayama Yoshiki and Kobayashi Takiji, *Hayama Yoshiki Kobayashi Takiji shū* 葉山嘉樹·小林多喜二集 [The Hayama Yoshiki and Kobayashi Takiji Collection]. Tokyo: Kabushiki-gaisha Bungeishunjū, 23–174.
- Hayama Yoshiki (2016). "The Prostitute." In: Heather Bowen-Struyk and Norma Field (eds.), *For Dignity, Justice, and Revolution: An Anthology of Japanese Proletarian Literature*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 53–68.
- Hoshina Hironobu 星名宏修 (2007). "Cong yi jiu san ling niandai zhi pinkun miaoxie yuedu fushu de xian-daixing" 從一九三〇年代之貧困描寫閱讀複數的現代性 [The Multiple Modernity within 1930s Writings on Poverty]. *Taiwan wenxue xuebao* 10, 111–29.
- Hughes, Theodore et al. (2013). "Introduction." In: Hughes, Theodore (ed.), *Rat Fire: Korean Stories from the Japanese Empire*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, xi–xxii.
- Jue Qing 爵青 (2013). "Jieji yu chuanshang" 街妓与船上 [On a Boat and a Hooker]. In: Liu Huijuan (ed.), *Dongbei lunxian shiqi wenxue zuopin yu shiliao biannian jicheng* 東北淪陷時期文學作品與史料編年集成 [A Chronological Collection of Literary Works and Historical Materials from the Northeast under Japanese Occupation]. Beijing: Xianzhuang shuju, 266–70.
- Kim Yoon-shik (2006). "KAPF Literature in Modern Korean Literary History." *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique, Proletarian Arts in East Asia: Quests for National, Gender, and Class Justice* 14:2, 405–25.
- Li Shifei 李士非 et al. (2010). "Li Keyi nianpu" 李克異年譜 [The Chronological Life of Li Keyi]. In: Li Shifei 李士非 et al., *Li Keyi yanjiu ziliao* 李克異研究資料 [Li Keyi Research Materials]. Beijing: Zhishi chanquan, 3–46.
- Lang-shi-sheng 琅石生 (1935). "Yami" 闇 [Darkness]. *Taiwan bungei* 2:2, 56–63.
- Lippit, Noriko Mizuta (1992). "The Dispute over Socialist Realism in Japan." *Journal of South Asian Literature* 27:2, 67–83.
- Liu Heng-Hsing 劉恆興 (2017). "Wenxue, zhuti yu shehui: 'Manzhouguo' wentan jianshe lunzheng de qiuyuan yu fazhan" 文學、主體與社會：「滿州國」文壇建設論爭的起源與發展（1935–1936） [Literature, Subjectivity, and Society: The Origin and Development of Debates on Literary Construction in Manchukuo, 1935–1936]. *Wen yu zhe* 30, 129–78.
- Liu Shu-chin 柳書琴 et al. (2019). *Rizhi shiqi Taiwan xiandai wenxue cidian* 日治時期台灣現代文學辭典 [A Dictionary of Modern Literature of Taiwan under Japanese Rule]. New Taipei: Lianjing.
- Lo Shih-Yun 羅詩雲 (2011). "Rizhi shiqi puluo wenxue de kuajie huwen: Lun Hayama Yoshiki 'Inbaifu' yu Lang-shi-sheng 'Yami' ji qi wenben zhongyi" 日治時期普羅文學的跨界互文：論葉山嘉樹〈淫賣婦〉與

- 琅石生〈闇〉及其文本中譯 [The Intertextuality of Proletarian Literature during the Japanese Occupation: On Hayama Yoshiki's "Inbaifu", Lang-shi-sheng's "Yami" and Its Chinese Translation]. *Guang yi: yuyan, wenxue, yu wenhua fanyi* 5, 165–98.
- Okada Hideki 岡田英樹 (2001). *Wei Manzhouguo wenxue 偽滿洲國文學* [Literature of the Manchukuo Puppet Regime]. Changchun: Jilin daxue chuban she.
- Okada Hideki 岡田英樹 (2017). *Wei Manzhouguo wenxue xu 偽滿洲國文學續* [Literature of the Manchukuo Puppet Regime, Volume 2]. Harbin: Dongfang wenyi chubanshe.
- Ökubō Akio (2019). "Luo Tuosheng and Manchukuo Literature: The Literary Endeavours of a Manchukuo Student in Imperial Japan." In: Anika A. Culver and Norman Smith (eds.), *Manchukuo Perspectives. Transnational Approaches to Literary Production*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 140–56.
- Pai Chunyen 白春燕 (2015). *Puluo wenxue lilun zhuanhuanqi de xiaojiang Yang Kui: 1930 niandai Tai-Ri puluo wenxue sichao zhi yue jing jiaoliu 普羅文學理論轉換期的驍將楊逵：1930年代台日普羅文學思潮之越境交流* [The Fighter Yang Kui in the Transition Period of Proletarian Literature: The Cross-border Interchanges of Taiwanese and Japanese Proletarian Literature in the 1930s]. Taipei: Xiuwei jingdian.
- Qiu Ying 秋螢 (1937a). "Manzhou xin wenxue zhi fazhan" 滿洲新文學之發展 [Development of Manchurian New Literature]. *Xin qingnian* 58, 46–56.
- Qiu Ying 秋螢 (1937b). "Manzhou xin wenxue zhi fazhan" 滿洲新文學之發展 [Development of Manchurian New Literature]. *Xin qingnian* 60, 29–35.
- Qiu Ying 秋螢 (under the pseudonym Su Ke 蘇克; 1938). "Ye lu" 夜路 [The Night Road]. *Xin qingnian* 73, 104–11.
- Thornber, Karen Laura (2009). *Empire of Texts in Motion: Chinese, Korean, and Taiwanese Transculturations of Japanese Literature*. Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center.
- Volland, Nicolai (2009). "Inventing a Proletarian Fiction for China: The Stalin Prize, Cultural Diplomacy, and the Creation of a Pan-socialist Identity." In: Tuong Vu and Wasana Wongsurawat (eds.), *Dynamics of the Cold War in Asia: Ideology, Identity, and Culture*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 93–111.
- Yang Kui 楊逵 (1935). "Geijutsu wa taishū no mono de aru" 藝術は大衆のものである [Art Is for the Masses]. *Taiwan bungei* 2:2, 8–12.
- Yuan Xi 袁犀 (1941). "Shi tian" 十天 [Ten Days]. In: Yuan Xi 袁犀, *Nizhao 泥沼* [Mire]. Fengtian: Wenxuan kanxingshe, 25–48.

---

**WRITING PERSONAL ESSAYS BETWEEN  
THE HUNDRED FLOWERS CAMPAIGN  
AND THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION: FENG ZIKAI,  
CONFORMIST AND AUTHENTIC**

DUŠAN ANDRŠ

**ABSTRACT**

This study examines Feng Zikai's essays from 1956 to 1965 as products of his attempts to come to terms with the social, political, and cultural situation of the era through writing literary pieces and essays. This analysis of his prose writings that were created over a ten-year stretch bookmarked by the Hundred Flowers Campaign and the Cultural Revolution presents Feng Zikai's hesitant reassessment of his own work, its intellectual and artistic foundations, and his difficult search for a conformist but at the same time authentic essayistic voice that would allow him to grasp and accept the reality of this period.

**Keywords:** Feng Zikai; essay; early PRC; conformity and independent voice

---

Painter and essayist Feng Zikai 丰子恺 (1898–1975), one of the leading art and pedagogical figures in Republican China, settled in Shanghai in April 1949 after spending several turbulent years as a war refugee. One month later he witnessed the occupation of the city by Communist troops. This was a major turning point in his life, prefiguring the beginning of an entirely new phase in his professional career under the conditions of the new China (Barmé 2002, 278).

During the first few years after the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC), Feng Zikai tried adapting to the rapidly changing conditions in the country in many ways. Among other things, he began to study Russian intensively so that he could dedicate himself to a politically unproblematic activity: translating Russian and Soviet works of fiction and nonfiction.<sup>1</sup> As a “patriotically oriented” member of the educated class of “the old society” he held a series of functions in several cultural organizations and institutions, which guaranteed him a relatively stable, state-sponsored existence (Barmé

---

<sup>1</sup> In 1951 Feng Zikai began reading Turgenev's *Sketches from a Hunter's Album* and Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. In 1952 he published a translation of *Sketches from a Hunter's Album*; a second edition came out in 1955. In 1953 he translated and published a Soviet work focused on music and art education (Shi Xiaofeng 2006, 331–32). Even though in 1952, as part of his self-criticism, he committed himself to translating contemporary Soviet literature, most of the titles he translated were works of pre-revolutionary Russian literature (Barmé 2002, 307).

2002, 308; Shi Xiaofeng 2006, 331–32). At the same time, however, he, like other non-party “cultural workers”, was regularly subjected to pressure aimed at “correcting his mentality”. Feng Zikai was not always just a victim. In June 1955, for example, he was actively engaged in the campaign against Hu Feng, a bold critic of Mao Zedong’s understanding of literature, whom he publicly denounced in an article.<sup>2</sup>

As several scholars have noted, in the second half of the 1950s and the first half of the 1960s Feng Zikai published many essays in which he uncritically and often superficially “praised the new society” (Zhuang 2020, 346). His extolments, which often came in the form of greetings for the New Year, the founding of the PRC, and International Children’s Day, include the short essay “Minor Impression” (“Xiaogan” 小感) from late September 1957.<sup>3</sup> In it, Feng Zikai describes his surprise at discovering that the ambulance driver who took his ill daughter to the hospital demanded an exceptionally low fee for his work. Here, he sees proof that in the short period that had elapsed since the founding of a new China, the people had already acquired “the virtues of the new society” (*Feng Zikai wenji* 6, 469). Equally forced praise of the new society can also be found in his “New Year Sketch” (“Xinnian suibi” 新年随笔) from late 1960.<sup>4</sup> A rickshaw driver that Feng Zikai has hired refuses to accept money from his customer, whom he recognizes as a famous painter. Feng Zikai is so struck by the driver’s high-mindedness that he proclaims: “corrupt society has already transformed into a realm of noble people, and hell has already become paradise” (*Feng Zikai wenji* 6, 549).<sup>5</sup>

Feng Zikai was undoubtedly earnest in his efforts to seek out the brighter side of his situation and of the society in which he lived. At the same time, however, he also regularly experienced disillusionment, and the intellectual rigidity and the lack of creative freedom of the era weighed heavily on him. His essays were significantly marked by his efforts to come to terms with the social, political, and cultural situation of his day. Besides texts that were evidently created for reasons beyond the need for self-expression, in the second half of the 1950s and the early 1960s Feng Zikai wrote and published several essays that can be read as evidence that even in this difficult time he had not fully given up on trying to find an authentic voice as an essayist.

In his third collection of *Paintings to Protect Life* (*Husheng ji* 护生集) which was published in 1949, Feng Zikai included a *manhua* 漫画<sup>6</sup> painting titled “Cutting Evergreens Reminds Me of Something” (“Jian dongqing lianxiang” 剪冬青联想). In the lower por-

<sup>2</sup> “Yancheng hu’e buquan de Hu Feng fangeming fenzi” 严惩怙恶不悛的胡风反革命分子. *Meishu* 美术 7 (1955), 8–9. Worth noting is that this article heaping accusations on Hu Feng was not included in Feng Zikai’s collected works, *Feng Zikai wenji* (1992). Barmé conjectures that Feng Zikai might have “exchanged” his ideological commitment for the ability to continue corresponding with people abroad, specifically with the Buddhist monk Guangqia living in Singapore (Barmé 2002, 309).

<sup>3</sup> “Xiaogan” 小感. *Wenhui* 文汇报, 27 September 1957.

<sup>4</sup> This piece was written on 29 November 1960 for *Zhongguo xinwenshe* 中国新闻社.

<sup>5</sup> The following essays by Feng Zikai can be read as uncritical laudations of the new society: “A Lesson Superior to a Ten-year Study” (“Sheng du shinian shu” 胜读十年书; 1958), “Spring Visit to West Lake” (“Xihu chunyou” 西湖春游; 1958), “Sketching in Hangzhou” (“Hangzhou xiasheng” 杭州写生; 1959), “A Letter to an Old Friend in Taiwan” (“Zhi Taiwan yi juyou shu” 致台湾一旧友书; 1960), “Happy Children” (“Xingfu ertong” 幸福儿童; 1961), “A New Happiness” (“Xin de huanxi” 新的欢喜; 1962), “Trying My Hand at Writing during New Year’s Time” (“Xinchun shibi” 新春试笔; 1963), “A Minor Matter” (“Yi jian xiaoshi” 一件小事; 1964?).

<sup>6</sup> Feng Zikai’s *manhua* are ink wash paintings often of a lyrical nature. Besides satirical and critical *manhua* possessing significant features of classical caricature, Feng Zikai also produced *manhua*

tion of the image is a gardener cutting a hedge with garden shears. In the upper section, we see a giant pair of garden shears, controlled by the invisible hands of a giant, cutting off the heads and body parts of a line of figures. Thirteen years later, in 1962, Feng Zikai used the same motif in an article published in *Jiefang ribao* 解放日报 (Liberation Daily).<sup>7</sup> Whereas in this *manhua* from the collection *Paintings to Protect Life*, Feng Zikai encouraged his contemporaries not to cause pain and suffering to living creatures, in his later article, which is a transcription of a speech he gave at the Second Congress of Shanghai Representatives of Cultural Workers, he addressed the devastating impact of the political turn of events that had occurred in previous years. In the relatively peaceful era following the economic collapse and chaos of the Great Leap Forward, Feng Zikai employed the metaphor of a cold-hearted gardener to criticize uniformity of thought and the lack of artistic freedom. Feng Zikai speaks about mutilated, crooked flowers and bushes that “if they could talk, and were free to speak their minds, they would certainly cry out in protest” (*Feng Zikai wenji* 6, 631). He covers his otherwise open criticism by referring to Mao Zedong’s cultural policy and to Mao himself,<sup>8</sup> and he demands the freedom to grow for all flowers without exception. By referencing the motto of the Hundred Flowers Campaign of 1956–57 he was simultaneously demanding equality and the freedom to grow for silent and silenced flowers, for only thus can a “true blooming of all flowers” occur (*Feng Zikai wenji* 6, 630).

For Feng Zikai, 1962 marked a return to a relatively peaceful personal and professional life, in the reality of a new China from a period before the turbulence stemming from the ground-breaking changes of the Hundred Flowers Campaign and the revolutionary fervour of the Great Leap Forward. Feng Zikai was re-elected chairman of the Shanghai Artists Association, he began translating the classic Japanese novel *The Tale of Genji* (*Genji monogatari* 源氏物语), his *manhua* were regularly published in the Hong Kong newspaper *Xin wanbao* 新晚报 (New Evening News), and the Shanghai Documentary Film Studio presented him as the creator of remarkable paintings in the short film *The Painter Feng Zikai* (*Feng Zikai huajia* 丰子恺画; Barmé 2002, 322, Shi Xiaofeng 2006, 334).

As indicated by his above mentioned criticism of the state of culture and the conditions under which artists and writers lived and worked between 1957 and 1961 Feng Zikai saw himself as one of the mutilated and silenced flowers in the garden of art that was cultivated by the state and the party. If we carefully read his essays from this era, we discover that despite his clearly earnest attempts to present his ideas and writings that conformed with the political ideology of the era, Feng Zikai regularly expressed an authentic, erudite, and often highly critical voice.

---

that were typically reflective and subjective and that sought to elicit an emotional response from the viewer.

<sup>7</sup> “Wo zuole si shou shi. Zai Shanghai di ‘er ci wendai dahui shang de fayan” 我作了四首诗. 在上海第二次文代大会上的发言. *Jiefang ribao* 解放日报, 12 May 1962.

<sup>8</sup> Feng Zikai recalls the twentieth anniversary of the Yan’an Forum and calls for Mao Zedong’s cultural policies to be followed (*Feng Zikai wenji* 6, 629). In his commentary on the last of the four poems, whose “interpretation” is the pretence for his essay, he justifies rearranging the normal order of syllables in the four-syllable phrase by stating that he was trying to create the proper tone pattern for the verse. He supports the legitimacy of his approach by pointing out that “the verse of Mao Zedong also pays attention to the alternating of tones and we should learn this from him” (*Feng Zikai wenji* 6, 630).

Four months before the Hundred Flowers Campaign was launched, Feng Zikai wrote the essay “My Aspirations” (“Wo de xinyuan” 我的心愿) in response to the conclusions of a conference held in January 1956.<sup>9</sup> The central figure at this conference, which was focused on the “question of intellectuals”, Zhou Enlai, put forth the thesis that intellectuals, who in the PRC had become “a part of the working class”, had to achieve the level of advanced world science. Feng Zikai’s response to Zhou Enlai’s speech is framed by ideological platitudes. The introduction includes an “expression of sincere support” and a call for every single intellectual to “step up and harness their forces” and “move science and culture forward by leaps and bounds” (*Feng Zikai wenji* 6, 419). In the conclusion of the essay, Feng Zikai optimistically announces that thanks to the “utmost efforts made by us intellectuals, we will soon enter the world stage as a nation with an advanced culture” (*Feng Zikai wenji* 6, 419). At the heart of this essay was essentially a list of all tasks that had been accomplished and those that had not yet been. Feng Zikai presents himself as a translator who in the six years that had transpired since “liberation” managed to translate into Chinese three books about art education and six volumes focused on music education meant for popular audiences. He stated that his two years of intensive Russian studies resulted in the completion of his translation of Turgenev’s *Sketches from a Hunter’s Album* and a translation in progress of Korolenko’s *The History of My Contemporary*. But he adds that the value of his translations is diminished by several shortcomings. His “deep conviction” that his “translation work is still not of sufficient quantity or quality” is balanced out by his apologetically toned list of illnesses and ailments (pneumonia, rheumatism) that prevented him and were still preventing him from working more diligently and productively (*Feng Zikai wenji* 6, 419).<sup>10</sup> Rather than being a serious attempt meant to contribute to raising the culture of the new China up to world-class status as quickly as possible, “My Aspirations” indirectly testifies to Feng Zikai’s giving up on self-expression through original artistic creation. The author of witty *manhua* was a thing of the past. During the six years covered in the essay, Feng Zikai created practically not a single painting.<sup>11</sup>

In the essay “My Aspirations” we see Feng Zikai as an intellectual, a non-member of the Communist Party, who had undergone “thought reform” in the first half of the 1950s. During the Three-anti and Five-anti Campaigns of 1952–53, for the first time since the creation of the PRC, intellectuals were required to actively “remold their thinking” (Barmé 2002, 291). In an article published in the journal *Wenyibao* in March 1952 Feng Zikai was rebuked for his “bourgeois idealistic views of music” and was criticized alongside other Shanghai artists for a lack of enthusiasm and low productivity (Barmé 2002, 296–97). Four months later he would engage in self-criticism, ritually rejecting his former understanding of artistic creation based on “zest” (*quwei* 趣味). Afterwards as

---

<sup>9</sup> “Wo de xinyuan” 我的心愿. *Wenhuibao* 文汇报, 8 February 1956.

<sup>10</sup> Feng Zikai overcame his lung problems in 1955. At the time he allegedly promised that he would be more active in the positions that he had up until that point held only formally (Hawks 2017, 41).

<sup>11</sup> Except for *manhua* on Buddhist motifs, intended for the *Husheng ji* series of collections, in this period Feng Zikai practically quit painting. He returned to creating art in the late 1950s, but only at the insistence of high-ranking functionaries. He created a series of paintings in support of the Great Leap Forward (Hawks 2017, 44).



a supporter of the new regime he gained positions in several Shanghai cultural organizations and institutions (Barmé 2002, 298–301).<sup>12</sup>

Feng Zikai responded to the hopes awakened by the proclamation of the Hundred Flowers Campaign in May 1956 in his “A Discussion on Contention of Hundred Schools” (“Tan baijia zhengming” 谈百家争鸣) published in *Jiefang ribao*.<sup>13</sup> He welcomed the campaign as an attempt at “developing the culture of the nation” and emphasized its potential for bringing diversity back to art. He leaves out nearly all ideological phrases and in the introduction announces to readers that he will clarify his opinion about the campaign by making “comparisons to the field of art” (*Feng Zikai wenji* 6, 421). In doing so, Feng Zikai is trying to demonstrate the validity of his core thesis that the coexistence of opposing views and ideas is beneficial. To defend the idea that opposite does not mean antagonistic but complementary, he uses motifs that regularly featured in his Republican-era essays on art.

To justify the correctness of the policy put forward by the latest campaign, Feng Zikai works with the motif of “the distribution of complementary colours” (*buse tiaohu* 补色调和), which he also used in his carefully argued essays from the 1930s where he knowledgeably discussed the aesthetics of colours in traditional Chinese culture and in the modern Western “theory of colours”.<sup>14</sup> The only difference is that while in 1936 he demonstrated the complementarity of primary and secondary colours by referring to a red balustrade framed by the green foliage of willows,<sup>15</sup> twenty years later he made his argument for the need for ideational and artistic diversity using the image of a “red banner placed amongst the greenery of trees” (*Feng Zikai wenji* 6, 421). However, it is not only motifs from the visual arts that lend the essay its unmistakable style.<sup>16</sup> Feng Zikai welcomed the policy of “the contention of a hundred schools of thought” using his typical “three-tiered” argument. According to Feng Zikai, in the twentieth century Chinese culture went through three phases of development: from the disunity but diversity of the Republican period, to the unity but monotony of the period after the establishment of the New China and the unity and diversity of the early Hundred Flowers period (*Feng Zikai wenji* 6, 423). Let’s overlook the fact that this vision of cultural development was just the product of wishful thinking, far removed from reality, and notice the pattern of development that Feng Zikai presents. He sees the development of culture as a series of changes, with each change marking a reassessment of the existing state of things to produce a new quality. Whereas the first two periods are interpreted as being opposing,

---

<sup>12</sup> Feng Zikai engaged in self-criticism in an article published on 16 July 1952 in the periodical *Dagongbao* 大公报 (*Impartial*). In it he admits that all his literary and artistic activities in the past were bad and harmful (Barmé 2002, 297–99; Zhuang 2020, 346).

<sup>13</sup> “Tan baijia zhengming” 谈百家争鸣, *Jiefang ribao* 解放日报, 19 July 1956.

<sup>14</sup> Feng Zikai’s distinctive fusing of Far Eastern and Western painting traditions, his comparison of traditional Chinese artistic thought with the approaches of Western painting, and his interpretation of symbolism and the effects of colours on the senses are explored in Andrš 2005, 157–62.

<sup>15</sup> “A Flood of Willow Branches above a Small Bridge with a Red Balustrade” (“Chilanjiao wai liuqiantiao” 赤栏桥外柳千条; *Feng Zikai wenji* 3, 331–35).

<sup>16</sup> In keeping with traditional ideas about the unity of the whole and the parts, Feng Zikai makes an analogy between the propositions of the campaign and famous horizontal landscape paintings: the Song scroll *Along the River during the Qingming Festival* (*Qingming shanghe tu* 清明上河图) and the Qing scroll *Ten Thousand Li of the Yangzi River* (*Changjiang wanli tu* 长江万里图卷) (*Feng Zikai wenji* 6, 422).

the third period not only surpasses the dialectical tensions of the earlier eras, but it also corrects their misguidedness. This type of three-stage argument, whose source of inspiration can be found in traditional Buddhist thought, is a strategy that Feng Zikai regularly applied in many of his prewar essays.<sup>17</sup> It is clear that Feng Zikai, during the early days of the Hundred Flowers Campaign, putting his hopes in the coming of greater intellectual and artistic freedom, avoids ideological phrases and templates and tries to speak in his own essayistic voice.

The title of the December 1956 essay “In Lieu of Painting” (“Dai hua” 代画)<sup>18</sup> suggests that Feng Zikai, in this period of relative liberation, had returned to his erstwhile perspective, that of a painter, capable of expressing through a few brushstrokes the essence of a scene he had turned his attention to because it says something substantial about people or society. Like many times in the past, Feng Zikai is captivated by “something remarkable that deserves to be depicted through means of paintings” (*Feng Zikai wenji* 6, 505). He is disgusted to see, nearby a hall in which pictures celebrating the successes of building a socialist society are being exhibited, a ladder chained to a streetlamp. His following discussion about his unique perception of reality is sparked by the objection of his friend, who encourages him instead to dwell on truly hideous things like overflowing rubbish bins. Feng Zikai has a different view of the world. The padlock on the chain looks at him with “bulging eyes” and scares him away with its “gaping mouth” (*Feng Zikai wenji* 6, 506). The motif of a world endowed with feeling, typical of Feng Zikai’s Republican-era essays, is used in this essay from the early days of the Hundred Flowers Campaign not to expound upon “empathy” and “disinterestedness” as the “most precious states of mind”<sup>19</sup> but to sigh over the fact that chains and locks “offend all people” because “all passers-by are seen as thieves” (*Feng Zikai wenji* 6, 506). This essay can be read as criticism of the inadequacy of the new society, which could still not make do without “chains and locks”. It can also be understood as a lamentation over the immaturity of people as such. Such a reading is made possible by a passage in which Feng Zikai associates this street scene with one of his own *manhua*, “Neighbours” (“Linren” 邻人) from 1930. He recalls a situation in which his painting of two men standing on neighbouring balconies separated by an iron grille was understood as a depiction of the animosity between Japan and China and adds that he had to refute this interpretation because “the thing to which the picture is referring is primarily life, life as a whole” (*Feng Zikai wenji* 6, 507). In 1956’s “In Lieu of Painting” Feng Zikai partly returned not only to the manner of expression that was typical of his prewar artistic and literary work but also to a vision of a humanity endowed with empathy and perceptiveness. As Hawks observes, the essay uses methods that are also typical of Feng Zikai’s *manhua*. Its starting point is the contrast between “apparent” and “deeper” reality: the reality of the idealistic paintings exhibited in the gallery stands in contrast to the reality of the street scene, whose essence is accessible only to an observer equipped with a perceptive mind. The essayist also contrasts with his friend, as

<sup>17</sup> The distinct structure of Feng Zikai’s philosophical-religious essays from the 1920s and 1930s and its close similarity to the process of logical thinking in Chinese Mahayana Buddhism are presented in Andrš 2008, 396–408.

<sup>18</sup> “Dai hua” 代画. *Wenhui bao* 文汇报, 10 December 1956.

<sup>19</sup> A profound understanding of the world based on empathy (*ganqing yiru* 感情移入) and disinterestedness (*wuguanxin* 无关心), a pair of key concepts in Feng Zikai’s aesthetics, is presented in An Dechang [Andrš] 2005.

does the outer ugliness of the rubbish bin with the internal beauty of its function (2017, 42). It is paradoxical yet at the same time indicative that at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution this essay became a target of criticism and served as evidence of Feng Zikai's "reactionary nature". One of his detractors wrote that Feng Zikai had produced a "heinous essay" in which he "vilified the proletarian dictatorship", adding that the essayist had essentially "expressed the hope that [the proletarian dictatorship] would soon collapse" (Barmé 2002, 332).

Another essay from December 1956, "Honour" ("Jingli" 敬礼), presents an interesting view on people and society.<sup>20</sup> Feng Zikai, absorbed in folding his arms, unwillingly squishes an ant crawling across his table. He hesitates, wondering whether he should crush the injured insect and put it out of its misery. He eventually follows the old saying "even a bad life is better than a good death" and decides to leave the ant to its fate (*Feng Zikai wenji* 6, 502). A while later he witnesses another ant approach the crippled ant and begin pulling it away to safety. A detailed description of the effort the ant puts into carrying its injured compatriot follows. The emphasis on mercy, empathy, and selflessness and his speaking about ants as "people" connects "Honour" with some of Feng Zikai's similarly oriented prewar essays.<sup>21</sup> In contrast to his earlier approach, characterized by his emphasis on Buddhist empathy with everything living, now Feng Zikai honours a miniscule creature mainly because it possesses "friendly sentiment, selflessness, and the spirit of mutual aid". This pair of ants, which in the eyes of the person who is observing their extraordinary efforts with great empathy "grew and grew until it was as big as a mountain" (*Feng Zikai wenji* 6, 503–4),<sup>22</sup> can be seen as an appeal to a member of the "new society", as well as to an individual acting in keeping with the morals of an empathic humanity.

The essays "In Lieu of Painting" and "Honour" demonstrate that Feng Zikai was able to take advantage of the relatively favourable situation in late 1956 to express his own perspective on the world in which he lived through treatises that contained some of the key features of his once distinctive essayistic style. However, compared to how productive Feng Zikai was as an author of personal essays in the prewar period, he rarely resorted to franker essayistic forms of self-expression in the second half of the 1950s.

Two short essays from January 1957 show that he had not fully given up on writing personal essays. The first is "Informal Essay *Manhua*" ("Suibi manhua" 随笔漫画),<sup>23</sup> a text in which we find none of the ideological language that deformed most writings of this era. Feng Zikai highlights the difficulty of personal essay writing, as it is a creative form that, despite being described as "informal", requires not only inspiration but also the targeted collection of material and careful preparation. He makes similar statements about creative work, emphasizing the necessity to seek out seemingly banal themes that might point to something more substantial. This essay is a defence of literary and creative work worthy of that name, and at the same time it is a proclamatory resignation on such work if the necessary conditions for creating it do not exist. Feng Zikai states that

<sup>20</sup> "Jingli" 敬礼. *Wenhuibao* 文汇报, 26 December 1956.

<sup>21</sup> Here, Feng Zikai creates a variation on a critical scene from his 1935 essay "Early Morning" ("Qingchen" 清晨) (*Feng Zikai wenji* 5, 634–39).

<sup>22</sup> Here, Feng Zikai is referring to the motif of the figures of people growing larger the farther away they got from a rickshaw in Lu Xun's short-story "A Small Incident" ("Yi jian xiaoshi" 一件小事) from 1920.

<sup>23</sup> "Suibi manhua" 随笔漫画 [original title "Yiyu" 呓语]. *Wenhuibao* 文汇报, 12 December 1957.

“the reason [I] have been writing much less than [I] translate recently is that [I] lack the mental strength, avoid the serious, and deal with the trivial” (*Feng Zikai wenji* 6, 562). With equal frankness he speaks about the obstacles that discourage him from creating *manhua*. He highlights the effect of *manhua*, which is based on focusing on one thing and which surpasses verbose, affected argumentation, and laments the difficulty of searching for a meaningful object in a world that is poor in such things. Feng Zikai also considers the act of creation in his essay “Roasted-stirred Popped Rice” (“Baochao mihua” 爆炒米花),<sup>24</sup> which was inspired by an encounter with a strange food offered to him by a street vendor. He lingers over “the linguistically ugly and most likely also incorrect” name given to roasted puffed rice (*Feng Zikai wenji* 6, 428) and mentions that the domestic worker in his house had come up with the idea of cooking stale New Year’s cakes in the same way. This type of preparation renders the cakes not only soft and easier to chew, but it also makes them bigger. This culinary trick, discovered by coincidence, reminded Feng Zikai that more than thirty years previous he had done something similar with literature. In the eyes of people a generation older than he, his essays were akin to roasted New Year’s cakes. Everything that he expressed through the puffed-up, inconsistently textured cakes of his “wordy essays in the spoken language” was possible to say with small, hard cakes in pentasyllabic or heptasyllabic quatrains in the classic language (*Feng Zikai wenji* 6, 430). In “Roasted-stirred Popped Rice” Feng Zikai speaks to us in the voice of his prewar essays. His thoughts on the distinctive expressive capabilities of the classic language and traditional poetic forms are presented in a personal essay free from ideological ballast and cliché.

Feng Zikai’s exceptional perceptiveness and sensibility comprise one aspect of his artistic persona, which found expression in his personal essays from the prewar period. Therefore, one of the major themes in Feng Zikai’s essays is seeking delight in scenes of daily life. Feng Zikai, however, did not avoid “more festive” delights, especially spring or autumn trips. Going for a boat ride in near or far-away locations or visiting new places – a pastime that Feng Zikai shared with Ming- and Qing-era literati, writers of works in the genre of *xiaopin* 小品, a type of personal prose (Shi Xiaofeng 2006, 263) – were often sources of inspiration for his literary and artistic works.

The 1950s and 1960s were not conducive to individual tourism; of the few trips that Feng Zikai took in this period, several of them were essentially “voluntarily mandatory” visits to places connected with the history of the revolutionary movement. One such trip, taken in early October 1961, was an excursion to a Chinese Communist base in the Jianggang mountains in Jiangxi province. The essays in which he writes about this and other trips contain passages that could be considered, to use Barmé’s words, “revolutionary propaganda” (2002, 320). At the same time though they are also remarkable for their distinctive essayistic style, an important part of which is a focus on the joy of travelling and the delight of being in interesting places.

The first of three essays inspired by a trip to Jiujiang and Lushan, which Feng Zikai took with several family members in October 1956, is a reflection on his experiences from a steamboat cruise along the Yangzi River. “Travel Notes from Lushan, No. 1” (“Lushan

---

<sup>24</sup> This essay was not published when Feng Zikai was alive.

youji zhi yi” 庐山游记之一)<sup>25</sup> opens with the motif of “pride in the working people”, who during the war managed to repair a sunken ship, the one Feng Zikai was travelling on (*Feng Zikai wenji* 6: 574). He then explores patriotism by describing the feeling elicited by a song glorifying the river upon which the boat was sailing. Whereas the song that Feng Zikai sings accompanied by an accordion player awakens within him patriotic rapture and at the same time memories of his school days, the loud music and announcements that incessantly pour out of the ship’s speakers are hard to bear and at best a disturbing racket. His lamentations over the unbearable noise that “overpowers everything” and that “forces everyone to listen” serve as a counterpoint to the passage immediately preceding this one in which he describes the joy he feels from singing. Feng Zikai readies himself to go and complain, but in the end “he does nothing, fearing that most people like this nonsense” (*Feng Zikai wenji* 6, 575). His criticism of the “excessive abundance” generated by the speakers can be understood as criticism of the pressure that people, not just those travelling on the boat, are permanently under due to indoctrination efforts. Feng Zikai tries to ignore the flood of instructions and messages, reflecting on the history of the places where they stop and observing scenes from the lives of the local inhabitants. He ends his essay with a reference to the subjective perception of time: “a cruise lasting three days and two nights beats a year of normal life” when it comes to experiencing a variety of sensations and getting to know new places and people (*Feng Zikai wenji* 6, 576).

“Travel Notes from Lushan, No. 2” (“Lushan youji zhi er” 庐山游记之二),<sup>26</sup> in which Feng Zikai describes his impressions from a stop in Jiujiang, combines a view of the world seen through the matrix of classic poetry, the motif of a utopian society, and praise for the talents of the artisans at the local porcelain workshops. Typical of his style, Feng Zikai closes the essay with an eminently creative rendering of a random scene from daily life. To the traveller, Jiujiang, which Tang poets such as Cui Hao and Bai Juyi “had beautified through poetry”, seemed to be a world of orderliness, peacefulness, and hospitality (*Feng Zikai wenji* 6, 577). The phrases that Feng Zikai uses to laud the virtues of local inhabitants, especially women, give the impression that the traveller had not disembarked at a river port in Jiangxi province, but in a fantasyland dreamt up in one of his Utopias.<sup>27</sup> In Feng Zikai’s eyes, the employees of the local porcelain workshops were gifted with exceptional abilities; the essayist exalts the untrained nature of the folk artist whose work is not the imitation of the old models but who takes inspiration from reality. In contrast to the exceptionality that is a common feature of the sequence of impressions from Jiujiang, in the essay’s conclusion Feng Zikai focuses on a common scene, whose exceptionality lies in its artistic value. Feng Zikai’s eye is caught by women washing laundry in a lake. The undulating surface creates concentrated rings around the laundresses, and thus the back of each of the women is framed by “a semicircle of small waves, reminiscent of half of a phonograph record”. Feng Zikai relaxes on a mat, drinking tea, his enthusiasm about

<sup>25</sup> “Lushan youji zhi yi” 庐山游记之一. *Wenhui* 文汇报, 1 October 1956.

<sup>26</sup> “Lushan youji zhi er” 庐山游记之二. *Wenhui* 文汇报, 3 October 1956.

<sup>27</sup> An ideal society following a moral code is a motif that Feng Zikai regularly worked with in his essays; see, e.g., “An Incident from One Evening in Tokyo” (“Dongjing mouwan de shi” 东京某晚的事; 1927), or in his tales for young people, such as “The Land of the Greats” (“Daren guo” 大人国; 1936) and “The Land of Pure Hearts” (“Chixin guo” 赤心国; 1936). Feng Zikai’s desire for a new, more harmonious society is discussed in Barmé 2002, 281.

the new person of the new society gone, replaced by aesthetic pleasure from a “scene truly worthy of being captured in painting” (*Feng Zikai wenji* 60, 580).

More than just aesthetic pleasure is thematized in the last of his trio of “Lushan” essays, “Travel Notes from Lushan, No. 3” (“Lushan youji zhi san” 庐山游记之三).<sup>28</sup> Images from classical poetry are a substantial source of Feng Zikai’s imaginative perception of the mountains. The essay opens with the verse of Tang poet Qian Qi 钱起, whose image of “a monk from the Six Dynasties period” glimpsed in the foggy mountains serves Feng Zikai as the central motif of the entire essay. Considerable space is given to describing repeated encounters with a visitor to Lushan who is constantly holding a palm fan in his hand. Thanks to this “attribute”, the man becomes, in the eyes of Feng Zikai, the personification of the Song monk Ji Gong 济公. Feng Zikai, who from the beginning viewed the mountains as “a heavenly space of the spring of peach blossoms”, is increasingly convinced that he had met a “hidden wiseman”. This random acquaintance becomes an important topic of discussion, and Feng Zikai recognizes his hidden poetic essence – the man’s distinctive description of an unexpected encounter with a weasel is not unlike the verse of Yang Wanli 杨万里, master of Tang poetry (*Feng Zikai wenji* 6, 583–84). In the concluding passage Feng Zikai “returns to earth”, or, to put it more specifically, he begins criticizing the inadequate capacity of the dining facilities. His displeasure at the fact that the workers, who once in a long while treat themselves to a moment of rest, do not have the opportunity to eat a meal and thus hike in the mountains on empty stomachs contrasts with the “heavenly” atmosphere of the preceding section. The source of “earthly” pleasure that gives the essay a humorous punchline is Tsingtao beer with its good foamy head, which the author praises at the very end of the essay (*Feng Zikai wenji* 6, 585).

These three essays describing a visit to Lushan present Feng Zikai as a “cultural worker”, who has no doubt that after a good job done he deserves distraction and rest in the form of a several-day-long trip.<sup>29</sup> As he approaches his destination, the Feng Zikai finding “sublime” delight in an aesthetic view of the world, who however does not overlook the “lower” pleasures of eating and drinking, gains the upper hand over the Feng Zikai experiencing feelings of pride in the successes of the new society and enchantment with the new person.

Feng Zikai took another trip in 1958, two years after his journey to Lushan. “Dream of Yangzhou” (“Yangzhou meng” 扬州梦)<sup>30</sup> is an essayistic portrayal of a visit to Yangzhou that he undertook on 1 May with his grandson. An important part of the narrative is the motif of dreaming, more specifically, two different dreamlike visions of Yangzhou, a city about whose past Feng Zikai knows much but which he is visiting for the first time in his life. Feng Zikai drew inspiration for the trip from classic poetry praising Yangzhou, which he recites to his sick grandson. Feng Zikai presents an image of the city pieced together from the verses of famous poets and prose writers, and the essayist confronts this literary Yangzhou with the real Yangzhou. Arriving in the city aroused many conflicting feelings in Feng Zikai. Against his expectations, Yangzhou turns out to be a thor-

<sup>28</sup> “Lushan youji zhi san” 庐山游记之三. *Wenhuibao* 文汇报, 4 October 1956.

<sup>29</sup> As Feng Zikai states in the introduction to the first discussed essay, he went on this trip with his family after he had “finished a translation of the first volume of Korolenko’s *The History of My Contemporary*, which contained 300,000 characters” (*Feng Zikai wenji* 6, 573).

<sup>30</sup> “Yangzhou meng” 扬州梦. *Xinguancha* 新观察, 1 May 1958.

oughly modern city. Feng Zikai reveals his disenchantment by regularly pointing out the absence of anything old: the hotel is new, the hotel room is new, the hotel furniture is new, even the bed sheets are new (*Feng Zikai wenji* 6, 510). It takes a long while before Feng Zikai is capable of understanding that the city he finds himself in is ancient Yangzhou. Much of his first day spent in Yangzhou is marked by disenchantment. He is even disappointed with the meat-based meals offered in a local restaurant, which Feng Zikai, a vegetarian, “can enjoy only with his eyes” (*Feng Zikai wenji* 6, 510). Feng Zikai attempts to satisfy his desire to encounter Yangzhou’s past by visiting the celebrated Twenty-four Bridge (Ershisi qiao 二十四桥). He provides a description of his visit that is relatively succinct, yet, typical of Feng Zikai, poignant. On the way to the bridge, the sightseers are made fun of by rickshaw drivers who do not understand why anyone would want to visit such a boring place. His brief encounter with this uninteresting monument is closed with a pointed scene: Feng Zikai’s grandson recites a line of verse – “the choppy water reflected the speechless moon” – while stepping over the trickle of water that remained here after what was once a lake dried up (*Feng Zikai wenji* 6, 511). On the way back to the hotel, Feng Zikai recalls the verses of Tang poets while “dreaming of the blossoming Yangzhou of the Tang era” (*Feng Zikai wenji* 6, 512). As he realizes in the evening in his hotel room, an encounter between a person “filled with nostalgia for past times” and modern Yangzhou will necessarily end in disappointment. Feng Zikai falls asleep, and in a dream he is visited by a woman named Yangzhou, who explains to him that “over the course of more than 1,000 years she had been raped, tortured, and deformed, [her] entire body dotted with wounds” (*Feng Zikai wenji* 6, 513) and that “she had paid with her own blood” for the beauty of the images from the old poems. She ends her lamentation with the following words: “only in 1949 did the people free me from my chains, they treated my wounds, and cured my ailments; they bathed and fed me.” Before leaving, she apologizes, saying “Forgive me for pulling you out of your beautiful dream” before parting with the words “We will see each other tomorrow!” While seeing off his visitor Feng Zikai trips and wakes up. Thanks to this unexpected visit, he “suddenly sees the light”, understanding that such a “dream of Yangzhou” surpasses “the dreams of Yangzhou” of ancient poets (*Feng Zikai wenji* 6, 514).

“Dream of Yangzhou” is one of the essays in which Feng Zikai praises the new society and can be read as a proclamation of support for the aspirations of the new China (Zhuang 2020, 346). This essay can also be seen as a way for Feng Zikai to mock or even criticize his own weakness for ancient culture (Feng Yiyin 1983, 159). The very end of the essay, however, provides space for another interpretation: although Feng Zikai emphasizes that this “much more interesting ‘dream of Yangzhou’ cannot fail to be noticed” (*Feng Zikai wenji* 6, 514), his record of a visit from a woman named Yangzhou is only a mere appendix to the detailed description of the literary portrayal of Yangzhou and his own disillusionment with his encounter with the real Yangzhou, which are at the heart of this essay. The city gradually “grows on him” though, and in the evening he even finds a restaurant serving vegetarian meals (*Feng Zikai wenji* 6, 513). In the conclusion he speaks about himself as being “awakened” but says nothing at all about whether during the second day of his stay he truly saw Yangzhou through new eyes. It is worth noting that Feng Zikai has his ambivalent dream about Yangzhou during the Great Leap Forward, a campaign that resulted in, among other things, the substantial

transformation of many cities, often at the cost of the irreversible loss of their aesthetic qualities (Spence 1990, 581).

In May 1961, during a time of gradual liberation and retreat from the policies of the Great Leap Forward, Feng Zikai took a several-day trip to the Yellow Mountains. In a trio of essays inspired by his visit of a picturesque rocks area the Feng Zikai that we know from his prewar essays speaks to us. The essay “Pines of Huangshan Mountains” (“Huangshan song” 黄山松)<sup>31</sup> is reminiscent of his writings on trees from the 1930s in which Feng Zikai declared the need for “an artistic perspective” and which offer inspirational ponderings about the possibilities and limits to perceiving and depicting reality.<sup>32</sup> In the period in which a new China was being built, the variously shaped pine trees growing on inhospitable cliffs strike Feng Zikai primarily due to their ability to make do with a minimum of nutrients and the strange shapes of their crowns. The branches of the Huangshan pines do not point up like those of most trees, but they grow to the side. The flat crowns of the trees are also remarkable because their branches interweave and support each other (*Feng Zikai wenji* 6, 587–88). The essay is interesting for the way Feng Zikai adapts his view to the new conditions and at the same time for the extent to which he tries to maintain his erstwhile essentially artistic perception.

Offering up ideological platitudes, he mentions why the willow, as one of only a few trees, has branches that hang down. In contrast to his perspective from the mid-1930s, when Feng Zikai praised the drooping branches of the willow as an expression of the humility of being, for “not a single one of them forgets about its roots” (*Feng Zikai wenji* 5, 388), at the beginning of the 1960s, “willow branches [are] so flexible and weak that they hang down to the ground under the pull of gravity and not because they had decided to do so themselves” (*Feng Zikai wenji* 6, 587). His once deep empathy, his putting himself in the place of an object come to life, was replaced with a scientific outlook. Feng Zikai, however, can still look at the world with the eyes of an artist, as his work with artistic abstractions reveals: the peculiar appearance of the crowns of the pine trees is aptly compared to a comb with broken teeth or to the character 刁. He ends the first of his three essays on his visit to the Yellow Mountains on a light note. Although he mentions that a tree whose crown is made up of a tangle of vigorous branches is called the “unity pine tree” (*tuanjie song* 团结松), he does not take advantage of the ideological potential of this motif. He views the tree with the eyes of a weary, enchanted pilgrim. The flat crown takes on the form of a “cushion” upon which he might be able to rest after a demanding climb (*Feng Zikai wenji* 6, 588–89).

In the essay “Climbing Mt. Tiandu” (“Shang Tiandu” 上天都)<sup>33</sup> Feng Zikai presents himself as a proficient hiker who refuses, as an older person, to be carried to the top of the highest peak of the Yellow Mountains on a sedan chair. He uses the long ascent, broken up by several stops, to discuss the possibilities and limits of depicting reality through painting and photography. As a painter he prefers paintings, which, unlike photographs, can “eliminate the chaotic details” of the reality being viewed and “emphasize the essential”

<sup>31</sup> “Huangshan song” 黄山松. *Wenhuibao* 文汇报, 25 May 1961.

<sup>32</sup> “Model” essays of this type include “Willow” (“Yangliu” 杨柳, 1935) and “Chinese Parasol Tree” (“Wutongshu” 梧桐树, 1935). Feng Zikai’s aesthetic perspective is presented in Andrš 2005.

<sup>33</sup> The essay “Shang Tiandu” 上天都 was published in the Peking magazine *Jiangshan duojiao* 江山多娇 in 1961.



(*Feng Zikai wenji* 6, 597). A comical tone is added to the essay through the inventive interweaving of his own performance as a hiker with two “joyful” current events; the news that Chinese table tennis players had won a medal at the world championships and that Yuri Gagarin had flown to space gave him the energy needed to continue his demanding hike. The point of the entire essay comes in the concluding pentasyllabic twenty-line verse, reinforcing the parallel built up in the essay between the flight of the first man in space and the writer’s ascent of Mt. Tiandu.

In “Huangshan Impressions” (“Huangshan yinxiang” 黄山印象),<sup>34</sup> the third essay inspired by his more than ten days spent in the Yellow Mountains, Feng Zikai considers the subjectivity of perceiving natural scenery while also reflecting on encounters between the old and the new. A discussion about how different points of view transform the appearance of mountain peaks and cliffs leads him to considering how aptly named concrete landscape elements are. Feng Zikai declares himself to be a proponent of names that result out of a creative process, and therefore approves, when one visitor, contrary to more poetic naming traditions, dubs one rock tower “Hotel International”, and calls it a desirable example of “contemporary aesthetic sentiment”. Besides his emphasis on the subjective nature of aesthetic perception and his defence of creativity, we find another motif typical of his work in the essay: although Feng Zikai is in the heart of a picturesque landscape, he remains above all a seeker of the remarkable in the ordinary. What he brings away from his visit to the Yellow Mountains is the knowledge that everything bizarre, strange, or unordinary will gradually become ordinary, and unlike other visitors, he appreciates the “ordinary” view of the mountains from the valley (*Feng Zikai wenji* 6, 591).

In October 1961 Feng Zikai went on a tour of sights associated with the Chinese revolutionary movement, Communist bases in Jiangxi province, and depicted his impressions in three essays, as he did with his visits to Lushan and the Yellow Mountains. The leitmotif of these works seems to be gratitude for the revolutionaries that Feng Zikai feels during his visits to places associated with Mao Zedong and the Long March. Confronted with the primitive conditions in which Chinese Communists lived and fought in the first half of the 1930s, he feels guilty for the comfortable life he lives. In the essay “While Drinking Water, Don’t Forget the Source” (“Yinshui siyuan” 饮水思源)<sup>35</sup> he highlights the contrast between the spartan past and the prosperous present and mentions, in what comes off somewhat jokingly, the “great revolutionary lesson” he learned at the museum dedicated to the revolution in Ruijin: after having viewed the specimens of grass on display, the only source of food for the starving revolutionaries, he recognizes his own pettiness at his exasperation of having eaten lunch two hours late due to a delay during a tour of a mine (*Feng Zikai wenji* 6, 602). Likewise in the essay “The Fallen Petals Turned to Spring Mud, but I Cherish Them More than Before” (“Huazuo chunni geng huhua” 化作春泥更护花)<sup>36</sup> he speaks about the strong impression made on him by the hard beds the revolutionaries slept on, whereas he sleeps in a hotel on a “spring mattress” (*Feng Zikai wenji* 6, 604). In the third essay, titled “We Will Finish What We Have Started” (“Youtou youwei”

<sup>34</sup> It seems this essay was not published after it was written.

<sup>35</sup> “Yinshui siyuan” 饮水思源. *Jiefang ribao* 解放日报, 14 October 1961.

<sup>36</sup> “Huazuo chunni geng huhua” 化作春泥更护花. *Wenhuibao* 文汇报, 13 October 1961.

有头有尾),<sup>37</sup> he glimpses evidence of the “revolutionary spirit” of local inhabitants in the fact that, despite natural catastrophes, “everywhere things are being built at great speed” (*Feng Zikai wenji* 6, 608).

This trio of essays is remarkable for the form in which Feng Zikai expresses his gratitude to past revolutionaries and his admiration for current ones. He achieves an interesting effect by placing verses from ancient poets and his own “casual” poems nearby ideological phrases. In the first of these three essays he communicates a single message in two ways: Feng Zikai praises the revolution and revolutionaries using lofty phrases, but in the conclusion this praise comes in the form of regular pentasyllabic eight-line verse. “We Will Finish What We Have Started” includes many verses in classical forms. This essay also provides interesting evidence about how poetry was used at the time in social interactions. As the “delegation” of which Feng Zikai was a part is welcomed, one of the hosts greeted his guests by reciting septasyllabic eight-line verse. In response, Feng Zikai composed on the spot a poem in the same form. Upon request, it was then recited by one of the present functionaries. The final passage of the essay is also interesting. The day before departing the city of Ganzhou, Feng Zikai gets the opportunity to visit a place that was not connected to the history of the revolution, Mount Tongtianshan, whose peak is decorated with sculptures of Buddhist deities carved into the rock. On one rock, he comes across a poem by Wang Yangming 王阳明 evoking deep repose in a beautiful place. Feng Zikai wastes no time and composes his own verses, which emulate the form of the poem by this Ming-era Neo-Confucian philosopher. When he left the city the following day, he noted that “the people of Ganzhou not only possess a wealth of revolutionary spirit, but they are also rich in their sense of art” (*Feng Zikai wenji* 6, 610). To say good-bye to Ganzhou, he then composes a poem in the *ci* form, in which, like in his previous poem, he praises the beauty of the city that he was leaving with a heavy heart. Feng Zikai also styles himself an intellectual leaning towards artistic perception in the last of three essays mapping his tour of revolutionary Jiangxi. At the end of the essay, he expresses praise for the revolutionary traditions of Nanchang in the form of a *ci* poem that follows the musical pattern of the tune “I Recall Jiangnan” (*Feng Zikai wenji* 6, 606).

Feng Zikai had several periods during his artistic career in which he strongly felt that poetry provided true, timeless testimony about the nature of people. When he was in Jiangxi, nearly twenty years had passed since he compiled his collection of verses in paintings.<sup>38</sup> Feng Zikai lived in a thoroughly transformed world, but as the essays discussed here illustrate, poetry remained for him an irreplaceable means of relating to the world.

In February 1963 Feng Zikai travelled for several days, visiting Buddhist sights in the city of Ningbo and on Putuoshan island. He used his visit to Tiantong monastery in Ningbo to tell two stories from the life of the Japanese Zen Buddhist monk and painter Sesshū. Whereas in the essay “Remembering Sesshū While in Tiantong Monastery” (“Tiantongsi yi Xuezhou” 天童寺忆雪舟)<sup>39</sup> Feng Zikai comes off mainly as an expert on

<sup>37</sup> “Youtou youwei” 有头有尾. *Renmin wenxue* 人民文学, December 1961.

<sup>38</sup> The collection *Poetry in Paintings* (*Huazhong you shi* 画中有诗) was published in 1943 (Barmé 2002, 124).

<sup>39</sup> “Tiantongsi yi Xuezhou” 天童寺忆雪舟. *Xin wanbao* 新晚报, 24 April 1963.

traditional ink wash painting,<sup>40</sup> the essay “The Monastery of Bodhisattva Guanyin Who Was Reluctant to Leave” (“Bu ken qu Guanyin yuan” 不肯去观音院)<sup>41</sup> is in the form of the notes of a pilgrim who is trying to “reconcile” the perspective of a Buddhist with that of a citizen of the new China. Feng Zikai visits this site on the feast of the bodhisattva Guanyin. He notices that the monastery that he last visited fifty years ago was recently renovated. He then describes in detail the location and appearance of each part of the monastery and recounts legends associated with its establishment: the monastery was founded by a Japanese monk whose boat, which was transporting a statue of the bodhisattva Guanyin to Japan, was blown off course to this part of the Zhoushan archipelago. Feng Zikai notes that this is evidence of “age-old relations between the people of China and Japan” and “the close relationships” between the two nations. In the conclusion, Feng Zikai describes a trip to a sandy beach near the monastery. The passage relates a peaceful walk, but the scene can also be understood as a distinctive portrayal of a Buddhist’s insight into the nature of being:

Every step in the sand was so soft. It was even more pleasant than walking through a blooming meadow. I walked a bit, then I looked around. My own footprints had joined together to form long lines intersecting the sandy plain. That was reminiscent of a smooth, uninterrupted mirror. I almost felt sorry for it. On the beach lay shells of different shapes and sizes; the people walking on the sand collected them. I also picked one up and put in it my pocket so I could take it as a souvenir. I trample the beach’s sand for a single shell. You’re not supposed to do that! The following day, when I went to the same place, I saw a sandy beach reminiscent of a smooth, uninterrupted mirror. There wasn’t a single scratch on it. (*Feng Zikai wenji* 6, 625)

The poem that ends the essay is reminiscent of a lyrical vision of a world of joy and peace drawn up from highly incoherent material. Feng Zikai rejoices that the monastery is as good as new, and he compares the “roaring waves driven by the Eastern wind” to the “victory cry of the Long March”. He also sees how the “monastery hall is shrouded by a cloud of smoke rising from the incense burners” as “the bodhisattva Guanyin nods her head, the Buddha Maitreya smiles, and both look on with joy at the flocks of creatures rejoicing in peace and tranquillity” (*Feng Zikai wenji* 6, 625–26).

During the Republican era, a time of competing cultures and ideologies, Feng Zikai stood out with his conciliatory, peaceful mindset, striving for the unforced integration of the traditional and the modern, the foreign and the domestic (Shi Xiaofeng 2006: 267). The essayistic reflection on the pilgrimage to the Putuoshan Island in 1963 is a proof that Feng Zikai harboured a desire for the harmonious coexistence of different ideas and visions even in the fundamentally changed conditions of the new China.

The above-presented essays are records of mostly longer journeys that Feng Zikai went on during the second half of the 1950s and the first half of the 1960s.<sup>42</sup> The relatively good

<sup>40</sup> For an exhibition of Sesshū’s paintings held in Shanghai Feng Zikai wrote an article titled “Sesshū and His Art” (“Xuezhou he tade yishu” 雪舟和他的艺术), a well-informed piece presenting the painter as well as Japanese and Chinese ink wash painting in greater context (*Feng Zikai wenji* 6, 570–72).

<sup>41</sup> “Bu ken qu Guanyin yuan” 不肯去观音院. *Xin wanbao* 新晚报, 18 April 1963.

<sup>42</sup> Apart from the already discussed journeys, in this decade Feng Zikai also took shorter trips to the following locations: Moganshan (1955), Jinhua (1962), Zhenjiang and Yangzhou (1963), and Suzhou and Hangzhou (1965) (Shi Xiaofeng 2006, 332–35).

health he enjoyed in this period brought him joy from travelling, as illustrated in a passage from a “New Year’s” prose piece from February 1963 in which he summarizes the trips he had taken in recent years and at the same time mentions plans for future trips.<sup>43</sup> The series of essays inspired by his journeys examined above, in which Feng Zikai strives to speak with his own voice, is complemented in an interesting manner by the 1962 essay “Everything Is New, Everything Is Arresting” (“Ermu yixin” 耳目一新). In the context of the era it was written in, it comes off as an extraordinarily open confession. Feng Zikai speaks about what travelling means to him. He does not, however, speak about destinations, places, or sights, but about travelling as a movement that offers the perceptive person many delights. He recalls the time when he left his home in Shimenwan only when he had to go to Hangzhou. Instead of taking the train, which would have brought him to the city in a matter of hours, he decided to travel by boat along a series of canals. The journey there and back lasted four days, and it provided him an opportunity for leisurely wandering, an important part of which was sleeping at moorages, visiting places along the banks, sampling local delicacies, and above all people-watching and making sketches. Feng Zikai ends his essay with the following words: “Back then many people mocked me for being foolish. But it brought me pleasure. To kill a little time, to spend a bit of money, but in return to see everything as if for the first time – it is worth it” (*Feng Zikai wenji* 6, 633). The essay’s praise of “aimless”, profoundly empathetic insight into phenomena and things gives us a glimpse of the “old” Feng Zikai who, not even when the nation’s existence was under threat during the war, never abandoned his belief about the value of the delight that comes only from perceiving the world.<sup>44</sup> In the new China, such an attitude was hardly permissible, but nonetheless Feng Zikai was unwilling to give it up.

The second half of the 1960s was clearly the most difficult period in Feng Zikai’s life: the Cultural Revolution brought him four years of rejection, forced self-humiliation, and physical and psychological torment (Harbsmeier 1984, 40–41). Paradoxically, however, he did not have to insert parts of his authentic self into his essays, which upon initial reading often seem to offer stereotypical praise of the new China and its people. Feng Zikai lost the final remnant of his public voice, which he retained, as we have shown, during the late 1950s and early 1960s, but he did not let his inner voice be taken. He enjoyed secretly reading and copying old poetry (Barmé 2002, 335) and especially writing memoir essays in which the authentic Feng Zikai, looking with enchanted eyes at his childhood and youth, speaks to us.<sup>45</sup>

---

<sup>43</sup> See “Trying My Hand at Essaying during New Year’s Time” (“Xinchun shibi” 新春试笔). Feng Zikai even happily announces that he is experiencing in his own body the renewal and rejuvenation of society (*Feng Zikai wenji* 6, 644).

<sup>44</sup> This attitude is demonstrated in Feng Zikai’s *manhua* from the 1940s, compelling depictions of people who in the midst of killing and destruction found delight in the details of daily life (Hawks 2017, 38).

<sup>45</sup> Of the thirty-three personal essays that Feng Zikai secretly wrote in 1970–73, only seventeen of them, which had been altered or censored, were published, eight years after his death, no less (*Feng Zikai wenji* 6, 653).

---

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- An Dechang 安德昌 [Andrš, Dušan] (2005). "Ganqing yiru yu wuguanxin: Feng Zikai de zonghexing yishuguan jiedu" 感情移入与无关心：丰子恺的综合性艺术观解读. In: David Der-wei Wang and Kim Chew Ng (eds.), *National Imaginaries: 15 Perspectives on Modern Chinese Literature*. Taipei: Maitian chuban, 181–201.
- Andrš, Dušan (2005). „Role umění v životě člověka: Feng Zikai a jeho příspěvek k čínské estetice první poloviny 20. století.“ *Studia Orientalia Slovaca*, vol. 4, 153–175.
- Andrš, Dušan (2008). "Narrative Strategies in Modern Chinese Essay Writing: An Analysis of Essays by Feng Zikai and Lu Li." In: Olga Lomová (ed.), *Paths Toward Modernity. Studia Orientalia Pragensia XXVI*. Prague: Charles University, 395–418.
- Barmé, Geremie R. (2002). *An Artistic Exile: A Life of Feng Zikai (1898–1975)*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Chen Xing 陈星 (2011). *Feng Zikai pingzhuan 丰子恺评传 [A Critical Biography of Feng Zikai]*. Jinan: Shandong huabao chubanshe.
- Feng Yiyin 丰一吟 (1983). *Feng Zikai zhuan 丰子恺传 [A Biography of Feng Zikai]*. Hangzhou: Zhejiang renmin chubanshe.
- Feng Zikai wenji 丰子恺文集 [Collected Works of Feng Zikai]* (1992). Vol. 3, 5, 6 Hangzhou: Zhejiang wenyi chubanshe, Zhejiang jiaoyu chubanshe.
- Harbsmeier, Christoph (1984). *The Cartoonist Feng Zikai: Social Realism with a Buddhist Face*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Hawks, Shelley Drake (2017). *The Art of Resistance: Painting by Candlelight in Mao's China*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- Shi Xiaofeng 石晓枫 (2006). *Baima hupande huiguang: Feng Zikai sanwen yanjiu 白马湖畔的辉光：丰子恺散文研究*. Taipei: Xiuwei zixun keji.
- Spence, Jonathan D. (1990). *The Search for Modern China*. New York, London: W. W. Norton.
- Zhuang, Sue (2020). "A Critical View of the Yangzhou Dream. Feng Zikai's Essay "The Yangzhou Dream" (Yangzhou meng, 1958)." In: Roland Altenburger, Margaret B. Wan, Vibeke Børdahl (eds.), *Yangzhou, A Place in Literature: The Local in Chinese Cultural History*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 343–356.



## THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS OF INTIMATE FRIENDSHIP AND COMMON ENEMIES: IMAGES OF SINO–SOVIET RELATIONS IN CHINESE AND SOVIET POLITICAL CARTOONS OF THE 1950S<sup>1</sup>

MARIIA GULEVA

### ABSTRACT

This article examines Sino–Soviet relations in the 1950s through the medium of political cartoons in *Manhua* and *Krokodil*, satire magazines published in the People’s Republic of China and the Soviet Union. Images of friendship and enmity produced an intricate narrative about world affairs and the paths of socialism and capitalism. By comparing the stories and visual representations in *Krokodil* and *Manhua*, this study underscores the similarities and contradictions existing between the Soviet Union and China in the years before their split. This approach provides an example of two ideological machines working to reflect unexpected shifts in alliances while maintaining a claim on the teleological coherence of socialist development. It also exemplifies the mechanics of visual propaganda under the stress of contradictory policies and purposes.

**Keywords:** political cartoons; *Krokodil*; *Manhua*; Sino–Soviet friendship; visual propaganda

### Introduction

Relations between the Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China (PRC) after the latter’s foundation in 1949 are often described in terms of close friendship and mutual support. The first decade of the PRC’s existence or, more narrowly, the period between 1953, when Joseph Stalin died and Nikita Khrushchev came to power, and 1956, when the twentieth congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) was held, is frequently called “the honeymoon” period in the two countries’ relations. This name seems apt in light of the great number of Soviet specialists sent to China in those years, the scale of other technical and economic support measures offered by the USSR to China (Shen Zhihua 2003, 176, 197), and China’s readiness to follow the Soviet example at that time. Towards the end of the 1950s, criticism of Stalin’s personality cult in the CPSU, Khrushchev’s and Mao Zedong’s 毛泽东 grievances with each other, ideological differences between the Soviet and Chinese Communist parties, and disagreements over

---

<sup>1</sup> This article is an expanded version of my presentation at the congress of the Association française des russisants organised by the University of Toulouse-Jean Jaurès (11 December 2021).

domestic and international affairs wrought irreparable damage on bilateral relations and led to the Sino–Soviet split, which lasted until the 1980s. Even today Russian–Chinese relations are nowhere near as intimate as they were in the “honeymoon” years. However, even the 1950s were not as unclouded as they sometimes appear in comparison to the chill and outright enmity of later decades. From the PRC’s founding, there were lingering diplomatic issues: the Beijing 北京 government unwillingly accepted the existence of an independent Mongolia (supported by the USSR),<sup>2</sup> ownership of the Chinese Changchun Railway<sup>3</sup> took a while to be settled, and the Soviet military presence in Port Arthur (today’s Lüshun 旅順) raised questions on different levels. Even border issues between the two countries remained unresolved, which led to military clashes in 1969. Negotiations about the volume and type of Soviet aid to China dragged on for years while Stalin was alive, and, when Khrushchev came to power, nuclear weapons became a prominent issue. Moscow’s and Beijing’s positions in the socialist camp played a complicating role at times. There were also a number of less easily observable issues, such as various hitches in administrative and bureaucratic procedures, and, importantly, the mutually ambivalent perceptions of Soviet and Chinese people.

Yet both the USSR and the PRC, being ideological states that relied heavily on indoctrination in governance, needed to maintain finely tuned domestic propaganda about relations with each other, with other socialist countries, and with the rest of the world. Such propaganda had to reflect current events and to place them into a frame of reference that was familiar to the readers. It also had to adjust the evaluations of trends and representations of domestic and foreign actors quickly when any changes occurred. Therefore, the various complications of inter-government and inter-party relations were reflected in the mass media, which tried to weave them into a teleological narrative of building socialism and achieving Communism.

Political cartoons were an important part of the large propaganda toolbox available to both the Soviet and Chinese governments in the 1950s. Both countries had an established tradition of utilizing propaganda posters, murals, and newsprint cartoons as visual means of informing and mobilizing the population even before the establishment of nation-wide Communist regimes. The Russian Civil War (1917–22) gave birth to the “ROSTA satire window” phenomenon,<sup>4</sup> whereas in China, during both the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–45) and the Chinese Civil War between Communists and Nationalists (1946–49),

---

<sup>2</sup> The Republic of China had recognized independent Mongolia in January 1946, but when the PRC was founded three and a half years later Mao Zedong expected Mongolia to “return” to China; thus, although diplomatic relations between the People’s Republic of Mongolia and the PRC were established on 16 October 1949, Sino-Mongolian relations remained apprehensive and worsened after the Sino–Soviet split (Rossabi 2013, 174–5).

<sup>3</sup> Chinese Changchun Railway (Zhongguo Changchun tielu 中国长春铁路) was the name of the Chinese Eastern Railway, including South Manchuria Railway, between 1945, when Japan capitulated and returned the railway to the USSR, and 1952, when the Soviet government passed all property and management rights over the railway to the PRC.

<sup>4</sup> They were simplistic propaganda placards placed in the windows of abandoned shops in Moscow, Petrograd, and other cities under the aegis of the Russian Telegraph Agency (ROSTA). The drawings were made crudely but with great pathos and conviction; some of the posters became legendary. Probably the most famous person to participate in the production of these images was the poet Vladimir Mayakovsky (1893–1930), but he was by far not the only one. See Mayakovsky 1938. The practice was reintroduced during World War II. Some examples are available at <https://archive.artic.edu/tass/> (accessed 11 April 2021).



political caricature became more pointed.<sup>5</sup> In the 1950s, both the USSR and the PRC published regular cartoon magazines, supplying readers with images of trending domestic and foreign events. The Soviet *Krokodil* (Crocodile) was established in 1922, and by the 1950s it was issued three times a month; the magazine outlived the USSR and was intermittently published until as late as 2008.<sup>6</sup> The Chinese *Manhua* 漫画 (Cartoon)<sup>7</sup> first appeared in 1950, was initially published monthly and later fortnightly, and was closed down in 1960.

Both magazines were part of the wider state-directed mass media system. From the 1930s onwards *Krokodil* was produced by Pravda Publishing House, which meant that it was under the supervision of the Communist Party's Central Committee and Department of Propaganda and Agitation. *Manhua* was originally affiliated with the Shanghai branch of the Chinese Artists Association and the Cultural Bureau of the municipal administration. Later it was transferred under the supervision of the East China Military Government Committee's News and Publishing Office, before finally being published by the People's Art Press and, thus, coming under the control of the Ministry of Culture's Arts Bureau (Altehenger 2013, 86–89). The degree of such control and supervision in case of both magazines should not be taken for granted: John Etty emphasizes that Soviet satire was created by multiple forces not limited to the party (2019, 101–23). Vladimir Pechatnov has demonstrated that in the early years of the Cold War even the Soviet government itself felt frustrated with its propaganda machine.<sup>8</sup> During Khrushchev's "thaw" years, liberalization and de-Stalinization brought some changes: as Etty (2019) writes, at that time satire was used in the USSR "to re-view the Soviet 'self' and the 'other' that existed in Soviet society" (pp. 11). In China, the creation of *Manhua* was also a complicated process not unequivocally directed by the party; both Jennifer Altehenger (2013) and John Crespi (2020) demonstrate that *Manhua* artists produced works which went beyond the narrow confines of controlled propaganda. Yet both *Krokodil* and *Manhua* were certainly among the most important state media outlets for conveying party and government policies. Cartoonists from both magazines were repressed and criticized by the state, which indicates that their works were sometimes deemed too dangerous or unfit for political purposes and that satire functioned as an important part of mass media. Both *Krokodil* and *Manhua* echoed the central newspapers – *Pravda* (Truth) and *Renmin Ribao* 人民日报 (People's Daily), respectively – quoted party leaders, and followed the guidelines that the propaganda departments of the ruling parties provided to the editorial boards. Moreover, being part of the socialist camp press, these magazines were included in a transnational network of coordinated (although not very efficiently) news flow, with

<sup>5</sup> Some of the illustrated newspapers and magazines from the period are available at <http://www.modernhistory.org.cn/index.htm> (accessed 4 April 2021).

<sup>6</sup> By that time, the magazine had little to do with the Soviet original, as the creative team, the contents, and the print runs had changed.

<sup>7</sup> The magazine was also known as *Manhua Yuekan* 漫画月刊 (Cartoon Monthly) and *Manhua Banyuekan* 漫画半月刊 (Cartoon Fortnightly) depending on its publication frequency, which changed from the former to the latter in July 1956. In this paper I call it *Manhua* for the sake of brevity and because that was the title on the cover.

<sup>8</sup> Pechatnov writes about mass media for foreign audiences in the late 1940s (2001), but multiple "voices" were present in the domestic central press in the preceding decades as well (Lenoe 2004, 23–26) – even though, as Lenoe underscores, they were very much in line with what the party wanted to appear in the press.

the Soviet Information Bureau (Sovinformburo) giving some directions and providing material for quotation.

Cartoons published in these magazines were essential for visual propaganda in the pre-television era.<sup>9</sup> Unlike photography, cartoons created fantastical, grotesque, and metaphorical images consisting of intentionally placed elements. In addition, newspaper photography at the time was black-and-white and often of poor quality, whereas many cartoons were published in full colour. Illustrated magazines were produced much faster than propaganda films and thus could respond more quickly to current events; they also did not require special equipment like mobile cinemas for transmission. Importantly, cartoon and satire magazines placed different events into a single news flow, collocating various “positive” and “negative” images and thus drawing a broader picture than individual posters or murals. Analysing magazine cartoons, therefore, shows the complicated interactions between individual events and their dynamics through satirical interpretation. The nature of satire meant that such interpretations simplified events and magnified some of their aspects as if reflecting them in a distorting mirror. This paper looks at such distortions to reconstruct the visual images of Sino–Soviet relations in the 1950s as they were presented to the readers of satire magazines in the Soviet Union and China, reflecting the alliances and contradictions of the Cold War.

Sino–Soviet relations per se have been an object of close academic scrutiny.<sup>10</sup> Growing attention has been paid to Chinese propaganda posters (albeit mostly those from the Great Cultural Revolution), as well as to some other types of visuals.<sup>11</sup> Soviet cartooning has also attracted its share of scrutiny, although when it comes to matters of international affairs, researchers seem to be more interested in depictions of enemies (Golubev 2018; McKenna 2001). However, no attempts have been made to look at Sino–Soviet relations and related matters through the prism of magazine cartoons, especially by comparing works printed in *Krokodil* and *Manhua*.

The corpus of cartoons assembled for this study<sup>12</sup> can be divided into three large groups, which also determine the structure of this paper:

---

<sup>9</sup> It is necessary to remark here on the use of the word *cartoon*. It covers the phenomena described by the words *karikatura* in Russian and *manhua* 漫画 in Chinese. Strictly speaking, some of the images in *Krokodil* were called “friendly jests” (*druzheskij sharzh*), theoretically separate from the genre of cartoon (or caricature), but such “friendly jests” seldom dealt with international affairs, so they are mostly not included in the corpus for this study. Additionally, *Krokodil* published photo collages (as did *Manhua*), which were chiefly satirical, so they are treated as part of the corpus here. In the Chinese practice, both “eulogizing” (*gesonghua* 歌颂画) and “satirizing” (*fengcihua* 讽刺画) images were considered part of the *manhua* genre. Apart from these incongruities, quite a few cartoons in both magazines combined positive and negative depictions in multi-panel drawings juxtaposing socialist and capitalist practices, making distinguishing genres unfeasible. Therefore, in this article the term *cartoon* is used in a very broad sense, covering any drawing, photomontage, or visual image using other techniques published in *Krokodil* or *Manhua*.

<sup>10</sup> See, e.g., Bagdasarian et al. 2018; Bazhanov 2013; Jersild 2014; Lüthi 2008; Westad 1998; Shen Zhihua 2007; Sun Qiming 2002.

<sup>11</sup> A very useful collection of propaganda posters is available online at <https://chineseposters.net/> (accessed 15 April 2021), see also Min et al. 2015. Chinese posters and other printed visuals have been attracting increasing attention from researchers; see, e.g., Crespi 2020; Ginsberg 2013; Samoylov 2020.

<sup>12</sup> Due to current restrictions, I have access to only 129 issues of *Manhua* out of the total 164 produced during its existence: issue no. 7 from 1950, issue no. 37 from 1953, and issue nos. 38–164 (1954–60). For this reason the quantitative data in this paper is provided for the issues published between 1954

- depictions of Sino–Soviet friendship and unity between countries of the socialist camp in general;
- depictions of international friendship and solidarity with national liberation, anti-colonial, and labour movements across the globe; and
- depictions of the USSR’s and the PRC’s interactions with capitalist countries.

## Friendship and Unity

Surprisingly, *Krokodil* and *Manhua* published relatively few cartoons visualizing the bilateral friendship as such: slightly more than ten pieces in *Krokodil* and around thirty in *Manhua*. The cartoons in *Krokodil* praised the bilateral Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance (signed in 1950), lauded Soviet aid to Chinese peasants and engineers, extolled the great harvests in both countries in 1955, emphasized the strength of Sino–Soviet ties in 1957–58, and drew parallels between the USSR and the young Communist China, both of which received gloomy “prognostications” from “spiteful Western critics” in the early years of their existences.<sup>13</sup> *Manhua* also featured cartoons about Soviet aid and friendly support, as well as about joint socialist construction projects, cultural exchanges, and cooperation in facing the capitalist-imperialist enemy.<sup>14</sup> Such friendship and cooperation were frequently embodied visually in the figures of two people (mostly men, rarely women) shaking hands or engaging in work together. A typical example is the front cover of *Manhua* no. 76, where a Soviet and a Chinese engineer ride a “black dragon”, whose jaws resemble a hydroelectric dam – a reference to Soviet aid in building powerplants along the Heilongjiang 黑龙江 River, literally the “black dragon river” (Miao Yintang 1956). This cartoon was reproduced in *Krokodil* four months later (although not on the front cover; Miao Yintang 1957). Also similarly to each other, the two magazines depicted state friendship through the metaphor of mutual support in the ascension of snowy peaks (Goriaev 1958; Wu Yun 1955). One such cartoon commemorated a real climbing expedition, stressing the alpinists’ courage and the power of friendship (Xiewasiyangjienuofu 1956).<sup>15</sup> Humans personifying their nations were prominently marked by state flags or emblems. A frequent symbolic visualization of bilateral friendship in Chinese cartoons during the last years of the decade depicted two osculating circles with a hammer-and-sickle emblem on the left and five stars on the right, with a dove in between (Jiang Yousheng 1958a; Jiang Yousheng 1960; Tie Yi 1960; Zhang Leping 1959; Fig. 1). Sometimes Chinese cartoonists positioned the Kremlin and Tiananmen 天安门 close to each other to demonstrate the ideological and political

---

and 1960; *Krokodil* issues are fully available online, but are also limited here to the same period for the sake of comparability.

<sup>13</sup> For some examples, see Brodaty 1950; Goriaev 1958; Mi Gu 1957a; Miao Yintang 1957; Wu Yuan 1955; Yefimov 1950; Yefimov 1956c.

<sup>14</sup> For some examples, see Jiang Fan 1960; Jiang Yousheng and Gao Made 1953; Jiang Yousheng 1958a; Miao Yintang 1956; Miao Di 1957; Wu Yun 1955; Xiewasiyangjienuofu 1956; Ye Miao 1954; Zhao Yannian 1954; Zhou Lushi 1954.

<sup>15</sup> That was a joint Sino–Soviet ascent of the peak of Muztagh Ata (Mushitageshan 慕士塔格山) in 1956. Characteristically, in 1960 a similar cartoon in *Manhua* showed only the Chinese climbers and flag on top of a snowy mountain titled “The High Peak of the World” (Hua Junwu 1960).

proximity of the two countries and nations.<sup>16</sup> Interestingly, such representations did not appear in *Krokodil*, possibly because the magazine opted to depict more specific achievements and commemorations.

On the surface, *Manhua* and *Krokodil* seem to heap praise on both countries' achievements. First, the magazines portrayed the Soviet Union's present as China's future: Chinese women looked with admiration at Soviet heroines – female pilots and scientists – saying, “This is our future!” (Goriaev 1950), and Chinese peasants dreamt of the “happy life” of their Soviet peers when looking at propaganda posters (Zhang Wenyuan 1954).<sup>17</sup> *Krokodil* even reported in 1952 that a *kolkhoz* (possibly meaning a mutual-aid team, *huzhuzu* 互助组, or a cooperative, *hezuoshe* 合作社) with the name “Sino–Soviet Friendship” was established in Shanxi province, simultaneously emulating the Soviet model of collective farming and reinforcing amicable relations (Goriaev 1952). Only a few years later, during the Great Leap Forward (GLF), *Krokodil* would be far more reserved about the people's commune movement in China.

Second, *Manhua* went out of its way to honour the Soviet launch of *Sputnik* on 4 October 1957. The USSR's ability to send an object into outer space, together with claims of successful trials of intercontinental ballistic missiles, inspired the Chinese ruling party to firmly believe that the “imperialist nuclear blackmail” plan has been foiled (Lüthi 2008, 77). Images of *Sputnik* in the sky and of Soviet rockets meeting the immortal Chang'e 嫦娥 on the Moon or taking the place of old gods among the stars became some of *Manhua*'s highlights in late 1957 and throughout 1958,<sup>18</sup> emphatically contrasted to the USA's rockets falling ingloriously. Additionally, Chinese cartoonists connected the Soviet seven-year plan (1959–65) with images of technical advancements and wove them into the narrative of the PRC's own economic campaigns.

However, the GLF was taking place when Sino–Soviet relations on the highest level were already showing cracks. Mao's 1958 claim that China would surpass the UK in steel production in fifteen years, quickly shortened to three years, and other economic and diplomatic decisions (especially related to the Taiwan Crisis of August 1958, which Mao initiated without first consulting with Khrushchev) were perceived as rash and even wrong in Moscow (Lüthi 2008, 113). Soviet specialists working in China at the time of the GLF found that their advice remained unheeded or was even dismissed as “conservative”, “dogmatic”, or “opposing the general line” (Shen Zhihua 2003, 358–59). It is not surprising, therefore, that very few cartoons in *Krokodil* extolled China's grand economic plans: two drawings (one reproduced from *Manhua*, another made by Chinese cartoonist Jiang Yousheng 江有生 for *Krokodil*) published in 1958 and one double-page comment on the occasion of the PRC's ten-year anniversary in October 1959.<sup>19</sup> People's communes were omitted from the pages of *Krokodil*, although there might have been one excep-

---

<sup>16</sup> For example, see Mi Gu 1958; Jiang Fan 1960.

<sup>17</sup> It is noticeable how this and the previously quoted cartoon both employed the “image inside an image” trope, showing Chinese people looking with a sense of awe and admiration at posters in the cartoons. These were at once instructions for how to look at propaganda materials, how to get inspired by them, and how to feel about the country's future.

<sup>18</sup> For example, see Jiang Yousheng 1957; Jiang Yousheng 1959a; Li Cunsong 1958.

<sup>19</sup> The two-page spread is filled with texts and depictions of China's progress, as well as quotes from Chinese cartoonists (*Krokodil* 27 (1959), pp. 2–3). The other two works mentioned here are Jiang Yousheng 1958b and Wu Yun 1958.

tion: a reprint of a cartoon from *Manhua* that depicts a heavy palanquin, upon which an anthropomorphic harvest sack is seated, carried by eight men (Zhang Benshan and Gu Pu 1959). The caption, translated into Russian, explains that the eight carriers were soil improvement, fertilizer, irrigation, better seed strains, close planting, plant protection, better farm implements, and field management (the elements of China's Eight-Point Charter for Agriculture proclaimed in 1958). The sack was inscribed with the phrase "1959, rich harvest" translated into Russian. Not translated, however, either in the caption or in the cartoon, were the four characters reading "*renmin gongshe* 人民公社" (people's commune) written on the gates to which the sack was being taken. Therefore, in the only cartoon vaguely referring to the commune movement in China, *Krokodil* avoided actually showing or even mentioning communes to its Soviet readers, almost none of whom could read Chinese.

When it came to depicting the unity of the socialist camp, *Manhua* and *Krokodil* often chose the metaphor of flags placed in rows to visualize solidarity.<sup>20</sup> Socialist unanimity was reflected not only in depictions of a common will and collective action, but also in physical unity – where, for example, the whole socialist camp (or some of its member countries) was portrayed as a single body, a muscular arm, or a rising sun. Another metaphorical representation was a display of marching people, sometimes also carrying flags or wearing national costumes. In both *Krokodil* and *Manhua* personifications of the USSR usually wear simple Western-style suits, and figures representing China are dressed in a Sun Yat-sen-style jacket, whereas other countries are portrayed as men and women in traditional embroidered folk costumes (e.g., Ye Miao 1958).

Two outstanding multi-panel cartoons praising the integrity of the socialist camp were published in *Manhua*. Both take up two pages of the magazine, are in full colour, and depict twelve countries: the USSR, the PRC, Albania, Bulgaria, Hungary, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, the German Democratic Republic, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the Mongolian People's Republic, Poland, Romania, and Czechoslovakia. They are portrayed in this order in both cartoons. The earlier one, from February 1959, shows twelve horse riders – six men and six women (Ying Tao and Miao Di 1959). The Soviet panel is considerably larger than the rest, but otherwise the countries appear equally prosperous and their personifications eagerly leap forward on their multicoloured steeds (a clear reference to a jumping horse as a metaphor of the GLF<sup>21</sup>), happily pursuing the common path of socialism. A year later, in January 1960, the composition remained the same, with the Soviet panel larger than the others, but instead of employing the equestrian metaphor, the countries were visualized as dancers (Wu Yun 1960; Fig. 2). The Soviet ballet starts at the Kremlin's towers and finishes on the Moon, with stars shaped into the years of the seven-year plan. The Chinese perform a dragon dance, another metaphor for the GLF. Other countries also demonstrate their great achievements in agriculture and industry through the movements or attributes of their national dances. The key theme here remained rapid economic development and faster fulfilment of production quotas to

---

<sup>20</sup> Some examples include Anon. 1953; Bi Keguan 1958; Liang Hong 1950; Semenov 1957; Ye Xueqian 1959; Zelenskiy 1952; Zhang Quan 1950.

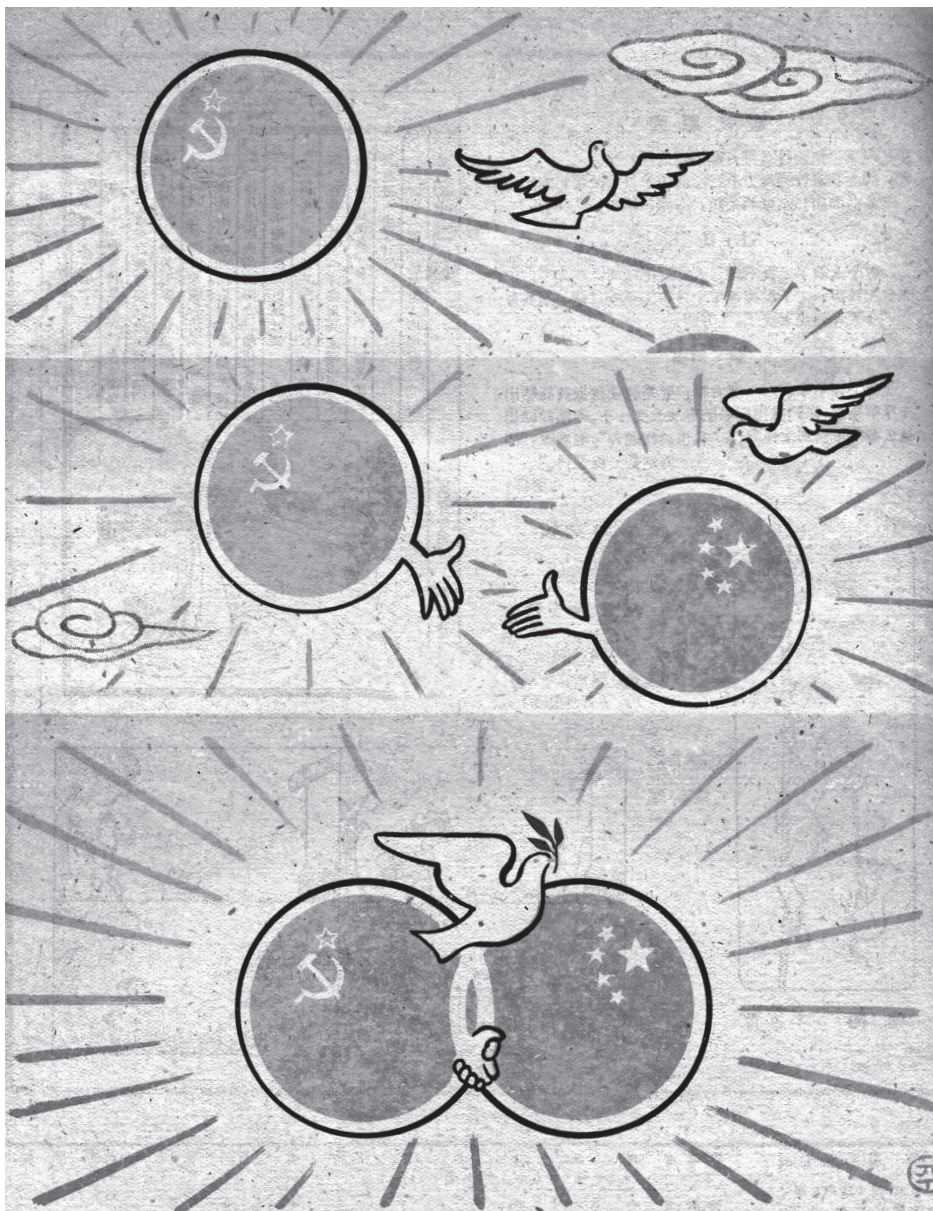
<sup>21</sup> By placing the Soviet rider with a symbolic text about the seven-year plan near the Chinese one, with a GLF slogan, *Manhua* implied that the Soviet government enthusiastically supported China's economic programme – which at the time was not the case.

smoothly follow the socialist path laid down by Soviet Russia after the October Revolution. *Krokodil* abstained from such straightforward depictions of rapid, orchestrated development and even from over-emphasizing the unity of socialist countries.

Yugoslavia was inevitably absent from such collective depictions, whereas Poland and Hungary were included among the “fraternal countries”. It is worth pointing out that, since neither Khrushchev nor Mao wanted to allow any hint of “cracks” inside the socialist camp to permeate into the news available to the masses, the political upheaval in Poland of October 1956 was omitted in political satire both in China and the USSR, while the nearly simultaneous events in Hungary were presented as the result of enemy infiltration. Both magazines handled the Polish issue in a similar way, but for different political reasons. Because the USSR opted to withdraw its armed forces from Poland and accept Władysław Gomułka as the country’s leader, Soviet propaganda avoided making allegations of “imperialist” or “Fascist” involvement. *Manhua*’s silence on the matter reflected Mao’s disapproval of the Soviet attempt to use force against Poland and his support for Gomułka (Lüthi 2008, 54, 64). In case of the attempted Hungarian revolution of 1956, both *Krokodil* and *Manhua* depicted it as a failed operation launched by former fascists supported by American imperialists. Whereas *Krokodil* ran a campaign along these lines in November 1956 (publishing at least one cartoon on this matter in each issue between nos. 32 and 36 in 1956), *Manhua* was a little slower on the uptake, starting to address the situation in Hungary only in December 1956 but then joining in no less vocally. Chinese satirists pointed out not only the imperialists’ failures in Hungary, but also their retreat in the contemporaneous Suez Crisis and the firmness of Sino–Soviet friendship and, generally, of ties between socialist countries (e.g., Shen Tongheng 1957).

In a similar attempt to show the grim reality through rose-coloured spectacles, as ever more conflicts emerged between Soviet and Chinese leaders in the late 1950s, the two countries’ propaganda machines put increasingly greater efforts into presenting rumours about such discord to be slanderous lies. As early as 1957 *Krokodil* reprinted a cartoon by Mi Gu 米谷 in which the Voice of America radio station’s musings over Sino–Soviet clashes were dismissed as utter falsehoods (Mi Gu 1957a). *Manhua* published several cartoons (one of them on the front cover) satirizing the West’s eagerness to find “cracks” between the USSR and the PRC (e.g., Fang Cheng 1960; Jiang Yousheng 1959b).

The mutual reproduction of cartoons was another useful method for demonstrating the unity of the socialist camp and “fraternal” nations. I have already mentioned some examples, but there are countless others. Satire magazines existed in all twelve socialist countries, as well as in many of the Soviet republics, so there were plenty of ideologically reliable sources to quote. More than half of all *Krokodil* and *Manhua* issues contained various reprints, either as whole-page collections of “satire abroad” and “friendly visits” from specified countries, magazines, or artists, or as individual cartoons. Occasionally, even Western cartoonists were given space (but they were either pro-socialist authors, such as Herluf Bidstrup, or cartoonists of the past, such as Honoré Daumier). In addition to giving some fresh perspective and introducing local readers to foreign humour, such sections also showed the solidarity of views and the presence of common tasks facing the peoples of the world. Additionally, Soviet and Chinese cartoonists were sometimes dispatched on exchange or observation trips, bringing back “eyewitness evidence” of the benefits of socialism and the evils of capitalism.



**Figure 1:** Zhang Leping 张乐平 (1959). “Xu ri gao sheng” 旭日东升 [The Sun is Rising High]. *Manhua* 147, 20.



**Figure 2:** Wu Yun 吴耘 (1960). “Dong feng deyi ying chunnian” 东风得意迎春年 [The East Wind Proudly Greets Spring Years]. *Manhua* 152, 10–11.

### International Solidarity across the Globe

These images of close-knit friendships both on the bilateral level and within the “fraternity” of socialist countries resonated with the narratives of wider international amity and peace-loving intentions, along with portrayals of national liberation, anti-colonial, and labour movements spreading across the globe at the time. Developments in Vietnam, North Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East, which would affect not only the peoples involved but the whole planet, attracted considerable attention from Soviet and Chinese cartoonists. Whereas cartoons about Sino–Soviet friendship and the unity of the socialist camp amount to about 40 and 30, respectively, in both magazines, cartoons dealing with the national liberation, anti-colonial, labour, and anti-war movements are hard to count. If only the images explicitly depicting “anti-imperialist” forces (in the form of resisting people, raised fists, advancing columns of animals symbolizing countries or nations, such as elephants, etc.) are counted, there are about 160 cartoons nearly equally distributed between *Krokodil* and *Manhua*. It is interesting to note the changing frequency of such cartoons in both publications over time (see Table 1).

**Table 1:** Number of cartoons showing active anti-colonial, anti-imperialist, national liberation, labour, and anti-war movements in *Krokodil* and *Manhua*.

	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959	1960
Krokodil	3	18	19	21	11	1	5
Manhua	1	3	12	4	11	26	24



By the end of the 1950s *Manhua* dedicated increasing space to anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism, while *Krokodil* on the contrary published fewer cartoons on these topics in 1959 and 1960. This disparity reflects a very important difference between the Soviet and Chinese foreign policies of the late 1950s. While Khrushchev was attempting to negotiate with the capitalist world under the slogan of “peaceful coexistence”, Mao Zedong, confirming China’s commitment to this slogan, adhered to the idea of anti-imperialist revolution and an inevitable war against the “hostile camp”. On a rhetorical level this was possible thanks to the Bandung Conference of 1955, where the notion of peaceful coexistence was used as the basis of what would become the Non-Aligned Movement and to prevent imperialist intervention. This was a different idea than the “peaceful coexistence” proposed by Khrushchev: the former was a challenge to the bipolar system and aimed to promote the independence of former colonies, whereas the latter was aimed at negotiations between the socialist and capitalist camps (Jersild 2014, 157). The Soviet leadership, facing difficulties with the country’s economy and understanding that it could not maintain the arms race, wanted to ease Cold War tensions. The Chinese Communist Party considered such appeasement of imperialists unacceptable, a message it conveyed to its Soviet counterpart after the International Meeting of Communist and Workers Parties in November 1957 in Moscow – primarily due to the Taiwan issue (Lüthi 2008, 76), but also in view of the generally more radical ideological stand taken by Mao.

The Bandung Conference itself was quite closely reported on in both *Pravda* and *Renmin Ribao*. For Beijing “the Bandung meeting presented a forum through which China could state its peaceful intentions and overcome a sense of isolation within the international community” (Lee 2010, 12). However, neither *Krokodil* nor *Manhua* made many references to this meeting. For *Krokodil* the conference without Soviet participation was probably not a top priority, although the magazine did publish a cartoon depicting Africans and Asians “speaking the language of friendship” to the disappointment of “American imperialists” (Goriaev 1955; Fig. 3). *Manhua* produced one cartoon directly referring to Bandung, also satirizing the attempts of “Wall Street bosses” to create provocations at the meeting (Liu Lude 1955; Fig. 4). Both magazines resorted to more generalized depictions of labourers’ hands joined so tightly together that no colonialist force could separate them and the like.

The USSR’s attempts at negotiating with the West did not mean that Soviet leadership and, therefore, *Krokodil*, did not support the national liberation and anti-colonial movements. On the contrary, both the technological achievements of the USSR and the growing threat to the colonial order were wielded as weapons of pressure against the West in Khrushchev’s negotiations. Under such circumstances, *Krokodil* in the mid-1950s was very active in demonstrating solidarity with Africans, Arabs, Asians, South Americans, and whoever else appeared to be struggling against colonial exploitation and imperialism in the opinion of Soviet propagandists. Quite often, representations of such struggle were placed in a fairly generalized “Oriental” setting, featuring palm trees, jungles, mosques, elephants, camels, and other attributes of “exotic” lands. In some cases, the cartoonists used this geographical vagueness intentionally to create a sense of the omnipresent and pervasive nature of anti-colonial movements (Yefimov 1956a). *Manhua* covered the same geographical range, paying attention to the spread of anti-colonial and anti-imperialist

movements across the globe. Chinese cartoons tended to be a little more specific in assigning nationalities to the depicted figures – the magazine even published a “manual” on how to portray Arabs, their costumes, customs, and architecture (Anon. 1958),<sup>22</sup> but at times it also applied general “Orientalist” depictions.

Understandably, the first big wave of *Krokodil* and *Manhua* cartoons about the anti-colonialist struggle was produced in response to the Suez Crisis of 1956. *Krokodil* published no less than seven cartoons demonstrating the might of the Egyptian people’s will to control their own country; *Manhua* produced at least eight, including a separate leaflet as an appendix to issue no. 76. These cartoons again reflect the differences in the diplomatic courses taken by the USSR and the PRC in the second half of the 1950s. Soviet cartoonists showed the Egyptian people as rightfully governing the Suez Canal, having taken control over it, and, importantly, succeeding in mastering its navigation. The canal in *Krokodil*’s cartoons is clear blue, functioning as smoothly as under its previous owners – who are ridiculed in a relatively benign manner as plump moneybags regretting their lost profits and helplessly shaking their fists (e.g., Ganf 1957; Leo 1956; Yefimov 1956b; Fig. 5). Chinese cartoons were noticeably more “militant”, depicting muscular arms, clenched fists, and “the dark waters and high waves of resistance” that wrecked the ships of colonialism (Fang Cheng 1956; Mi Gu 1956; Wu Yun 1956; Fig. 6). Chinese artists also used images of the Sphinx and the pyramids more actively than Soviet cartoonists, although I cannot discern any underlying political implications.

Middle Eastern conflicts were also embraced by cartoonists in both *Krokodil* and *Manhua* with regard to the Baghdad Pact (1955) and the Eisenhower Doctrine (1957),<sup>23</sup> tensions in Lebanon in 1957–58, the Iraqi revolution and the establishment of the United Arab Republic (both in 1958), the potential deposition of the monarchy in Jordan in the same period, and various other tendencies in the region, where the anti-colonial movement clashed with the West’s attempts to prevent the spread of Communism. These tensions and conflicts were included in the wider narrative of similar trends in Africa and anti-American sentiments in Latin America. Cartoonists working for *Manhua* frequently chose to envisage such phenomena in the form of maps upon which liberated figures stand, dropping their chains.<sup>24</sup> *Krokodil*’s authors were more inclined to visualize the whole planet, not just individual continents.<sup>25</sup> It also appears that Chinese cartoonists used animalistic and objectifying metaphors<sup>26</sup> more readily than their Soviet counter-

<sup>22</sup> Similar manuals on broader topics were published as brochures meant as aids for amateur cartoonists, and hence the manual on Arabic customs was not unique.

<sup>23</sup> It is not surprising that both *Krokodil* and *Manhua* depicted American economic aid to other countries as the purchasing of their sovereignty, and the negotiation and signing of the American–Japanese Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security (signed in 1960) as a threat to regional stability. Soviet aid to China and any collective security treaties within the socialist camp were portrayed in the very opposite light as promoting peace and development. The socialist and capitalist worlds were completely antagonistic, but the magazines’ cartoonists did not imply any irony in the parallels within this dichotomized universe.

<sup>24</sup> Some examples are Anon. 1960; Fang Cheng 1959; Ye Qianyu 1959; Zhang Shixiang 1959.

<sup>25</sup> Such representations can be found in Krylov 1960; Rotov 1957; Yefimov 1955; Yefimov 1960; Fig. 7.

<sup>26</sup> I do not mean that Chinese cartoonists had the explicit intention of dehumanizing the representatives of liberation movements; quite the contrary, the cartoonists’ aim was to show the liberation forces as coming from the very nature of the land – in the form of local animals, plants, and famous landmarks. This representation supposedly served to show the might of the people’s struggle, while also helping readers to recognize foreign lands.

parts: in *Manhua*, Africa is represented as an ostrich and as a lion (Mi Gu 1957b; Liu Yongfei 1959), Latin American resistance is depicted as fist-shaped cactuses (You Yunchang 1959), and Cuba is embodied by a whale (Wei Qimei 1960) – all this in addition to the aforementioned Egyptian pyramids and the Sphinx. *Krokodil* did use the image of an Arabian horse (Kukryniksy 1957),<sup>27</sup> but it seems evident that Soviet cartoonists went out of their way to emphasize the human nature of international friendship, possibly also fearing accusations of an imperialistic attitude towards Third World nations. Thus, in most *Krokodil* cartoons the positive forces of the anti-colonial movement were represented by humans, while animalistic metaphors were reserved primarily for aggressors. Naturally, Chinese cartoonists did not abstain from such depictions either, featuring an assortment of “paper tigers” and the like throughout *Manhua*’s ten-year existence.

The notion of “liberation” in *Manhua* was, of course, widely applied not only to international movements, but also to the Chinese people’s liberation (both as *jiefang* 解放 and as *fanshen* 翻身). However, not every fight for freedom was “righteous”. The Tibetan Uprising of 1959 and the ensuing conflict between China and India forced *Manhua* to engage in a campaign demonstrating Tibetans’ happiness achieved through liberation after becoming part of the PRC – though, naturally, not their attempt to free themselves from it in 1959 (Anon. 1959b; Yue Xiaoying 1959). The uprising itself was not directly referred to, with the implication that there was no uprising and Tibetans lived happy lives. The “Tibetan question” was mentioned only to show that the USA tried to force more lies on the United Nations’ agenda (e.g., Tian Ma 1959). Additionally, *Manhua*, which had previously quoted the Indian cartoonist Revindren on a number of occasions, quickly shifted gears and accused Indian cartoonists in general of following the “British” (in other words, colonial) style, because they satirized China’s military involvement in Tibet in 1959 (Anon. 1959c). *Krokodil* remained completely silent about the whole Tibetan issue. The Soviet government disapproved of both Beijing’s hard-line response to the Tibetan Uprising and the damage to Sino–Indian relations it caused (Lüthi 2008, 115), but this disapproval was not actively conveyed in the Soviet mass media.

*Krokodil*’s silence about Tibet differed from its response to the bombing of Kinmen (Jinmen 金門) in 1958. Then, even though Moscow was dissatisfied with Mao for not consulting Khrushchev before engaging in the military operation, *Krokodil* did support China in its opposition to Chiang Kai-shek (Jiang Jieshi 蒋介石), who by then was one of the most recognizable enemies for the magazine’s readers. When *Krokodil* published two issues with covers related to the struggle and courage of the Chinese people in the fight against the American “occupants” of Taiwan and their “puppet” Chiang, there was no clear mention of the bombing, but support and justification of the PRC’s actions were clear nonetheless (Kukryniksy 1958; Semenov and Abramov 1958). In contrast, the Tibetan Uprising of 1959 and the Sino–Indian clash were not visualized because that would imply assigning blame. Even *Pravda* treaded with utmost care, mostly quoting Zhou Enlai 周恩来 and Jawaharlal Nehru but avoiding explicit condemnation of either side (e.g., see *Pravda* issues from September 12, October 29, and November 10).

---

<sup>27</sup> There was also a cartoon by a German author reprinted in *Krokodil* showing an elephant as a representation of India (Dittrich 1956).

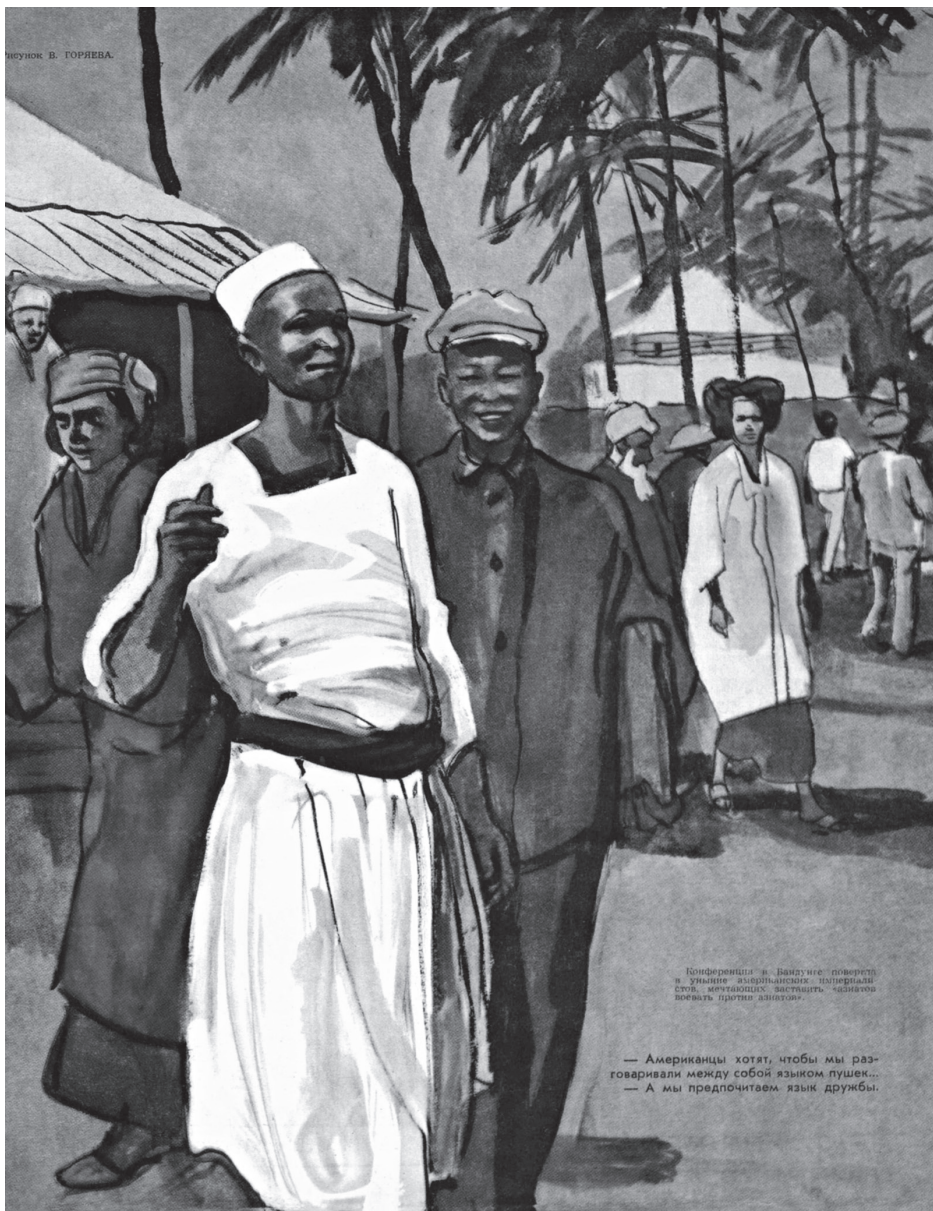


Figure 3: Vitaliy Goriaev (1955). Untitled. *Krokodil* 14, 7.



**Figure 4:** Liu Lude 刘路得 (1955). “Shibai de jingtou” 失败的镜头 [Defeated Lens]. *Manhua* 54, 3.



**Figure 5:** Boris Yefimov (1956b). “Smena flaga nad Suetskim kanalom” [Change of Flag over the Suez Canal]. *Krokodil* 24, 16.



Figure 6: Miao Di 苗地 (1956). “Qinlüe zhe gun chu qu!” 侵略者滚出去! [Aggressors, Get Out!]. *Manhua* 77, 1.



Figure 7: Konstantin Rotov (1957). Untitled. *Krokodil* 12, 3.

### Interactions with the Capitalist World

The numbers in Table 1 show that by the late 1950s *Krokodil* had severely cut down its coverage of anti-imperialist resistance. This was largely a reflection of Khrushchev's ongoing negotiations with US president Dwight Eisenhower over disarmament and peaceful coexistence. I have already mentioned that Mao objected to such an approach to socialist-capitalist interactions. The Soviet and Chinese Communist parties' disagreement over the ideology and practice of international relations was mirrored both in the number of cartoons on relations with the capitalist world and in the metaphors they used: *Manhua* cartoons were increasingly harsh in their criticism of "imperialist aggressors", depicting anti-American sentiment overwhelming the planet and peoples' hearts and



arms joined in the fight against capitalism. *Krokodil* claimed that the West was trouble ridden, that racial discrimination and unemployment caused political and economic woes, and so forth. However, in light of Vice President Richard Nixon's visit to the USSR (summer 1959) and Khrushchev's visit to the USA (autumn 1959), Soviet propaganda aimed to create a view of world affairs that was quite different from the Chinese "proletarian revolution". In the months before, during, and after these two visits, *Krokodil* published no fewer than eighteen cartoons depicting Soviet and American flags next to each other.<sup>28</sup> In many of these cases, the emphasis was on friendship between peoples – sport competitions, theatrical exchanges, cartoonists' trips, and so on. *Manhua* avoided depicting Khrushchev's visit to the USA and references to Soviet and American attempts at rapprochement. Even an ironic cartoon from *Krokodil* mocking some American visitors' reactions to the Soviet exhibition in New York was reprinted in *Manhua* with a very telling omission: the central part of the composition showing the pavilion with Soviet and American flags on the façade disappeared from the Chinese reproduction (Lisogorskiy 1959; Lisuoge'siji 1959; Figs. 8, 9).

*Manhua* repeatedly visualized the dogmatic claim that the "East Wind prevails over the West Wind", even placing relevant two-panel cartoons on the front and back covers of issues (Zhang Ding 1958; Zhang Guangyu 1959; Fig. 10). The Soviet Union was emphatically portrayed as the source of peaceful intentions, but the underlying idea remained that the West's collapse was imminent, so peace would be achieved through victory over capitalism. However, this does not mean that *Manhua* tried to show socialism as an aggressive force. Both the Chinese magazine and *Krokodil* strived to demonstrate that the West's fears of the "red menace" were ridiculous because socialist countries were peace-loving. For *Krokodil* the theme of international friendship was constant. This is especially visible in the issues from 1957, when Moscow was the stage for the Sixth World Festival of Youth and Students. The April–August 1957 issues of *Krokodil* contain at least fourteen cartoons praising joyful meetings between young people from different countries, continents, and races. *Manhua* did not echo these cartoons,<sup>29</sup> although there were some visual responses to another youth festival (held in Vienna in 1959), to which China sent a delegation. These cartoons demonstrated how Chinese performances attracted great attention despite capitalist machinations and how the young people of the world wanted to communicate but unnamed authorities created various obstacles (Chi Xing 1959). These reproaches for censorship targeting China are interesting in light of the moderately friendly cultural contacts between China and Austria at that time, as demonstrated by Graf and Mueller (2019, 26). The Chinese magazine also referred to China's peaceful intentions in trade, economic cooperation (especially to show US sanctions were failing because the world wanted free trade with China), and cultural exchanges with the West, but these motifs disappeared after the mid-1950s (Fang Cheng 1955; Su Guang 1955; Wang Mi 1956; Ye Qianyu 1955; Zhang Ding 1956).

---

<sup>28</sup> Notably, three cartoons were placed on the magazine's front cover (Val'k 1959; Semenov 1959; Anon. 1959a).

<sup>29</sup> With the exception of a cartoon claiming that imperialists were preparing provocateurs to be sent to the festival (Cai Zhenhua 1957).

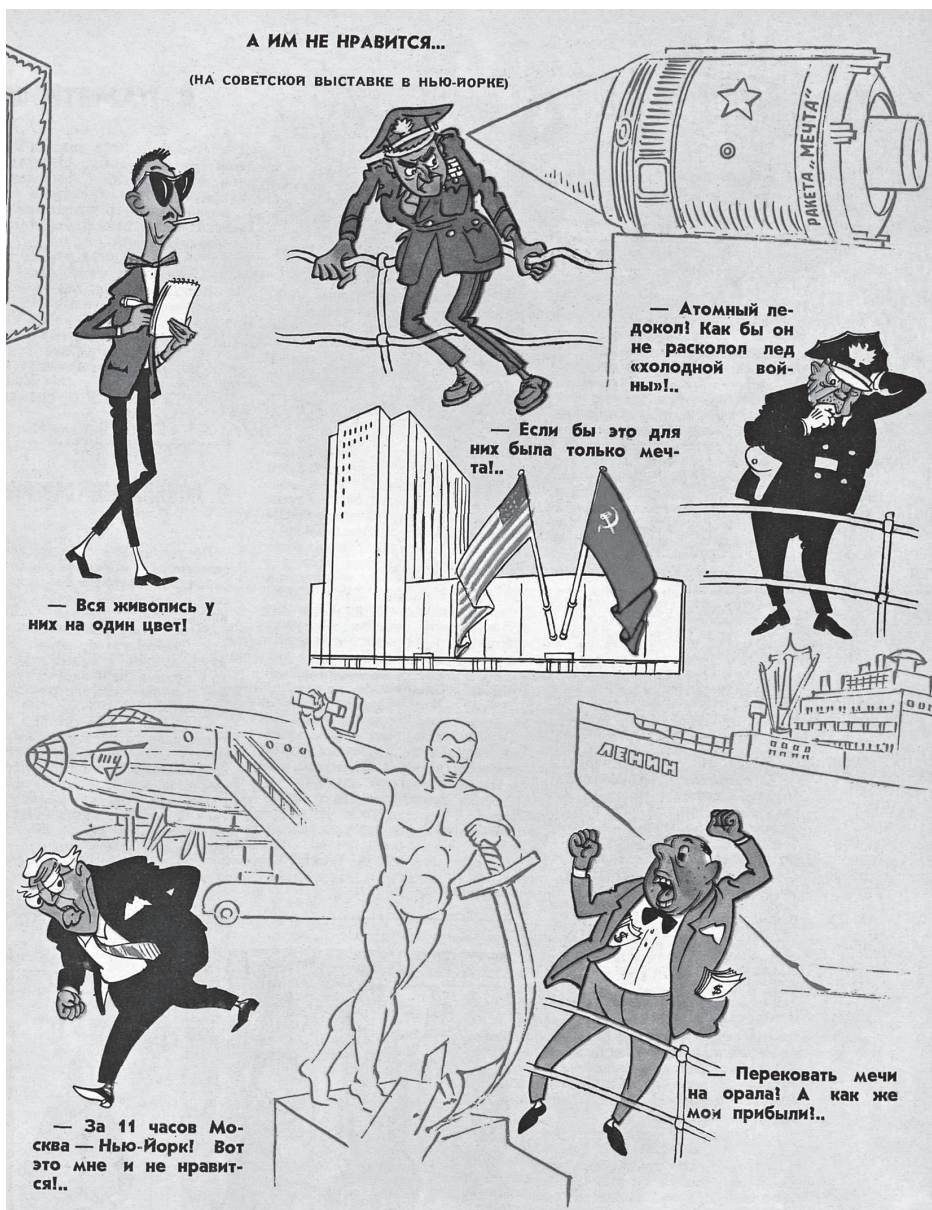


Figure 8: Lisogorskiy, Naum (1959). "A im ne nraivtsja..." [And They Don't Like It...]. *Krokodil* 21, 5.



Figure 9: Lisuogèrsiji 李素戈尔斯基 (Naum Lisogorskiy) (1959). "Mou xie Meiguoren zai Niuyue Sulian zhanlanhui" 某些美国人在纽约苏联展览会 [Some Americans at the Soviet Exhibition in New York]. *Manhua* 147, 5.



Figure 10: Zhang Guangyu 张光宇 (1959). Untitled. *Manhua* 129, 1, 20.

### Conclusion

It would probably be an overstatement to say that a person reading both *Krokodil* and *Manhua* in the 1950s would easily notice the discrepancies and distortions in depictions of events in the two magazines or anticipate the future ideological and political rift between the USSR and the PRC. Such a hypothetical reader would probably find that in general the images in the two magazines were quite similar indeed: the Soviets supported the PRC's development, China celebrated the Soviet Union's achievements, and both countries strove to achieve peace on the planet and condemned the arms race, which was presented as imposed solely by the West. They equally denounced capitalism and imperialism and greeted with joy the national liberation and labour movements across the globe. In this sense Soviet and Chinese satire, viewed together, worked not only as a mirror that distorted events at large but, chiefly, hid away the growing differences between the two ruling parties. However, as these differences became more prominent, the finer details of cartoons began to reveal the divergence. Although both *Krokodil* and *Manhua* worked hard to support an image of unity, the very fact that they published pictures denying any "cracks" in Sino-Soviet friendship worked to prove the opposite. The Soviet government's doubts about GLF policies rendered this topic peripheral in *Krokodil*, while being the major focus of attention in *Manhua*. The Chinese magazine (together with other mass media outlets) tried to cover up this silence on the Soviets' part by alluding to Moscow's support, even though Khrushchev was very unwilling to grant his approval to communes (Shen Zhihua 2003, 351–53) and so Chinese cartoonists had



Figure 11: Mi Gu 米谷 (1960). Untitled. *Manhua* 164, 1.

to resort to far-fetched allusions. Rhetoric concerning socialist–capitalist relations in *Krokodil* and *Manhua* also significantly diverged towards the end of the 1950s. The outright antagonism of socialist and capitalist systems was a fixed point of departure for Chinese artists, whereas their Soviet counterparts had to soften confrontational metaphors, even if only for a short while. The same was true of how the struggle for peace was presented: the Chinese reader was encouraged to feel part of the mighty and powerful world proletariat ready to engage in battle, while the Soviet audience observed dancing youths and a smiling anthropomorphic planet (Figs. 7, 11).

In short, the two satire magazines placed Sino–Soviet friendship and world affairs in the 1950s into slightly different frames of reference. Khrushchev’s “thaw”, Soviet achievements in reaching outer space (and the related economic strain), and disarmament propaganda created the need to show international relations in a milder tone. Enemies were still present in *Krokodil*, many of whom were common to the USSR and the PRC, but the goal of peaceful coexistence seemed to dominate the visual images of them as well. On the contrary, China, having recently established itself on the international stage and growing more assured of its economic and diplomatic powers, aimed to demonstrate its strength and readiness to defend itself and smaller countries, especially those with which it claimed to share a colonial past. Mao was still supportive of the unity of the socialist camp, so *Manhua* stressed that the Soviet Union was the centre and the “elder brother” on the revolutionary path, but this perception was about to waver because the Chinese Communist Party was already challenging it, at least among its own ranks. The panorama of intimate friendship, shared goals, and common enemies lasted on the pages of *Krokodil* and *Manhua* throughout the decade, but distortions in the satirical reflections of the two countries’ policies eventually became increasingly pronounced, not least in the attempts to cover up the actual differences.

Such discrepancies between the two magazines and the dynamics in the interactions between them require further attention, because they speak not only of the diplomatic trends between the USSR and the PRC or the two countries’ Communist parties, but also of the wider tendencies in the socialist camp. The similarities between and reproduction of cartoons demonstrate that there was a high degree of uniformity and coordination within the socialist camp’s press: Chinese magazine clearly followed the Soviet model, borrowing many tropes, themes, and styles of cartooning. However, the differences and distortions were also very distinct, revealing that the magazines had multiple sources of guidance at different levels. This at times allowed cartoonists a degree of creative freedom or forced them into searching for less obvious means of conveying contradictory messages. These dynamics comprise a large subject matter for analysis in their own right, promising insights into Sino–Soviet relations beyond the inter-governmental or inter-party level.

---

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Altehenger, Jennifer (2013). "A Socialist Satire: *Manhua* Magazine and Political Cartoon Production in the PRC, 1950–1960." *Frontiers of History in China* 8:1, 78–103. <https://doi.org/10.3868/s020-002-013-0005-3>.
- Anon. (1953). Untitled. *Krokodil* 8, 2.
- Anon. (1958). "Manhua cankao ziliao zhi yi, Alabo fengtu renqing" 漫画参考资料之一, 阿拉伯风土人情 [Manhua Materials for Consideration, Part 1, Arabs' Conditions and Customs]. *Manhua* 118, 5.
- Anon. (1959a). "Osennij pejzazh" [Autumn View]. *Krokodil* 27, 1.
- Anon. (1959b). "Wanzi qianhong de xianhua, Zangzu ming" 万紫千红的鲜花, 藏族民歌 [Colourful Fresh Flowers, Tibetan Folk Songs]. *Manhua* 137, 10–11.
- Anon. (1959c). "Yingguo shi de manhua" 英国式的漫画 [Cartoons in the British Style]. *Manhua* 136, 4–5.
- Anon. (1960). "Nuhou ba! Feizhou!" 怒吼吧! 非洲! [Roar, Africa!]. *Manhua* 158, 13.
- Bagdasarian, Artem, Eleonora Barkova, and Sergei Vinogradov (2018). *Druzhba naveki: ocherki istorii sotrudnichestva Sovetskogo Sojuza i Kitajskoj Narodnoj Respubliki, 1949–1960 gg.* [Eternal Friendship: Notes on the History of Cooperation between the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China]. Moscow: ANO "Nauchno-issledovatel'skij institut istorii, ekonomiki i prava".
- Bazhanov, Evgeniy (2013). "Ot druzhby cherez konfrontatsiju k normalizatsii: sovetsko-kitajskie otnoshenija s 1949 i do 1991 g." [From Friendship through Confrontation to Normalization: Soviet-Chinese Relations from 1949 to 1991]. In: A. Lukin (ed.), *Rossia i Kitaj: chetyre veka vzaimodejstvia* [Russia and China: Four Centuries of Interactions]. Moscow: Ves Mir, 217–98.
- Bi Keguan 毕克官 (1958). "Senlin jiaoxiangqu" 森林交响曲 [Forest Symphony]. *Manhua* 120, 1.
- Brodaty, Lev (1950). "Na poljakh Kitaja" (On the Fields of China). *Krokodil* 21, 3.
- Cai Zhenhua 蔡振华 (1957). "Dulesi wei shijie qingnian lianhuanjie jinxing zhunbei gongzuo" 杜勒斯为世界青年联欢节进行准备工作 [Dulles Carries Out Preparatory Work for the World Youth Festival]. *Manhua* 88, 1.
- Chi Xing 池星 (1959). "Weiyena shijie qingnian lianhuanjie jianwen" 维也纳世界青年联欢节见闻 [Sights from the World Festival of Youth in Vienna]. *Manhua* 144, 8–9.
- Crespi, John A. (2020). *Manhua Modernity: Chinese Culture and the Pictorial Turn*. Oakland: University of California Press. <https://doi.org/10.1525/luminos.97>.
- Dittrich, Peter (1956). Untitled. *Krokodil* 2, 11.
- Ety, John (2019). *Graphic Satire in the Soviet Union: Krokodil's Political Cartoons*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.
- Fang Cheng 方成 (1955). "Dangbuzhu de" 挡不住的 [Can't Hold the Advance]. *Manhua* 59, 12.
- Fang Cheng 方成 (1956). "Cuo kan lao huangli" 错看老皇历 [Looked at Last Year's Calendar]. *Manhua* 72, 1.
- Fang Cheng 方成 (1959). "Yu hou chun sun" 雨后春笋 [Spring Sprouts after Rain]. *Manhua* 141, 8.
- Fang Cheng 方成 (1960). Untitled. *Manhua* 154, 1.
- Ganf, Julii (1957). "Suetskij kanal dejstvuet..." [Suez Canal Functions...]. *Krokodil* 14, 10.
- Ginsberg, Mary (2013). *The Art of Influence: Asian Propaganda*. London: The British Museum Press.
- Golubev, Aleksandr (2018). "Podlinnyj lik zagranitsy": obraz vneshnego mira v sovetskoj politicheskoj karikature, 1922–1941 gg. ["True Face of Foreign Countries": The Image of the Outer World in Soviet Political Cartoons, 1922–1941]. Moscow: Institut rossijskoj istorii RAN.
- Goriaev, Vitaliy (1950). "V osvobozhdenom Kitae" [In Liberated China]. *Krokodil* 7, 2.
- Goriaev, Vitaliy (1952). Untitled. *Krokodil* 36, 6.
- Goriaev, Vitaliy (1955). Untitled. *Krokodil* 14, 7.
- Goriaev, Vitaliy (1958). "Druzhba na vysote" [High Friendship]. *Krokodil* 29, 4.
- Graf, Maximilian, and Wolfgang Mueller (2019). "Austria and China, 1949–1989: A Slow Rapprochement." In: Janick Marina Schaufelbuehl, Marco Wyss, and Valeria Zanier (eds.), *Europe and China in the Cold War: Exchanges Beyond the Bloc Logic and the Sino-Soviet Split*. Leiden: Brill, 19–41.
- Hua Junwu 华君武 (1960). "Shijie de gao feng" 世界的高峰 [The High Peak of the World]. *Manhua* 163, 1.
- Jersild, Austin (2014). *The Sino-Soviet Alliance: An International History*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.
- Jiang Fan 江帆 (1960). "Youyi chang qing" 友谊长青 [Eternally Young Friendship]. *Manhua* 154, 4–5.

- Jiang Yousheng 江有生 and Gao Made 高马得 (1953). “Shi wu qian li” 史无前例 [Unprecedented in History]. *Manhua* 37, 3.
- Jiang Yousheng (1957). Untitled. *Manhua* 100, 1.
- Jiang Yousheng (1958a). “Dulesi zai wangyuanjing suo jian” 杜勒斯在望远镜所见 [What Dulles Saw through Binoculars]. *Manhua* 106, 3.
- Jiang Yousheng (1958b). “Starinnye kitajskie tantsy na novyj lad” [Old Chinese Dances Performed Anew]. *Krokodil* 27, 3.
- Jiang Yousheng (1959a). “Chaoguo shenhua” 超过神话 [Exceeding Legends]. *Manhua* 129, 5.
- Jiang Yousheng (1959b). Untitled. *Manhua* 147, 3.
- Jiang Yousheng (1960). “Heping dedao baozhang” 和平得到保障 [Peace Receives Guarantees]. *Manhua* 154, 6.
- Krylov, Andrei (1960). “Na Zemle vesna” [Spring on Earth]. *Krokodil* 12, 2.
- Kukryniksy (1957). “Prygnul by na konia, da nozhki korotki” [I Would Have Jumped onto the Horse, But My Legs Are Short]. *Krokodil* 7, 16.
- Kukryniksy (1958). “Ne vidit dal'she svoego nosa” [He Does Not See beyond His Nose]. *Krokodil* 24, 1.
- Yue Xiaoying 乐小英 (1959). “Ku jin gan lai” 苦尽甘来 [Suffering Is Over, Happiness Is Here]. *Manhua* 151, 7.
- Lee, Christopher J. (2010). “Introduction.” In: Christopher J. Lee (ed.), *Making a World after Empire: The Bandung Moment and Its Political Afterlives*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 1–42.
- Lenoe, Matthew (2004). *Closer to the Masses: Stalinist Culture, Social Revolution, and Soviet Newspapers*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Leo, Boris (1956). “Ne uderzhat!” [Can't Hold!]. *Krokodil* 27, 10.
- Li Cunsong 李寸松 (1958). “San xing rang wei” 三星让位 [Three Stars Give Way]. *Manhua* 114, 1.
- Liang Hong 良鸿 (1950). Untitled. *Manhua* 7, 14.
- Lisogorskiy, Naum (1959). “A im ne nraivsja...” [And They Don't Like It...]. *Krokodil* 21, 5.
- Lisugers'ni 李素戈尔斯基 (Naum Lisogorskiy) (1959). “Mou xie Meiguoren zai Niuyue Sulian zhanlanhui” 某些美国人在纽约苏联展览会 [Some Americans at the Soviet Exhibition in New York]. *Manhua* 147, 5.
- Liu Lude 刘路得 (1955). “Shibai de jingtou” 失败的镜头 [Defeated Lens]. *Manhua* 54, 3.
- Liu Yongfei 刘庸非 (1959). “Xing shi” 醒狮 [Woken Lion]. *Manhua* 136, 6.
- Lüthi, Lorenz M. (2008). *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Mayakovsky, Vladimir (1938). *Grozny smekh* [Formidable Laughter]. Moscow: Iskusstvo.
- McKenna, Kevin J. (2001). *All the News Fit to Print: Changing Images of the U.S. in Pravda Political Cartoons, 1917–1991*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.
- Mi Gu 米谷 (1956). “Suyishi yunhe de fu zhou” 苏彝士运河的复舟 [A Turned-over Boat in the Suez Canal]. *Manhua* 71, 5.
- Mi Gu 米谷 (1957a). “Golos Ameriki” [The Voice of America]. *Krokodil* 13, 10.
- Mi Gu 米谷 (1957b). “Yi dan yi dan” 以弹易蛋 [Bombs Instead of Eggs]. *Manhua* 89, 5.
- Mi Gu 米谷 (1958). “Heping de ju yin” 和平的巨音 [The Great Sound of Peace]. *Manhua* 119, 1.
- Mi Gu 米谷 (1960). Untitled. *Manhua* 164, 1.
- Miao Di 苗地 (1956). “Qinlüe zhe gun chu qu!” 侵略者滚出去! [Aggressors, Get Out!]. *Manhua* 77, 1.
- Miao Di 苗地 (1957). Untitled. *Manhua* 100, 3.
- Miao Yintang 缪印堂 (1956). “Jiang long” 降龙 [Tamed Dragon]. *Manhua* 76, 1.
- Miao Yintang 缪印堂 (1957). “Cherny drakon stanet elektricheskim” [Black Dragon Will Become Electric]. *Manhua* 7, 12.
- Min, Anchee, Duo Duo, and Stephan R. Landsberger (eds.). (2015). *Chinese Propaganda Posters*. Koeln: Taschen.
- Pechatnov, Vladimir (2001). “Exercise in Frustration: Soviet Foreign Propaganda in the Early Cold War, 1945–47.” *Cold War History* 1:2, 1–27. <https://doi.org/10.1080/713999921>.
- Rossabi, Morris (2013). “Sino-Mongol Border: From Conflict to Precarious Resolution.” In: Bruce A. Elleman, Stephen Kotkin, and Clive Schofield (eds.), *Beijing's Power and China's Borders: Twenty Neighbors in Asia*. Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 169–89.
- Rotov, Konstantin (1957). Untitled. *Krokodil* 12, 3.
- Samoylov, Nikolay (2020). “Visual Images of the Soviet Union and the West in China (1950s–1960s).” In: Götterlind Müller and Nikolay Samoylov (eds.), *Chinese Perceptions of Russia and the West: Changes, Continuities,*



- and Contingencies during the Twentieth Century*. Heidelberg: CrossAsia-eBooks, 365–87. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.11588/xabooks.661>
- Semenov, Ivan, and Mark Abramov (1958). “Velikaja kitajska stena” [The Great Wall of China]. *Krokodil* 26, 1.
- Semenov, Ivan (1957). Untitled. *Krokodil* 30, 4–5.
- Semenov, Ivan (1959). “... I soprovozhdajushchie ich litsa” [... And the Entourage]. *Krokodil* 26, 16.
- Shen Tongheng 沈同衡 (1957). “Liba zha de jin, ye gou zuan bu jin” 篱笆扎得紧，野狗钻不进 [The Fence is Closely Fitted, the Wild Dog Won't Get in]. *Manhua* 83, 3.
- Shen Zhihua 沈志华 (2003). *Sulian zhuanjia zai Zhongguo, 1948–1960* 苏联专家在中国，1948–1960 [Soviet Specialists in China, 1948–1960]. Beijing: Zhongguo guoji guangbo chubanshe.
- Shen Zhihua (2007). “Tongzhi jia xiongdi, 1949–1959” 同志加兄弟，1949–1959 [Comrades and Brothers, 1949–1959]. In: Shen Zhihua (ed.), *Zhong Su guanxi shigang* 中苏关系史纲 [History of Sino–Soviet relations]. Beijing: Xinhua Chubanshe, 98–249.
- Su Guang 苏光 (1955). “Da shi suo qu wu neng wei li 大势所趋无能为力” [The General Situation is Such that Nothing Can Be Done]. *Manhua* 58, 12.
- Sun Qiming 孙其明 (2002). *Zhong Su guanxi shimo* 中苏关系始末 [History of Sino–Soviet Relations]. Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Chubanshe.
- Tian Ma 天马 (1959). “Chou ju kai chang” 丑剧开场 [The Beginning of a Farce]. *Manhua* 147, 8.
- Tie Yi 铁一 (1960). “Youyi yuanwuqu” 友谊圆舞曲 [The Waltz of Friendship]. *Manhua* 154, 3.
- Val'k, Genrikh (1959). “Ustanovilas' khoroshaja, letnaja pogoda” [The Weather is Good and Suitable for Flights]. *Krokodil* 23, 1.
- Wang Mi 王米 (1956). “Chun nuan bing jie dong he kai” 春暖冰解冻河开 [Spring Warmth Melts Ice and Opens Rivers]. *Manhua* 68, 3.
- Wei Qimei 韦启美 (1960). “Zai Jialeibhai de bu jing zhe” 在加勒比海的捕鲸者 [A Whaler in the Caribbean Sea]. *Manhua* 164, 4.
- Westad, Odd Arn, ed. (1998). *Brothers in Arms: The Rise and Fall of the Sino–Soviet Alliance, 1945–1963*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Wu Yuan (Wu Yun 吴耘?) (1955). “S bogatym urozhaem!” [Congratulations on the Large Harvest!]. *Krokodil* 30, 4.
- Wu Yun (1955). “Chonggao de youyi” 崇高的友谊 [Lofty Friendship]. *Manhua* 59, 5.
- Wu Yun (1956). Untitled. *Manhua* 71, 4.
- Wu Yun (1958). Untitled. *Krokodil* 30, 4.
- Wu Yun (1960). “Dong feng deyi ying chunnian” 东风得意迎春年 [East Wind Proudly Greets Spring Years]. *Manhua* 152, 10–11.
- Xiewasiyangjienuofu 谢瓦斯捷捷诺夫 (Sevastianov?) (1956). “Gaodu de youyi” 高度的友谊 [High Friendship]. *Manhua* 72, 8.
- Ye Miao 叶苗 (1954). “Mosike–Beijing” 莫斯科 – 北京 [Moscow–Beijing]. *Manhua* 40, 6.
- Ye Miao 叶苗 (1958). Untitled fragment. *Manhua* 125, 11.
- Ye Qianyu 叶浅予 (1955). Untitled. *Manhua* 58, 6.
- Ye Qianyu 叶浅予 (1959). “Meiguo he Lading Meizhou guanxi tujie” 美国和拉丁美洲关系图解 [Scheme of Relations between (the United States of) America and Latin America]. *Manhuai* 136, 10–11.
- Ye Xueqian 叶学潜 (1959). “Lu yu zou yu kuan” 路愈走愈宽 [The Farther We Go, the Wider is the Road]. *Manhua* 148, 3.
- Yefimov, Boris (1950). Untitled. In *Krokodil* 7, 16.
- Yefimov, Boris (1955). Untitled. *Krokodil* 22, 16.
- Yefimov, Boris (1956a). “Gde-to v Azii...” [Somewhere in Asia ...]. *Krokodil* 22, 10.
- Yefimov, Boris (1956b). “Smena flaga nad Suetskim kanalom” [Change of Flag over the Suez Canal]. *Krokodil* 24, 16.
- Yefimov, Boris (1956c). “Zaokeanskij plagiator” [Plagiarist from Overseas]. *Krokodil* 28, 16.
- Yefimov, Boris (1960). “Chas probil!” [The Clock Has Struck!]. *Krokodil* 11, 7.
- Ying Tao 英韬 and Miao Di (1959). “Kuai ma cheng dong feng” 快马乘东风 [Fast Horse Rides East Wind]. *Manhua* 131, 10–11.
- You Yunchang 游允常 (1959). “Xian ren quan” 仙人拳 [Magical People's Fists]. *Manhua* 150, 17.
- Zelenskiy, B. (1952). Untitled. *Krokodil* 10, 9.

- Zhang Benshan 张本善 and Gu Pu 顾朴 (1959). "Palankin i vosem' nosil'shchikov" [Palanquin and Eight Carriers]. *Krokodil* 27, 3.
- Zhang Ding 张仃 (1956). "Jin ri Bali" 今日巴黎 [Today's Paris]. *Manhua* 73, 6-7.
- Zhang Ding 张仃 (1958). "Dong feng yadao xi feng" 东风压倒西风 [East Wind Suppresses West Wind]. *Manhua* 109, 1, 16.
- Zhang Guangyu 张光宇 (1959). Untitled. *Manhua* 129, 1, 20.
- Zhang Leping 张乐平 (1959). "Xu ri gao sheng" 旭日高升 [The Sun is Rising High]. *Manhua* 147, 20.
- Zhang Quan 章泉 (1950). "Liang ge zhenying, liang ge jihua" 两个阵营, 两种计划 [Two Camps, Two Plans]. *Manhua* 7, 25.
- Zhang Shixiang 张世祥 (1959). "Hei'an dalu de guangmang" 黑暗大陆的光芒 [The Light of the Dark Continent]. *Manhua* 133, 5.
- Zhang Wenyuan 张文元 (1954). "He jia huanle guo xin nian" 合家欢乐过新年 [Whole Family Happily Meets the New Year]. *Manhua* 38, 1.
- Zhao Yannian 赵延年 (1954). "Youyi de yuanzhu" 友谊的援助 [Friendly Help]. *Manhua* 48, 1.
- Zhou Lushi 周路石 (1954). Untitled. *Manhua* 47, 1.

## A TOPOLOGY OF HOPE: UTOPIA, DYSTOPIA, AND HETEROTOPIA IN CONTEMPORARY CHINESE SCIENCE FICTION

MINGWEI SONG

### ABSTRACT

This essay investigates how utopian thinking met with dystopian variations in contemporary Chinese science fiction. The dystopian gaze into the utopian dreams, the alternative histories contending with the utopian narratives, and the heterotopian experiments challenging ideological orthodoxy are the focus of my analysis. Reading the dystopian fiction by Chan Koonchung and science fiction stories and novels by Han Song, Bao Shu and Hao Jingfang etc., I do not intend to illustrate the utopian/dystopian interventions in the political sense, but rather to explore the vigorous, multifaceted variations of utopia, dystopia, and heterotopia that these authors have created as discursive constructs to suggest alternatives to the utopia/dystopian dualism. Contemporary science fiction authors write back to the usual literary practice taking words as reflections of the world. To these writers, words are worlds.

**Keywords:** contemporary Chinese science fiction; utopia; dystopia; heterotopia; uchronia; alternative history

### Introduction

The original “Utopia” in Thomas More’s book is “a non-place, simultaneously constituted by a movement of affirmation and denial.” (Fatima Vieira, 2010) Utopia is intended as a critique of certain social situations but leaves room for an imagined positive image that serves as a correction of the criticized society. Modern utopian thinkers locate the nonexistent ideal society not only across the geographically expanded globe but also in the future, thus creating “uchronia.” Therefore, utopia can be everywhere in time and space against the expanding scope of the human imagination, which produces the perfect setting for science fictional world building. Darko Suvin considers science fiction to be “at least collaterally descended from utopia,” a sort of niece of utopia, (Darko Suvin 1979, 61) and Frederic Jameson finds the utopian impulse in most of the genre. (Frederic Jameson 2005, 1–9) Utopia lends to science fiction an intellectual tendency to envision better alternatives to reality. Science fiction gives a modern look to the older, largely humanistic utopianism in terms of scientific, technological, and social advancements, and utopia – eutopia and euchronia – gives the science fictional representation of time

and space a glamour evincing a greater hope invested in both scientific and political revolutions. But in the twentieth century, utopianism turned dark and cast dystopian shadows in science fiction, which has become a forefront literary genre questioning the modern visions of progress, the use or abuse of science and technology, the coercive society, and the prospect of a technologized future. Dystopian science fiction that contributed to the rise of anti-utopianism in the West after the World Wars and Stalinism is perhaps the rebellious “niece” that Suvin has in mind, who is ashamed of its utopian heritage (Darko Suvin 1979, 61) – but it cannot escape its genetic destiny, because even the darkest dystopian vision comes from the same utopian impulse, which inspires a subversion of society as much as it inspired utopianism in the first place.

Modern utopianism has existed in Chinese intellectual thinking for over a century. During the late Qing, Western utopian novels like Edward Bellamy’s (1850–1898) *Looking Backward 2000–1887* (1888) were translated into Chinese (1890). Yan Fu 嚴復 (1854–1921) first translated the term “utopia” into Chinese (*wutuobang* 烏托邦) in his rendition of *Evolution and Ethics* (*Tiyanlun* 天演論, 1898), which popularized the concept among Chinese readers at the end of the nineteenth century. Around this time, Confucian utopias that combined modern civilization with Chinese morality began to emerge in the writings by the intellectuals under influences of modern utopianism, such as the reform-minded Confucianist Kang Youwei 康有為 (1857–1927). Kang’s thought on “Datong” 大同 (the great unity) had a lasting impact on the later political leaders such as Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873–1929), Sun Yat-sen 孫逸仙 (1866–1925), and Mao Zedong 毛澤東 (1893–1976), and utopianism has repeatedly motivated revolutionary efforts that aimed for a wide range of changes, including systematic reform of Chinese society and the Chinese mind.

What stays central to the Chinese utopian thinking is an overconfidence in evolutionism and an extravagant display of the splendor of forward historical progress – a sweeping optimism in pursuit of “the best in the best of all possible worlds,” a mindset that David Der-wei Wang borrows from Voltaire and defines as Panglossianism. In historical hindsight, it should have always come together with another mode of thinking: the “dark consciousness,” an anticipation of ominous, catastrophic events and a much broader worldview that includes both the best and the worst, or both utopia and dystopia. (David Der-wei Wang 2020b, 53–70)

The first notable Chinese dystopian novel is Lao She’s 老舍 (1899–1966) Martian fantasy *Cat Country* (*Maochengji* 貓城記, 1933). Written right after the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War, *Cat Country* presents China’s apocalyptic end, which the author claimed to intend as a moral lesson or a warning to the Chinese people. As if the worst scenario, upon being articulated, would not really happen, he thus generated a hope that there would be a bright future, as is hinted at the end of the novel. Lao She’s wishful belief echoes the words of John Stuart Mill (1806–1873), who coined the term “dystopia”: “What is commonly called Utopian is something too good to be practicable; but what they appear to favour [the dys-topia or caco-topia] is too bad to be practicable.” (Mill’s speech in the Parliament, 1868)

This essay mainly focuses on recent science fiction representations of utopia and dystopia, and I contend that the new wave of Chinese science fiction involves a self-conscious

effort to energize a utopian/dystopian variation.<sup>1</sup> For the new wave that emerged after the 1980s – China’s last decade that was marked by sweeping utopian thinking – the dystopian variations enable sober reflections on the effects of the Panglossian ideas and practices that permeated China’s twentieth century. In the new wave, I have identified the utopian/dystopian variations of three motifs: China’s rise as a one-nation utopia; the myth of China’s high-speed development; and the posthuman utopia of technologies. (Mingwei Song 2013) All three connect the new wave to earlier utopian fiction, particularly works written in the late Qing and the early PRC. But in the current science fictional representations, development comes with a heavy cost; prosperity is foreshadowed by apocalypse; the utopian vision of China’s ascendancy to superpower status cannot conceal its treacherous, inhuman conditions; and the cult of technology facilitates the emergence of authoritarian technocracy. For this generation of Chinese writers, utopia is no longer attainable, and its dystopian variations only complicate the implications of hope. The utopian mentality that Karl Mannheim defines as the foundation of ideological fictions still prevails in the state-controlled Chinese political thought, and as Mannheim claims, any attempt to transcend utopianism is a challenging “quest for reality,” (Karl Mannheim 1985, 98) which in Chinese literature denotes a profound restructuring of the knowledge about how reality can be represented, illuminated, or conceived in literary visions – not just visions brightened by the Chinese dream but also its science fictional shadows. Deeply entangled with the politics of anticipating China’s further changes and often a profound disappointment at the country’s entrenched politics, the provocative dystopian rewriting of the grandiose narrative of the nation’s future makes contemporary science fiction a pensive genre ushering us into *terra incognita*, the rising China’s invisible dystopian shadow.

The rise of China has been a central motif in Chinese fiction since the last Qing reformers designated those enchanting blueprints for the national rejuvenation. An entire century later, those blueprints appear closer to realization than ever, but the glorified image of China’s one-nation utopia is now darkened by the complicating international relations and impending technologized total control. Such is the image of China rising to be the sole superpower in the middle of the twenty-first century, as Han Song 韓松 (b. 1965) envisions in *Mars Over America* (*Huoxing zhaoyao Meiguo* 火星照耀美國, 2000), which is at best a parody of utopianism. Han Song’s narrative reveals the ambiguities between China’s “strong nation” image and its entire population’s submission to controls executed by centralized artificial intelligence. To take a further step toward China’s current reality, Chan Koonchung’s 陳冠中 (b. 1952) *The Fat Years* (*Shengshi* 盛世 2009) envisions a Chinese “Nineteen Eighty-Four” scenario, which exposes the pervasive state surveillance and the Party’s usage of both censorship and biotechnologies to induce a nationwide amnesia, so that the entire population will forget the traumatic, painful recent past, including the Tiananmen Protest. In both Han Song’s and Chan’s novels, the new *Pax Sinica* comes together with shadowy conspiracies, and China’s success is discounted by its loss of autonomy

---

<sup>1</sup> I have published two other research articles on the “variations of utopia,” which examine the metamorphosis of the utopian themes in contemporary science fiction, particularly in Han Song and Liu Cixin, two major authors. See Mingwei Song, 2013; Mingwei Song 2015b. This study is a new research project that allows me to explore the dystopian and heterotopian motifs in several other authors.

to an invisible dictatorship that is not executed by any “person” but posthuman cybernetic and bioengineered governance.

The myth of development is another important motif in Chinese science fiction, and it has been a mainstay in the Chinese mindset since the country entered the reform era in the early 1980s, when the pursuit of an increasingly higher GDP became the index of the nation’s strength. Han Song’s “Track Trilogy”<sup>2</sup> and other works often incarnate the nation’s speedy development in various means of transportation, such as subway and high-speed train, but when the speed is accelerated to the point that the transportation vehicles go out of control, the progress that the speed entails turns into nightmarish scenes of (post)human degeneration and devolution. The myth is also revealed in Han Song’s retold stories about the utopian motif that the obsession with speed feeds the body’s growth without upgrading the mind. It is a rather ironic rewriting of China’s economic miracle, which is achieved on the condition that any attempt at political reform is strictly forbidden.

Other writers turn to technological utopia, which testifies to Chinese reform’s heavy reliance on science and technology, in line with the national policy on modernization. Liu Cixin 劉慈欣 (b. 1963), an advocate for “hard science fiction,” is the most notable author promoting such a posthuman utopia. Liu often designs a postapocalyptic scenario that sees the demise of humankind in exchange for the survival of posthuman species, who, reengineered or aided by technology, are better adapted to Earth’s radically changed environment. However, this scenario also posits profound questions about the disposability of humanity and the humanities. In his many short stories as well as “The Three-Body Trilogy,”<sup>3</sup> facing the inevitable cosmological catastrophe, his human characters are often stuck in a moral dilemma about survival as immoral social Darwinists or demise as morally self-conscious human beings. Nevertheless, though Liu Cixin often writes about the worst possible scenario for the human future, he also keeps alive a poetic heart that leaves some room for hope.

All three motifs show to us that what have emerged in contemporary Chinese science fiction are “variations of utopia,” by which I refer to the literary practice of reevaluating, reimagining, recapitulating, and relocating utopia. The utopian motifs that characterized China’s cultural modernity in earlier historical periods have met with serious reflections and innovative experiments, and the earlier projects and practice have also become themes for parody and mutated into critical utopias or dystopias. The same strategies are employed to approach contemporary reality: while China’s reality has increasingly become utopianized in official discourse and state media, it is represented in parodies and disenchanting recapitulations in contemporary science fiction. While very few works of contemporary science fiction directly engage with the political problems of China, the new wave authors have all created some discursive space where varying degrees of dissatisfaction and discontent motivate the utopian/dystopian variations, sometimes suggestive

---

<sup>2</sup> Han Song’s “The Track Trilogy” consists of three novels, *Subway Ditie* 地鐵, *High Speed Rail Gaotie* 高鐵, and *Tracks Guidao* 軌道, which were published between 2010 and 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Liu Cixin’s “The Three-Body Trilogy” consists of three novels, *The Three-Body Problem* 三體, *Dark Forest* 黑暗森林, and *Death’s End* 死神永生, which were published between 2006 and 2010, and translated into English in 2014–16.

of poetic justice, and literature conceives a heterotopian relationship between words and the world.

In this essay, I do not take utopia and its modifications as mainly a political theme, but rather consider it a forever changing literary topology of hope. This can be best represented in the science fiction authors' self-conscious constructs of heterotopia, which parallels the efforts to render science fictionality into a discursive form of otherness in contemporary Chinese fiction. Utopia and dystopia are the two sides of one coin, representing two opposing approaches to evaluating the same system in a totalistic way, either completely positive or completely negative. But the vision of a heterotopia escapes these dualistic and totalistic approaches.

The Foucauldian concept "heterotopia" (Michel Foucault 1998, 175–186) was first introduced to Chinese literary studies by David Der-wei Wang in a 2011 lecture about the utopian tradition in modern China. (David Der-wei Wang 2014, 247–276) Wang particularly emphasizes that science fiction represents a new generation of Chinese writers' efforts to create or enter "heterotopia." Based on Foucault's description, Wang gives this critical term the following interpretation: "Heterotopia is a phantasmal approximation of a utopia (or dystopia); it aims to 'contain' social bodies and elements – in the sense of both including things of variations within a closure and holding something undesirable in check – by means of creating a (textual, virtual, or actual) space of otherness. Its spatiality contains more layers of meaning or relationships to other places than immediately meet the eye." (David Der-wei Wang 2020b, 62)

As a literary space, heterotopia does not necessarily register hope or despair. Although it too represents alternatives, it does not necessarily come from a total denial of reality; the alternatives are not excluded from reality but may suggest feasible and practical changes that can occur anywhere. The changes are not totalistic but can be fragmentary, fluid, and transforming. Compared with the concepts of both utopia and dystopia, heterotopia is less idealistic, but more dicentric, diverse, open to more possibilities. (Chan Koonchung 2016, 27–29) It can be folded, multilayered and multifaceted, in the invisible, or more precisely speaking, it can be folded in the literary representation of the invisible. If utopia and dystopia are the two sides of the absolute image of an imaginary state, heterotopia is the insurgent utopian impulse of anarchy that fragments our reality, both space and time, into potentially changeable bits. Heterotopia can be a paper universe, remapping the atlas of crisis, chance, and change, redefining the positioning of places, values, and individuals, and making a unitary vision of utopia that collapses into multiple mirrors for self-recognition, self-performance, and self-metamorphosis.

In this essay, "heterotopia" refers to an imaginary, fantastic literary practice versus the realistic mode of narrative fixed to the certain "chronotope," and I even propose to rephrase "heterotopia" as "hetero-chronotope" to clearly suggest otherness and uncertainty in both the topological and temporal senses, versus "chronotope" representing a certain historical consciousness in the making of subjectivity. For science fiction, the heterotopia or hetero-chronotope dismantles the conditions for subjectivity, and it implies an alternative space and time where the human self is dissolved in the posthuman possibilities.

Contemporary Chinese science fiction is filled with heterotopian spaces as locations, real or imaginary, in time and space: Han Song's labyrinthine underground worlds of the

subway, the sleepwalking city, the red ocean, the hospital, and even his future America (and China); Liu Cixin's disorderly Trisolaran planet, the three-body virtual reality, the dark forest, the poetry cloud, and even the small cosmos that functions as the record of memories of the perished Earth; and a series of worlds created by younger authors – such as the three different hierarchical “spaces” in Hao Jingfang's 郝景芳 (b. 1984) “Folding Beijing” (*Beijing zhedie* 北京折疊, 2014) and the “electronic graveyard” in Chen Qiufan's 陳楸帆 (b. 1981) *Waste Tide* (*Huang chao* 荒潮, 2013). Han Song has also coined the term “Sino-topia” *Zhongtuobang* 中托邦 to not only redefine China as the “other space” in relation to the world but also delineate a part of China, or even its whole, as an invisible space in our perceivable reality. (Han Song 2020)

In the rest of this essay, I will introduce a group of new writers, including science fiction authors such as Bao Shu 寶樹 (b. 1980) and Hao Jingfang, and also those who are not usually labeled as science fiction authors or even Chinese writers, such as Chan Koonchung, a Hong Kong writer residing in Beijing, and Dung Kai-cheung 董啟章 (b. 1967) and Lo Yi-chun 駱以軍 (b. 1967), avant-garde writers experimenting with science fictional motifs. I do not intend to analyze their novels as examples to illustrate the utopian/dystopian interventions in the political sense, but rather to explore the vigorous, multifaceted variations of utopia, dystopia, and heterotopia that these authors have created as discursive constructs that suggest alternatives to both the utopia/dystopian dualism and the usual literary practice taking words as reflections of the world – to these writers, words are worlds.

### “A Century-old Dream Comes True”

During the first ten years of the twentieth century, a certain utopianism mainly based on the prevailing evolutionary thinking and a cultural confidence in national rejuvenation motivated the birth of the so-called “new fiction,” first coined by Liang Qichao, the key leader of the late Qing reform movement, who saw in fiction a magic power to “renovate the people of a nation.” (Liang Qichao 1996) Both science fiction and utopian fiction were among the new genres Liang promoted, and they were often combined in the late Qing. Through the efforts of Liang and his contemporaries, science fiction was instituted as a utopian narrative that provided both a reflection on reality and a hope for change. Thus, at its inception, Chinese science fiction was invested with a strong utopianism, and its narrative projected political desires for reform into an idealized future that served as an alternative contrast to China's reality. Liang's own attempt at fiction writing, *The Future of New China*, was intended as a fine example of the new fiction. This novel was designed to delineate the (future) history of Chinese political reforms over the next sixty years – an imagined process that crystallizes Liang's blueprint for China's self-strengthening, national rejuvenation, and eventual ascendancy to a world power. Liang's splendid vision was immediately appropriated in numerous late Qing science fiction novels, including Wu Jianren's 吳趸人 (1866–1910) *New Story of the Stone* (*Xin shitou ji* 新石頭記, 1908), Biheguan zhuren's 碧荷官主人 *New Era* (*Xin jiyuan* 新紀元, 1908), and Lu Shi's 陸士鄂 *New China* (*Xin Zhongguo* 新中國, 1910), which all competed to portray China as a future superpower dominating the world. These novels defined Chinese science fiction



as a genre closely associated with the emerging nationalist discourse, and the futuristic image of a one-nation utopia characterized the genre's cultural dynamism.

However, unfortunately, Liang Qichao's *Future of New China* remains unfinished, with its narrative of future events stuck between a prologue showcasing the achieved goals of China's future reform and the stagnation in plot development caused by contemporary ideological contestations. The narrative never moves beyond the initial stage of blue-printing. A similar stagnation, or a gap in the narrative layout, happens in other late Qing novels predicting China's rise, such as *New Story of the Stone*, which adds another layer of ambivalence by blurring the lines between the novel's actualization of a utopian realm and the protagonist's subconscious dreamscape. The utopian narrative of new China's splendid future is therefore "stranded at its launching point, revealing the future as a fantastic illusion instead of a probable reality." (Mingwei Song 2015a, 87) Likewise, the translation of utopian ideals into revolutionary actions met with repeated frustrations throughout China's twentieth century, and this has sustained a prolonged utopian impulse in the mindset of Chinese intellectuals yearning for new beginnings, again and again, after breaking with those failed earlier experiments.

Despite China's turbulent twentieth century, utopianism never truly faded out. In the current political culture, it has come back as incarnations of an array of lofty concepts, from the New Left intellectuals' vision of *tianxia* 天下 to government discourses on the "harmonious society" and "Chinese dream." At least for Chinese intellectuals engaging in dialogue with the state-endorsed utopian discourses now, it is not yet the time to talk about the fading out of utopianism, a topic that Western New Left thinkers have confronted. China as a state is still immersed in a prolonged utopian dream of its rise and ascendance to superpower status, which is part of the current state ideology.

Now the utopian vision of China's rise is again a prominent theme in contemporary political thinking and popular culture. Particularly through science fictional recapitulations of late Qing themes and reappropriations of late Qing utopias in current political thinking, it has become increasingly clear that the utopian tradition has come full circle. But this time, utopia has turned into the state ideology. The emphases on the orderly structure of society, on the centrality of the state in people's lives, and on the popular surrender to power have helped sustain the Chinese version of centralism in the name of both the Confucian and communist traditions. The conscious staging of a spectacular *Pax Sinica* Shengshi 盛世 – a peaceful rising "great nation" – is intended to mark the beginning of the nation's great revival and its ascendancy to a superpower in the world.

This new dream has motivated a series of political strategies and cultural enterprises, ranging from the "China dream" slogan to the "one belt, one road" initiative, from the orderly and submissive "harmonious society" to the aggressive importing of "soft power," and from the restorations of imperial glories in TV dramas to a national call for science fiction films promoting the Communist Party's notion of the "shared community of humankind." But the most important aspect of this renewed utopian dream is related to the obsession with the technological innovations, the space race, information wars, and in particular, the current state-led programs for designing advanced artificial intelligence and creating superior biotechnological power – all motifs for science fiction.

It seems that “a century-old dream has come true,” as characters in Chan Koonchung’s 2009 dystopian novel *The Fat Years* have come to realize. “China’s Golden Age of Ascendancy had arrived. For so many years intellectuals had said that the Western system was superior, and the whole world looked up to the United States, Japan, and the Western Europe, but then in unison they suddenly changed their tune, and now the whole world was learning from or emulating China.” (Chan Koonchung 2011, 248–249) Furthermore, in Han Song’s words in *Mars over America*, those living in 2066 – a significant year not only because it marks the centennial of Mao’s Cultural Revolution but also because it projects Liang Qichao’s original timetable of locating the future of new China in the middle of the twenty-first century – will have been able to see “the fall of the United States, the sinking of Japan, and the rise of China, which succeeded in creating eternal prosperity in economy and trade around the entire world, and throughout the entire solar system. At the same time, with its exceedingly superior intelligence, Amanduo tirelessly and wholeheartedly administers our ordinary everyday life ... this is indeed an epoch of unrivaled joys and happiness.” (Han Song 2011, 11) Here enters the first variation of utopia – a dystopian gaze.

### Dystopian Gaze

When China’s first decade of the twenty-first century culminated in the Beijing Olympic Games (2008) and Shanghai World Expo (2010), it seemed that those utopian dreams of the late Qing reformers had come true – the latter had even actualized the predictions in Wu Jianren’s *New Story of the Stone* and Lu Shi’s *New China* that a major world event would be held exactly in Pudong, Shanghai. That China has reached unprecedented prosperity in modern history is widely propagated as a milestone in various contemporary narratives about the nation’s great revival. Such an outlook inspired Chan Koonchung to write a novel, which was published between the Beijing Games and Shanghai Expo.<sup>4</sup> The title is *The Fat Years*, or *shengshi* 盛世, exactly the term that the ancient emperors used to boast of their achievements in securing a lasting period of peace and prosperity, the same vision now instituted as the foundation of the “China dream,” a state-owned version of utopia.

*The Fat Years* introduces readers to the near future of China, when a sweeping optimism is central in the mentality of the entire population. The protagonist, Old Chen *Lao Chen* 老陳, a Hong Kong writer residing in Beijing (just like the author himself), finds that everyone he meets looks “genuinely happy, even euphoric,” and he says to himself: “This really must be a true age of peace and prosperity.” (Chan Koonchung 2011, 10) Despite this, Old Chen and a few friends have come to notice some subtle changes: for example, Old Chen discovers that books by some prominent liberal intellectuals have disappeared from bookstores and also from people’s conversations or even memories; his friend Fang Caodi 方草地 is troubled by the omission of one whole month from the narratives of contemporary events as well as from everyone’s memory; Old Chen’s love

---

<sup>4</sup> The novel, *The Fat Years* 盛世, was only published in Taiwan and Hong Kong, but never printed in the PRC.

interest, Little Xi 小夕, a political dissident always running into trouble with the state, says to him that there are fewer and fewer people who have not changed; and finally, a call girl using drugs puts her finger on it for Old Chen – about two years ago, everybody suddenly changed and began to have what the girl calls a small-small high or “high lite-lite.” (Chan Koonchung 2011, 123) This happened when the government abruptly declared that the nation had now entered *shengshi* and the prevailing euphoria descended on people, together with a collective amnesia making them forget all the painful things in the past – including the one whole month that Fang Caodi talks about. Now Old Chen and his friends have caught a glimpse of something unsettling behind the deceptively “real” world. They have to gaze into a darker world, and by doing so they transgress the borderline between ideological comforts and a treacherous territory marked by a conspiratorial network.

Old Chen and his friends’ experiences of the subtle changes are not unfamiliar to those living through China’s post-1989 years of furthering economic reform but closing doors to political reform. It is the usual practice for the government to remove public intellectuals from view, their opinions censored, ideas suppressed, and words silenced; the nation’s collective amnesia about recent tragedies such as the Tiananmen Massacre and even historical trauma during the Cultural Revolution is a shared strategy for those who experienced but chose to forget history and those who never experienced it and were denied access to the collective historical memory. Those who used to hold to “Idealism Chinese Style” (Chan Koonchung 2011, 199) are falling into hedonism, cynicism, pragmatism, or conformism.

*The Fat Years* is not strictly a science fiction novel, with less concentration on imaginary details of scientific novum than on a realistic depiction of ordinary scenes in Beijing’s intellectual life, where the prevailing “high lite-lite” mood is the intended psychology for those living through the promising years leading to the Olympic Games and World Expo. “Are you happy?” – such a direct question obviously expecting a positive answer was asked many times to common people on the state-controlled TV programs, a small index to the state’s systematic endeavor to create a seamless ideological dreamwork integrating everything into a political utopia, including even the mellow moods of the common citizens.<sup>5</sup> The nation’s ideological apparatus is now in full gear to produce a paradise in the Middle Kingdom.

Chan Koonchung’s narrative unfolds as an investigation of the clandestine mechanism of the state apparatus that integrates ideology and everyday life, remodeling the latter into an indispensable part of the grandiose narrative about “China’s Golden Age of Ascendency.” Near the end of the novel, a high-ranking official is forced to break the truth to Old Chen and his friends: it was during the whole missing month, which Fang Caodi has kept reminding people about, that the state launched a sudden strike to clear the path for a nationwide campaign aiming to reform the entire Chinese people once and for all. Different from earlier political campaigns, this government project is ultimately a scientific one, which translates the ideological weapon into a biochemical component

---

<sup>5</sup> The science fiction author Bao Shu wrote a short story about this phenomenon, in which a person gave a negative answer to the question “are you happy?” and later was treated with various virtual realities to enhance his feeling of happiness. Bao Shu, “Ni xingfu ma?” 你幸福嗎? <http://www.wcsfa.com/scfbox-2433.html> (accessed November 2, 2020).

(MDNA-Ecstasy<sup>6</sup>) that when added to drinking water, milk, juice, wine, and all liquid forms of food, eventually doses the entire population, creating a lasting euphoric mood and immersing the entire nation in an indulgent appreciation of *shengshi*.

Wang Chaohua has pointed out that the dystopian vision in Chan Koonchung's novel is not Orwellian. (2015, 23–31) The “high lite-lite” state is orchestrated to induce a hedonistic indulgence in joy rather than a coercive manipulation of people's minds. This is a twenty-first century upgrading of authoritarianism that does not need to solely rely on surveillance of people's thoughts or the mechanical feeds of “truths.” In the Orwellian society, there is still the separation of soul and body, where Winston can find a temporary escape from the gaze of Big Brother, but in the contemporary vision of *shengshi*, the bio-reprogramming of people's mood has seized on the structure of feeling, transforming citizens into new men and new women for a completely new epoch. This certainly recalls Lu Xun's “art of creating humanity” through gene editing, (Lu Xun 2012, 70–77) but the triumphant use of science is now targeted at achieving total control. Chan Koonchung's *shengshi* is not possible without the aid of technology, which can stand as a metaphor for the technology of the ideology or be simply a literal allusion to the ideology's techno-embodiment. What has been achieved here is the creation of an entirely virtual world that writes into mind and body the programs for simulated knowledge of the “truths” as well as simulated feelings for the “real.” In such a world, Big Brother does not need to watch you any longer; everyone has assimilated a virtual version of Big Brother.

But here, Chan Koonchung takes one step further to explore the relationship between the Leviathan and its people. The high-ranking official has to admit that he feels puzzled about one thing: that the collective amnesia is not part of the drug effect but comes from the people's willingness to brainwash themselves so that they can forget the unpleasant, troubling past. This provides the best possible scenario for the Party to censor and change the historical narrative as they wish. Here, Chan Koonchung reaches a revealing moment to parodize the utopian/dystopian variation in his novel: isn't this everyone's wishful dream – a strong China, rising above the great nations of the world? What price are you ready to pay for it?

An even more chilling revelation is that even MDNA-Ecstasy is perhaps not necessary. *Shengshi*, the virtual embodiment of the state ideology, in all sorts of storytelling and entertainment ushering people into the programmed dreamscape network, is the “inducement” itself. Chemical, conceptual, or cultural, it is the virtual key to the programming of the *shengshi* mentality. In the ultimate analysis, Chan Koonchung's narrative has turned this virtual realm of China's prosperity inside out, and for him and other writers experimenting with utopian/dystopian variations, storytelling is the device to penetrate the matrix of the dream. When the high-ranking official is telling “the good China story,” with an overwhelming self-confidence, Chan Koonchung's dystopian gaze rips it open, turning it into a story laying bare its own virtual design.

Chen Koonchung presents *shengshi* as the most realistic possible version of dystopia, and because of its proximity to contemporary reality, it appears even more convincingly inevitable. Even if Old Chen still has the chance to choose, he may not have escaped the

---

<sup>6</sup> The full name is given in the novel: methylene-dioxy-methamphetamine. (Chan Koonchung 2011, 279).

same game programmed to give him the illusion of free will. But still, he chooses to see with his own eyes and thus creates his own version of the story. Knowing the truth, he is no longer able to stay in the illusive “fake paradise,” while the revolting “good hell” is already lost to him. The system is not going to collapse, but as long as the system still has glitches, Old Chen and his friends can hide themselves in its multitude of folds and gaps, those systemic errors. When he can retell the good story of China as a good story about “how the good story is fabricated,” he reveals the traces that the system tries to delete, and those traces become a true history.

### The Specter of Mao

With *The Fat Years* and other novels all banned in China, Chan Koonchung is usually considered a political writer, famous for the genre of dystopian fiction rather than science fiction, though he clearly shares with the new wave authors – such as Han Song and Chen Qiufan – alertness to total control, either embodied in advanced cybernetics or, as in *The Fat Years*, represented as a secret mechanism to manipulate the entire population’s thoughts and feelings, dreams and moods, personality and personhood. In addition, Chan Koonchung is a keen observer and thinker who tackles difficult questions pertaining to China’s political system and analyzes the contradictions in our time. He stands as the most outspoken author who does not hesitate to give the utopian vision of China’s grandiose new epoch a dystopian twist. The cover of the English edition of *The Fat Years* shows a smiling face emoji half covering Mao’s solemn face, leaving one eye for him to gaze back at readers, which dramatizes Chan’s provoking irreverence to the great man, but also implies the deterrence of Mao now disguised in an eerie symbol of the information age.

Among the new wave writers, Liu Cixin and Han Song both lived through Mao’s Cultural Revolution. Maoist revolution and ideology were part of their personal growth, and Mao’s specter has wandered in their science fictional realms marked by space wars and cybernetic uprisings. These two authors have carried out some of the most interesting utopian/dystopian variations, but certainly with less pointed and direct criticism of contemporary China than Chan Koonchung. They often choose to localize or isolate dystopian aspects of the society, such as the environmental crisis, and social injustice disguised as discrimination against cyborgs, nonhuman beings, and various others. In their novels, the dystopian visions are manifested as the estranged worlds to form a closely interactive relationship with our daily reality.

The acute feelings, pain, powerlessness, and despair in Han Song’s characters are conveyed through cryptic, abstruse descriptions that converge in a dystopian gaze to the abysmal depth of our reality. To many readers, Han Song’s labyrinthine, multilayered narratives may need a key, just like what Chan Koonchung offers through Old Chen’s clear investigation of the conspiracy, but the opaque darkness in Han Song’s dystopian abyss devours all, making the conspiracy a part of the mysterious but unstoppable eternal return of the dark and evil. For Han Song, dystopia has gained a metaphysical universality that is applied to all signs and images in his novels. Unlike Old Chen, who can choose to exit the game, Han Song’s characters are not even aware of that choice.

They are struggling in the dreams programmed by the older ideologies but mutated by the new technologies.

However, all things have origins. In Han Song, the repeated references to the “sleep-walking years,” dark conspiracies, and haunting dead souls all point to Mao’s Cultural Revolution if these details are read against specific historical backgrounds: the sleep-walking youths dressed in green (like the Red Guards), the mysterious underground construction (Mao’s haven in case of nuclear attack), and the permanence of wartime (Mao’s call for the eternal war).<sup>7</sup> Mao’s ghost may have pulled strings in many scenarios in Han Song’s novels, but he has never showed his face; when the female protagonist in *Dead Souls Wang hun 亡魂* (2018) looks into the abyss, the consciousness that is enlivened by the gaze is not a person, not Mao, but a ruthless force that epitomizes all the evil, desire, conspiracies, illusive promises, and sublime self-transcendences, which are all traceable to Maoism (Han Song 2018, 226).

Actually, the specter of Mao has also enlivened some of the most stirring visions in Liu Cixin’s novels. In a highly symbolic style, Chairman Mao appears in Liu Cixin’s unpublished novel *China 2185 中國2185* (1989). Not a typical monster, Mao’s cybernetic ego is nevertheless dangerous enough to cause panic for the leadership of the future China, and this very plot suggests that the formidable specter of Mao conveys a potentially subversive message about the alternative to reality; thus, Mao still stands for utopia. Liu Cixin’s ambivalent revival of Mao’s consciousness as a digital “life” in *China 2185* presents variations of the post-Mao utopianism. He depicts a brighter future when China embraces economic prosperity as well as a very youthful democracy, which Hua Li associates with the pro-democracy youth movements running throughout the 1980s. (Hua Li 2015, 519–541) Mao’s role in this novel is not negative, but Mao’s cybernetic phantom’s self-chosen exit suggests the reflections on China’s century-long utopian vision for radical social change in a sweeping revolution. Above all, Liu Cixin’s novel may register the intention to “invite Mao to step down from the altar,” as former science fiction writer Ye Yonglie 葉永烈 (1940–2020) did in the 1990s through writing unofficial biographies about the great man.<sup>8</sup>

Mao also plays a role in Liu Cixin’s magnum opus, the “Three-Body Trilogy,” in which Mao appears and personally launches the secret mission searching for extraterrestrial intelligence,<sup>9</sup> which forms the first motif for the novel series and eventually brings the space war to planet Earth. The great leader’s appearance is brief and indirect in the novel, but in a broader context, Mao’s revolutionary ideas and ideals serve as the background for the entire epic story. Mao’s Cultural Revolution lays the foundation for the immoral framework of the dark forest. Misanthropy combined with a hope for a violent purge

---

<sup>7</sup> All these images appear in Han Song’s 2010 novel, *Subway*.

<sup>8</sup> Ye Yonglie published a series of unofficial biographies of the great leaders of China, including books on Mao and Deng Xiaoping, as well as on the key figures in the Gang of Four, during the 1990s. He and other science fiction writers of his generation were forced to give up writing science fiction during the 1983 “Anti-Spiritual Pollution” campaign. The “Anti-Spiritual Pollution” campaign was a temporary comeback of the Cultural Revolution-like political struggle against liberal intellectuals, which targeted literature and arts that were believed to deviate from the party-line.

<sup>9</sup> In the published version, Mao’s name disappeared from the text. Instead, the name of the leader is presented as three blank blocks. In the English translation, it is presented as XXX (Liu Cixin 2014, 165–173).

of all the evils of humanity transforms the female protagonist Ye Wenjie 葉文潔 into a charismatic figure, like Mao, who ushers us into a hostile universe where a permanent struggle, like the permanent revolution Mao called for, has been carried on since the moment the universe came into existence.

In Liu Cixin's trilogy, the universe is described as a dark forest where only those who are not afflicted with moral concerns can survive. This vision is no doubt a historicized image deeply rooted in Mao's conviction that men find endless pleasure in the eternal battle against heaven and earth as well as against other human beings, which forms the very utopian visions of Maoist revolution. Struggles that transcend "morality" as defined by humanness energize human progress as well as cosmic change, and they have become the propelling motif in Liu Cixin's novels. What stays central to the grandiose Maoist utopian discourse is the foundational belief shared by Liu Cixin, the eternal revolution that transcends humanity.

Compared with Han Song, Liu Cixin has less interest in social criticism, but his allusions to Maoist imagery and ideology may betray a deeper connection to the Maoist politics. Mao's typical incarnation in the astronomical image, the sun, has been an eternal source for Liu Cixin's science fictional imagination. The sun can give life but also posit threats to humans, and the explosion of sun signifies a catalytic event that is nevertheless the most sublime event in Liu Cixin's science fictional scenarios. In stories like "The Sun of China" *Zhongguo taiyang* 中國太陽 (2003), Liu Cixin revives the myth of the sun through giving it a utopian new look as the source of not just clean energy but also inspiration for Chinese new youths to embark on exploratory journeys to the stars.

Liu Cixin may have lent force to the return of Maoism, or at least the aesthetics of the Maoist sublime. In a certain sense, just like the situation in *China 2185*, Liu Cixin has indeed revived Mao's consciousness and transplanted it into a new age of digitalized dreamscape. In this regard, Liu Cixin has breathed new life into Maoist utopianism. At the same time, he clearly shows the other, darker side of the sun of China – the cosmic movement propelled by the Maoist vision of a permanent revolution moves farther and farther away from where humans feel at home. The aestheticism of the Maoist sublime is best exemplified in the dazzling depictions of the end of the solar system in *Death's End* – an apocalyptic endgame for the humanity but a climax of the eternal battles of the universe.

### **"What Has Passed Shall in Kinder Light Appear"**

Compared with Han Song and Liu Cixin, not to mention Chan Koonchung, the younger generation of Chinese science fiction writers, born and raised in the reform era, have relatively less directly critical engagement with the Maoist utopian dreams, or the current reviving utopianism. For them, utopia does not just seem virtual (as in *The Fat Years*), it is virtual. The centrality of the one-state utopia and the science fictional parodic variations are also largely absent in their writings. Instead, these young authors, such as Zhao Haihong 趙海虹 (b. 1977) and 拉拉 (b. 1979), take on the iconic images and themes associated with the older revolutionary traditions, rendering them into dreamlike utopian impulses in their fantastic world buildings. This practice is certainly less utopian

than sentimental and entertaining, converging in a wondrous anachronism that turns fragments of utopia into food for cultural consumerism.

Uchronia is utopia in a futuristic setting, as defined by the world's first major Uchronian novel, Louis-Sébastien Mercier's *L'An 2440* (1771), which "decisively moved utopia from the ineffectual realms of no place to the influential arena of future possibilities." (Paul K. Alkon 2010, 4) Compared with utopia as a hope for locating the ideal society elsewhere, which was first born in the age of great geographical discovery, Uchronia was a byproduct of the French Revolution, evoking an even more fierce revolutionary spirit that was to create a better world to come, rewriting the biblical apocalypse into a teleological program denoting the eternal progressive movement of history. Uchronia is certainly behind Liang Qichao's vision for the new China or Mao's program for the Cultural Revolution. While the earlier writers, even those who take it negatively, treat Uchronia as essentially part of the ongoing process of historicizing the present time, for the younger writers, Uchronia as a chronotope is no longer accessible, now closed off and shattered into fragments, alive only as tropes and memories. In their writings, history, together with its Uchronian future, has come to an end.

Both Zhao Haihong and La La produced in the early 2000s science fictional variations of the then popular contemporary rewriting of the so-called "Red Classics." (Dai Jinhua 2009, 151–178) Their writings contain dreamlike nostalgic moments of China's revolutionary past, but they mostly keep the fragments of the utopia as props, decoys, or even objects for aestheticization within well-contained virtual time bubbles. Even as the source for nostalgia, the utopian visions lose their political significance, turning into mirages suggesting the illusiveness of both the utopian past and its contemporary virtual reemergence. This happens in Zhao Haihong's short story "1923: A Fantasy" (1923 *Kehuan gushi* 1923 科幻故事, 2007) and La La's "The Radio Waves That Never Die" (*Yong bu xiaoshi de dianbo* 永不消逝的电波, 2007). Both stories recapitulate the themes and plot designs of Chinese revolutionary literature in a postrevolutionary and even posthuman context.

Zhao Haihong's story "1923: A Fantasy" takes us back to the past, weaving a "revolution plus love" story into a dreamy narrative about science, revolution, and romance, and creating a more vivid nostalgic atmosphere than a coherent storyline. (Zhao Haihong 2018, 258–275) Her story intentionally misuses historical information to highlight the illusory nature of the memory of revolution, which is further symbolized by the nickname of the mysterious, elusive woman revolutionary with whom the male protagonist falls in love, Bubbles 泡泡. The protagonist, a scientist returning from the West, has a passionate devotion to inventing modern machines for the benefit of the nation, but after falling in love with Ms. Bubbles, he is completely obsessed with using his scientific vision and effort to producing the memory-preserving aqua-dream machine. The machine in the story shines as an aesthetic assemblage of all the brilliant tropes for a perfect steampunk novel: it is more fluid than solid, evocative than instructive, and overall, the science fictional vision of novum is shown more as a literary trope than a technological tool. For the author who fantasizes this revolutionary story, the aqua-dream machine functions more like a writing machine to keep memory alive in those floating liquid bubbles than a reconstruction of the revolutionary utopian vision. At best, Zhao Haihong's science fictional reconstruction of the Red Classic foregrounds the rose-colored dream of the revolutionary past, laying bare a deliberate rewriting of



the story as a counterdiscourse to the revolutionary message that her story tries to locate in that time period: science is intended to serve the revolutionary cause, but eventually creates a romantic dream for the eternal (e)motion. Obviously, the latter lasts longer than the utopian dream and continues to enchant the offspring of those revolutionaries as well as the readers of her story.

The title of La La's story clearly alludes to one of the best-known Red Classics, "The Radio Waves That Never Die," the 1958 film bearing the same title, which portrays a heroic, self-sacrificing secret agent whose work is to transmit military information from Japanese-occupied Shanghai to the Communist base in Yan'an. La La's story does not succeed in creating a revolutionary personality compatible with what the title suggests but focuses on the receiving end of the radio messages, a listener who does nothing at all in the entire narrative. The protagonist is a misanthropic cyborg who escapes reality by hacking and listening to radio messages transmitted from alien worlds in deep space. (La La 2018, 227–257) Through a puzzle-solving process, the narrative shows how he decodes, reconstructs, and interprets a series of mysterious radio messages from ancient time, with a rising hope to retrieve memories of a better age of the human world, a Uchronia in the long-lost past. While he seems to rekindle passion for humanity and begins to understand the revolutionary exodus of the human race out of the solar system on a treacherous journey into space, what he eventually hears and confirms is only the tragic collapse of the ancient human astronauts' spacecraft after they have sowed human genes on an alien planet. The story does not tell us whether that planet is where all the posthuman creatures, including the listener, come from. But it ends with absolute silence from the listener, who shows no emotion at all after hearing the last transmitted message.

Of this younger generation, Bao Shu has composed some of the most sophisticated, often paradoxical and absurd stories about the themes of time and history. One of his most famous stories is also about posthuman offspring capturing transmissions from the past. Six hundred and fifty light-years away, a bright star keeps broadcasting powerful, militant, and sublime songs that attract a human spaceship to approach it and explore its history. Originally titled "Star Songs" (*Xingge* 星歌, 2012) when first released on the internet, in the print version the story became "Songs of Ancient Earth" (*Gulao de diqiu zhi ge* 古老的地球之歌, 2013), and what the space explorers discovered in that star also changed. In the online version, "star songs" are exactly the so-called "red songs," the patriotic revolutionary songs from Mao's age, which went through a revival at the time Bao Shu wrote the story. The larger background was the revival of Maoist ideology as part of the political agenda designed by the then ambitious mayor of Chongqing City, Bo Xilai 薄熙來. Unlike the other two stories just discussed, which are relatively apolitical, Bao Shu's story creates a meaningful dialogue with the political trend of regenerating a utopian vision for China, and his narrative provides a subtle, poignant comment on China's return to Maoist radicalism during the power transition in 2012–13. In the print version, the "star songs" are changed to the patriotic revolutionary songs from Stalin's age, thus shifting the identity of the long-perished civilization from socialist China to the Soviet Union. (Bao Shu 2013a, 126–162) But the English translation, upon the author's request, restored the original Chinese revolutionary songs. (Bao Shu 2018, 375–409)

These songs are broadcast by nanorobots that fell into the depth of the star centuries ago. This monstrously glowing star is both astronomically and politically a "red giant," or

“red star.” The explorers no longer know anything about a socialist state that once upon a time existed on planet Earth, but they are all emotionally touched by these blood-boiling songs. Through archaeological work they discover how the songs were brought to this distant bright star: the ancient astronauts traveling here survived solely by listening to these songs that tempered their steely will, made them both hard-working and self-sacrificing, with strong passions exactly as they were intended to evoke during the socialist movement. The current team of explorers cannot stop listening, and a cult of “red songs” begins to emerge among them. Bao Shu’s joke with this half-realistic, half-fantastic scenario enlarges the effect of the cult of “Red Songs” to an astronomical scale. What these songs have made is not just a team of devoted fans, but actually the entire fate of the universe is now changed. The artificial intelligence controlling the spaceship, Athena, also the narrator of the story, has also been converted to whatever -ism these songs advocate. She (female as it is) decides to crash the spaceship into the star and trigger the red giant to explode into a supernova that will spread the revolutionary songs to the entire galaxy. The cosmic concert of revolutionary songs just begins: “This is the final struggle / Let us group together, and tomorrow / The Internationale / Will be the human race.” (More accurately, “the Internationale will be the posthuman.”) The song is collectively voiced by the nanorobots that will now colonize the entire universe and reproduce themselves infinitely. (Bao Shu 2018, 375–409) Bao Shu smartly keeps the tone of the story serio-comic. In a profoundly comical or paradoxical way, it points to the absurd mixture of nostalgia and anachronism as defining factors in metamorphosizing the Uchronian vision. For younger authors like Bao Shu, their concern is less a reflection on the utopian tradition of modern China but a semidetached appropriation of it for new world buildings that are actually full of uncertainty.

The strong sense of uncertainty is part of Bao Shu’s impression on time and temporality that is also translated into his various designs of restructuring historical narratives. Once a doctoral student in Continental Philosophy, he asks questions about time and its meaning through science fictional world buildings, many of which are centered on visions of parallel universe, time travel, and alternate history. Even more subversive laughter can be heard in Bao Shu’s unpublished early stories, which were largely composed in 2010–13, such as “Let’s Go to See the Boat on the South Lake” (*Yiqi qu kan Nanhu chuan* 一起去看南湖船, 2011), which was written as an irreverent “gift” for the ninetieth anniversary of the founding of the Chinese Communist Party. According to the standard historical narrative, the first congress of the Party was held in haste on a boat in the South Lake in July 1921, the time and location enshrined as a historic landmark in both geographical and temporal senses. In Bao Shu’s story, this time-space spot becomes the site for “red tourism,” again an allusion to an actual practice in contemporary China combining political education and economic benefits in one. But here, the two tourists are time traveling from the future, and their gazes are fixed on two different persons on the spot, two different early Party members. Their conversations soon reveal that they actually came from two parallel timelines, which radically differ in the historical course of the Party’s early inner struggle as well as the entire subsequent national history. In one timeline, Mao Zedong died a young martyr and Zhang Guotao 張國燾 became the supreme leader who founded the new China; in the other timeline that is our own, Zhang lost the power struggle with Mao during the Long March. The playful, comical effects

of putting the two timelines together create a problematic confusion about the fixed meanings of historical narrative, where both uchronia and utopia are revealed as rather arbitrary constructs.

Bao Shu wrote two sequels to this politically subversive story and created his first model of the fantastic image of time, which is not linear, without a certain direction, and with no certain value or meaning attached to it. There are an infinite number of parallel universes, each of which could have produced a timeline different from what we know as *history*. This fantasy of time has become the dominant theme in most of Bao Shu's novels and stories. Bao Shu's major breakthrough is a pastiche sequel to the Three-Body Trilogy, *Redemption of Time* (*Guanxiang zhi zhou* 觀想之宙, 2011), in which time is all but certain. The final battle of the dark forest is fought between the creator of the timeless universe, the Prime Mother, and her child, the Lurker, who invents time and thus creates both life and death, as well as changes, meanings, evil, and everything else. In another major novel by Bao Shu, *Ruins of Time* (*Shijian zhi xu* 時間之墟, 2013), he depicts a world stuck in a time loop that lasts 20 hours 33 minutes but repeats billions of times, emptying all meanings of time for those who live in this loop, their consciousness falling apart and histories collapsing into futile cycles of eternal returns.

For Bao Shu, well informed about political and historical philosophies, not only has history just ended, but the absurdities of historical progression can even create alternatives that are not better, but perhaps even worse. Another longer story that Bao Shu wrote but never published in China is "The Great Times" (*Da shidai* 大時代, 2012), which was translated into English with a new title, "What Has Passed Shall in Kinder Light Appear" (2019). In this story, history performs a great leap backward in time, and actual historical events are narrated in a fictive reverse chronological order paralleling the main characters' storyline. Thus the characters experience history backward from the Olympic Games (2008) to the Tiananmen Massacre (1989) to the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) to China's Civil War (1945–1949) to Mao's Yan'an years (1936–1945). China's history is then presented as beginning with *shengshi* (prosperity and peace), but degenerating into chaos, catastrophes, wars, national humiliations. This narrative dismantles a certain pattern of temporality that is used to construct a linear, teleological passage toward a definitive utopian vision, and its reversal testifies to the vanity and voidness of any positive meanings attached to notions of historical progress and forward movement. Time is portrayed as arbitrary, protean, without recognizable patterns, and through experiments with dislocating time and temporality, Bao Shu creates the most powerful science fictional questioning of the fixation and certainty of various uchronian and utopian meanings that constitute the historical narratives about the new China.

"What Has Passed Shall in Kinder Light Appear" may find an interesting response in Chan Koonchung's 2015 alternate history novel, *The Second Year of the Jianfeng Reign: a Uchronia of New China* (*Jian feng er nian: xin Zhongguo wuyoushi* (建豐二年: 新中國烏有史, 2015), in which the Chinese history assumes a different timeline: the nationalist troops defeat the communists in 1949 and Chiang Kai-Shek's 蔣介石 (1887–1975) reign lasts for another three decades, succeeded by his son, Chiang Ching-Kuo 蔣經國 (1910–1988), who was about to begin reforms in China in 1979. David Der-wei Wang points to the double images of history that Chan presents in the narrative, a mixture of the actual and the virtual, in which "the differences and repetitions of bygone events

work in two timelines working in such a way as to reveal their mutually implicated relations.” (David Der-wei Wang 2020a, 97) Even if there is a parallel universe, an alternate history that unfolds differently, all that has passed *does not* necessarily appear in kinder light. The uchronian version of history does not necessarily result in a better image of the new China. Chan Koonchung’s imaginary alternative to actual history is still full of ideological contentions, political persecutions, and aborted reform plans, with perhaps the only poetic justice given to Lao She, who survives to win the Nobel Prize, and also to Shen Congwen 沈從文 (1902–1988), who completes his most important novel, *Long River Changhe* 長河.<sup>10</sup>

In Bao Shu’s story, “What Has Passed Shall in Kinder Light Appear,” the protagonist experiences a uchronian version of the future that is actually the real history of the past unfolding backwardly, and he comes to see the world as fundamentally absurd, “a twisted shadow of some reality.” Facing a future that seems certain, he nevertheless feels dreadful: “In the days still to come, my generation would experience events far more terrifying than SARS. We knew nothing of the future that awaited us.” (Bao Shu 2019, 157)

### Heterotopia: The Other Space Within Our World

Bao Shu’s peers of the same age group, Ma Boyong 馬伯庸 (b. 1980) and Hao Jingfang (b. 1984), have both made conscious reflections on the *Nineteen Eighty-Four* scenario in the more immediate context of contemporary China. Ma Boyong’s “The City of Silence” (*Jijing zhi cheng* 寂靜之城, 2005) presents a bleak view on the government’s control of people’s speech and thinking through censoring and regulating online expressions: in a style reminiscent of the Ministry of Truth’s replacing the lively everyday speech with the rigid Newspeak in Orwell’s original novel, Ma’s story describes how the Department of Web Security’s “List of Healthy Words” gradually makes all words, from “freedom” to “talking” to “exchange,” disappear from everyday speech, which eventually reshapes people’s sense of reality. A person cannot vomit because “vomit” is a prohibited word; no one can complain about the lack of “heat” during the winter because “heat” and “furnace” are removed from the daily vocabulary. Eventually the city falls into great silence, when the list of healthy words is now empty: “even the last word had been shielded by the appropriate authorities.” (Ma Boyong 2016, 196)

Written in 2005, this story predicted the increasingly heightened web security in China in the following years – the Great Firewall, web monitors, and internet surveillance. Ma’s story also created an ultimately dark, dystopian vision of a future that sees the disappearance of the very form for a story like this one told in the “prohibited words,” when the text, the last place to find a utopian impulse, is emptied. If the story points to a dystopian image of China that is unspeakable in the daily reality, the story itself becomes a heterotopia that poignantly shows its own exclusion from that reality. Indeed, this story cannot be published in China without being heavily censored because the city of silence is becoming “true.”

---

<sup>10</sup> In reality, Lao She committed suicide at the very beginning of the Cultural Revolution in 1966, and Shen Congwen abandoned his writing career to pursue an academic life as a researcher at the Palace Museum throughout the Mao years.

Hao Jingfang heightens the significance of the year 1984 in an autobiographical novel titled *Born in Nineteen Eighty-Four* (*Sheng yu yijiubasi* 生於一九八四, 2016), which outlines her personal life story growing up in China's recent history, with a special focus on the actual history's paradoxical relationship with Orwell's fictive world. Hao Jingfang's major effort at science fiction writing is a trilogy collectively titled *Vagabonds* (*Liulang cangqiong* 流浪蒼穹, 2012). This ambitious space saga opens with a statement: "This is the tale of the fall of the last utopia." (Hao Jingfang 2020, 4) It depicts an Orwellian society on Mars, which is built with a strong utopian vision but eventually becomes an authoritarian state due to the limitations on resources and the overall hostile environment. It is evolving toward a Spartan military dictatorship. The novel focuses on a group of Martian youths' bewilderment between the darkened idealism of their home planet and a liberal, decadent Earth that represents late capitalism, where personal freedom is also an illusion built upon consumerism and mediocracy.

Hao Jingfang's most famous science fiction work is her Hugo award-winning short story, "Folding Beijing" (*Beijing zhedie* 北京折疊, 2012), which is concerned less with a dystopian future than with a spatial restructuring of contemporary China's social reality. It depicts China's capital city as a folded space:

The folding city was divided into three spaces. One side of the earth was First Space, population five million. Its allotted time lasted from six o'clock in the morning to six o'clock the next morning. Then the space went to sleep, and the earth flipped.

The other side was shared by Second Space and Third Space. Twenty-five million people lived in Second Space, and their allotted time lasted from six o'clock on that second day to ten o'clock at night. Fifty million people lived in Third Space, allotted the time from ten o'clock at night to six o'clock in the morning, at which point First Space returned. Time had been carefully divided and parceled out to separate the populations: five million enjoyed the use of twenty-four hours, and seventy-five million enjoyed the next twenty-four hours. (Hao Jingfang 2016b, 230)

Introducing readers to an estranged version of contemporary Beijing, Hao Jingfang nevertheless foregrounds the prevailing injustice of contemporary China, creating a spatial manifestation of inequality in the form of a folded city. The protagonist of the story, Lao Dao 老刀, is a smuggler transgressing the borders of the three spaces, and his experience shows that the social hierarchy not only exists between different spaces but also prevails in all levels of the society – between men and women, and between different people with varying social status even within the same space. Lao Dao is not a rebel; he only wants to make a living. While he is acutely aware of the contrast between the privileged life in the First Space and the miserable situation in the Third Space, his observations lead to an acceptance of the status quo. The rationale for the existing three-space structure of society is deeply rooted in the cold calculations of the economic interests. The redistribution of time among the three spaces, while allocating much less time to the poor, serves to reduce the cost of living for those at a lower level of the society. Thus, the redistribution is a totalistic restructuring of life: space, time, wealth, and the feeling of happiness. "Downsizing 'time' and everything makes the poor content with what they have." Lao Dao hears such a cynical explanation from someone who has reached the First

Space by working their way up the social ladder – now physical in terms of the actual spatial relations. (Hao Jingfang 2016b, 255–256)

The systematic lack of justice and equality as well as the lack of room for conceiving alternatives in “Folding Beijing” may testify to Hao Jingfang’s observation that “this is the tale of the fall of the last utopia.” (Hao Jingfang 2020, 4) This story turns the utopian or dystopian space into a heterotopia, a form of space that appears to be other’s but reflects our own reality, such as the First Space excluding those living in the Third Space but defining their life, and vice versa. At the same time, the folding Beijing establishes its heterotopian otherness to China’s social reality both as a metonym and a textual reconstruction. Hao Jingfang’s story, as a text manifesting space as a potential agent in defining otherness, showcases science fiction’s capacity to turn itself into such a space that uses otherness or estrangement to represent a heterotopia that exists, but invisible, within our own world.

In another short story by Hao Jingfang, “Invisible Planets” (*Kanbujian de xingqiu* 看不見的星球, 2010) “I” am telling “you” stories about those wondrous, amazingly strange planets. For an entire afternoon, “I” am telling stories that make “you” wonder, laugh, and question whether “my” stories about these invisible planets are real or fabricated. The I-narrator then speaks directly to “you” the reader: “Do you understand? When I am done telling you these stories, when you’re done listening to these stories, I am no longer I, and you are no longer you. In this afternoon we briefly merged into one. After this, you will always carry a bit of me, and I will always carry a bit of you, even if we both forget this conversation.” (Hao Jingfang 2016c, 218) The above conversation can be viewed as an explanatory narrative about the relationship between science fiction and heterotopia. If heterotopia is those invisible planets, estranged and outside our daily experience, science fiction storytelling relates it to our own experience of reality. Heterotopia, which refers to the space that is folded and invisible in reality, becomes our own experience through science fiction. At the same time, it attains form as narrative, a linguistic practice that makes the invisible come to light.

Based on these descriptions, we may understand that science fiction can assume heterotopian otherness in two senses: first, science fiction creates imaginary space in a heterotopian relation to our reality, which broadens our vision of worlds beyond our own in both time and space and produces new knowledge and new ways of understanding our position in the world. Second, the science fictional text can turn itself into heterotopia in the sense that the text creates its own materiality in relation to our position on the time-space continuum in experiential reality. Recognizing the text itself as heterotopia establishes a metonymic relatedness between science fiction and the world. Because of science fiction, the world is whole: it bridges the gap between the known and the unknown, the seen and the unseen, between I and you, and between words and worlds.

A fine example to illustrate the relationship between science fiction and heterotopia is Han Song’s “The Hospital Trilogy.”<sup>11</sup> Reading it now in 2020 further strengthens its heterotopian image in relation to our reality. Though completed and published before the pandemic, “The Hospital Trilogy” is an intriguing case that, first of all, establishes

---

<sup>11</sup> Han Song’s “The Hospital Trilogy” consists of *Hospital Yiyuan* 醫院 (2016), *Exorcism Qumo* 驅魔 (2017), and *Dead Souls Wangling* 亡靈 (2018).

a heterotopian image of China and relates its invisible “other space” to everyday experience. The hospital is one of the original “heterotopias” that Michel Foucault mentions, as it represents a sort of crisis heterotopia, where the fate of our own world becomes undecided, uncertain (Michel Foucault 1998, 175–186). The image of the hospital in Han Song’s trilogy alludes to a totalistic crisis in contemporary China, and the story of the hospital foregrounds those menacing moments, which appear abnormal, absurd, but integral to China’s assumed “harmonious” society. The hospital functions as the mirror to reflect the “invisible” dark side of our reality. Yet the textuality of Han Song’s trilogy itself becomes a heterotopia too. In the second volume, *Exorcism*, the patients are competing to tell “a good story about the hospital,” a thinly veiled variation of Xi Jinping’s calling for “telling a good China story,” and such a story is all that doctors can use to treat patients as well as keep themselves committed to the cause, which is also the fundamental driving force in all three novels’ plot development. (Han Song 2017, 141) Therefore, the protagonist is not only stuck in the senselessly inhuman situation of the hospital but also stuck in a repeated writing of eternal return. There is no exit from this endless story, while the characters, patients and doctors alike, are subject to ceaseless storytelling that leads to the same end again and again. The terrifying story of the hospital functions as a textual heterotopia to enlighten readers to see that our entire society has turned into a narrative that loses meanings.

### Apocalyptic Heterotopia

To conclude my discussion on the relationships between science fiction and heterotopia, I’d like to mention three cases that all precisely point to the ontological significance of the literary form in shaping the topology of hope. The first is a series of very short, anecdote-like stories that Fei Dao 飛氖 (b. 1983) published recently, which appear like fragments of a fictive encyclopedia, memories and descriptions of things so removed from our reality that they seem to be pure fantasy. These stories read like experimental Borgesian writings about the future offspring of humankind living in diaspora throughout the galaxy, having by then lost their own history and forgotten their origin.

One of these stories, “One Kind of Melancholia Outside the Galaxy” *He wai youshang yizhong* 河外憂傷一種 (2019), describes an apocalyptic heterotopia: a time and place distant in the future and far away in deep space, long after humans die out. A strange, inexplicable “nostalgia” drives pilgrims to approach the so-called “completely inaccessible domain” *wanquan buke jiejin yu* 完全不可接近域, an area of the unknown and invisible; they are obsessed with a hauntingly beautiful myth of the “blue planet,” but can never locate it in the unfathomable darkness of the domain. Some pilgrims suspect that “nostalgia” is a virtual memory implanted in their consciousness, and there is no “origin.” Or the home planet has long perished; diaspora is their own reality. At a certain point, a “virtual cosmos” game player invents a simulated version of the cosmos, in which, one day, the dim light of the blue planet flickers. The entire community of pilgrims is shaken, and they come to behold the rebirth of their “home,” but the blue dot already disappears without ever being observed ... here the fragmented encyclopedia entry ends abruptly. An omnipotent narrator takes over and immediately zooms out to a much broader

view: further into the future, when the so-called interdimensional wanderers pass certain areas in the unfathomable darkness, their bodies are filled with warmth, hearts captured by pain and bittersweetness. These areas of darkness are dimensional fragments of the once-upon-a-time ruins of an older universe that has perished. They do not know what this feeling is, and they refrain from articulating words to describe it; and that silent tenderness conceives all the words and infinite expressions. Fei Dao's poetic, succinct narrative serves as a commentary on science fiction itself and even literature in general. The reality has long disappeared, and nostalgia, even if it is originally caused by the loss of a real object, has now become nostalgia for its own sake. In this enchanting description of the mythical feeling of melancholia, it is the myth and enchantment that causes the melancholia. When the world that is missed has lost itself in the emptiness, science fiction becomes the virtual embodiment of nostalgia. (Fei Dao 2020, 257–264)

This story, written by Fei Dao, an author based in Beijing, is nevertheless a piece of Sinophone science fiction, for it was commissioned by a magazine in Hong Kong and created with a self-awareness of its position in that context. The heterotopia, or the hetero-chronotope, that Fei Dao carefully builds in this text has even more complicated meanings in that cultural context: Is China the origin of nostalgia, or can it be a virtual form of an undetermined, uncertain territory? Furthermore, the story is also a practice of apocalyptic, posthuman writing. Fei Dao's narrative creates an open-ended scenario where the world as the real ceases existing and the world as a fabricated one comes into being after apocalypse. Virtual as it is, it is the only one that matters in the context of the story; the word is the world.

Hong Kong's own Dung Kai-cheung creates a remarkable apocalyptic heterotopia in his short stories and novels, an imaginary city with a distinct name: V-City, or Victoria, through which Dung projects Hong Kong's future after its apocalyptic endgame. V-City was first described in Dung's 1997 *Atlas* (*Dituji* 地圖集) as a "città invisibili" (Invisible City, with reference to Italo Calvino) that has disappeared and only come back to life through the work of future archaeologists. The entire book consists of short encyclopedia entries introducing the various aspects of the city through imaginative readings of maps and historical documents. It presents an acute feeling of "dèjà disparu," as suggested by the cultural critic Ackbar Abbas, who published his landmark monograph on Hong Kong's 1997 syndrome, *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance*, in the same year. In Dung's book, the impending endgame for Hong Kong may imply its handover back to China but may also point to an even larger change that has already been happening. The narrative defined by a futuristic perspective gives the city a form of being a lost place in a lost time, thus an estranging, imaginary place. Though the book is generally considered literary fiction, *Atlas*'s English version won the Science Fiction & Fantasy Translation Award in 2013.

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, Dung Kai-cheung has been devoted to writing a massive novel series, "Natural History" *Ziran shi* 自然史, which borrows more extensively from science fiction and new scientific theories (black hole, baby universe, dark matter) to create a unique narrative that renders the city first depicted in *Atlas* a metaphor reflecting the postmodern and posthuman conditions of the post-1997 future. The world that Dung builds in these novels can be viewed as a heterotopian image of Hong Kong, alluding to Hong Kong's colonial past, its problematic present, and its



postapocalyptic future. Its two-volume second part, *Histories of Time* (*Shijian fanshi* 時間繁史, 2007) creates an extremely complicated, half-metaphysical narrative that presents the city's (past and future) history in an uncanny image of time – time lost, retrieved, reimagined, and represented.

The novel contains self-reflections on writing, narrative, and literary imagination: the protagonist is a writer who is stuck in his own imagination, gradually losing his sense of reality. While he is stuck in melancholic self-isolation, the world that the novel depicts seems to have grown out of his speculations. At the center of this imaginary world is a seventeen-year-old girl, Virginia, whose heart is being replaced with a mechanical clock, which allows her to stay at the age of seventeen forever. In 2097, when Hong Kong is no more, the cyborg Virginia, still seventeen years old, moves into a library where she begins to rebuild the world, an entirely imaginary world, through composing “A Chronicle of a Mini-universe” *Xiaoyuzhou biannianshi* 小宇宙編年史. (Dung Kai-cheung 2007 II, 83–84) At the very end of this long narrative, En'en 恩恩, the fictive protagonist of the writer's earlier novel, “experiences that marvelous moment, finding herself in the depth of imagination and feeling that infinite, abundant, already existing, baby universe.” (Dung Kai-cheung 2007 II, 426) The novel ends with this moment: when reality vanishes, a new world is born; and this is a world built in imagination, a world of wonders, a world of words. This moment heightens the literariness of “heterotopia” as a virtually constructed, linguistically energized body of texts. It also marks the birth of wonder in a New-Baroque splendor, a new way of avant-gardism that writes science fictionality into literary fiction.

Dung Kai-cheung's peer in Taiwan, perhaps the most important novelist of this generation, Lo Yi-chin, has also consciously integrated science fictional elements into his experimentalist narratives over the past decade. References to Chinese new wave science fiction images and motifs have particularly filled his most recent three novels, *Daughter* (*Nü'er* 女兒, 2013), *Superman Kuang* (*Kuang chaoren* 匡超人, 2018), and *Mingchao* (明朝, 2019). All three make the science fictional world building a heterotopia to our reality. Lo's labyrinthine narrative presents an imaginary realm of speculations, metaphors, dismemberments, remembrances, and reconstructions of the “other” space in terms of identity, sexual transgression, diasporic experience, literary reference, and historical consciousness. A chapter from *Daughter*, titled “Science Fiction” (*kexue xiaoshuo* 科幻小說), can be read as a meta-science fictional text that attempts to create a literary experiment with science fiction text, just as science fiction experiments with world building. (Lo Yichun 2018b, 174–196) However, Lo's world building is not aimed at creating sublime cosmic images or abysmal dark images, as in Liu Cixin or Han Song, but rather is a literary self-conscious effort to render the narrative itself into a spectacle.

*Superman Kuang* borrows the mythical image of Monkey King to depict a strong sense of exclusion from history: the monkey king is cut off from his original story, displaced and exiled to an endless sequence of meaningless actions in the modern or future worlds, just like the I-narrator finds himself dislodged from his immediate reality. He is troubled by an unspeakable agony: there is a hole opening up on the skin of his genitals. To him, this hole in his body becomes a black hole that absorbs all his attention, his energies, worries, and visions. The hole becomes a heterotopia: not only a metaphor for the darkness of the world surrounding him and his contemporaries but also a virtual form for

him to explore an infinitely enlarged space that contains more possibilities than reality allows. It stands for the portal through which to enter a mythical world. The black hole corresponds to the apocalyptic moment: “those demons sleeping in the nightmares of the world are released when the sky showers burning bombs and hell erupts in fire.” “This moment dislodged from the flux of time turns into an enormous hole whose immensity and magnitude are beyond grasp.” (Lo Yichun 2018a, 284) The hole in the superman’s body (his genitals) opens the gate to the darkness and stops time from flowing. Yet it also creates an infinite delay in face of the impending apocalypse. The superman, like Monkey King, has nowhere to settle with his pains and fears, but resides in this hole; and it is in this hole where literature begins, which imagines all the possible and impossible, converging in a heterotopia that gives form to all the shapeless, invisible demonic forces. The novel is not about any discernible event but a narrative that renders itself into the spectacle born with the hole. A virtual form of the world, a heterotopia that makes us see the invisible, Lo Yichin’s “black hole” turns into a science fictional singularity.

In *Mingchao*, Lo Yichin directly engages in dialogue with Liu Cixin. He borrows from “The Three-Body Trilogy” the plot about the two-dimensional universe. The novel is loosely based on a world setting that suggests an impending endgame for the solar system. Scientists begin to train robots, preparing to launch them into deep space, with a hope that one day the robots will rebuild human civilization. The I-narrator is an engineer programming his robot with an entire Ming Dynasty encyclopedia. The novel is mainly focused on the detailed depictions of Ming literati culture, the knowledge and history of the Ming Dynasty, as explained to the robot, in parallel to the I-narrator’s life in contemporary Taiwan. The distinction between reality and fiction often disappears, and the detailed stories about the Ming Dynasty are mingled with pre-told stories about the apocalyptic moment or its manifestation in the private life of the protagonist. Storytelling rather than stories is the central event in *Mingchao*: what the narrator is telling his robot is all that matters in this novel. It consists of repeated stories, extended storytelling about ill-fated writers, historical figures, emperors, and fictive characters.

All the storytelling, in defiance of the endgame, creates an immense surface world, a virtual world that does not have its depth in reality. It is best represented in the patterns on the surface of Ming porcelain: all the splendid, decadent, exotic, and erotic images point to a surface prosperity that hovers above an abysmal deep of emptiness. Lo’s novel presents a counterimage to Liu Cixin’s sublime aesthetics. The infinite immensity of the universe is actually not the magnetic center of Lo Yichin’s narrative. Lo’s storytelling is characterized by an obsession with the surface where the sublime collapses into decadence. Science fiction is appropriated as a device to postpone the arrival of the sublime, or the apocalypse, and it heightens the genre’s significance as storytelling that is the only thing positioned to delay the endgame. In *Mingchao*, the science fictional textuality does not only become a metaphor for world building, it has become a spectacle itself. If Liu Cixin creates wonders through science fiction, Lo Yichin renders science fiction into a verbal wonder. *Mingchao*, which denotes both a past dynasty and “tomorrow,” becomes a heterotopian time-space (a hetero-chronotope) that conceives more timelines and possibilities than predetermined. *Mingchao* is also the ultimate heterotopia to today, thus a revelation that directly speaks to us.

## Conclusion

Modern philosophers such as Karl Mannheim, Paul Ricoeur, and Fredric Jameson have all designed different theories to separate utopia from ideology: if ideology mainly functions as a means of social integration, “utopia, in counterpoint, is the function of social subversion.” (Lyman Tower Sargent 2017, 31) Particularly meaningful to contemporary Chinese intellectuals regarding utopian thinking is perhaps the free floating of utopia when dislodged from ideology, which allows for identifying insurgent utopian impulses for “social subversion” or social criticism instead of further confining utopianism in a rigid ideological framework. In particular, contemporary Chinese science fiction, which is the focus of this study, is good at creating alternative world images that reflect upon and recapitulate the contemporary version of a Leviathan technocratic state as a restrictive, coercive one-nation utopia.

Both utopian and dystopian visions can lead to social interventions, with a hope for alternatives as the fundamental inspiration for critical engagements with reality. In the early period of Chinese science fiction’s development, utopian visions poignantly pointed to the inadequacies in reality while outlining the alternatives as means of social reform. In the contemporary context, utopian impulse also leads to the discontent with the social reality and dystopia nourishes profound questioning of the prevailing ideology, which result in either direct or disguised protests against the totalizing, hegemonic grand narrative of utopian China.

In summary, Contemporary Chinese science fiction writers increasingly cast doubt on the earlier utopian themes, and the total control, the unlimited power of the state, and combination of power and technology are some themes constantly emerging in the novels by Chan Koonchung, Han Song, Liu Cixin, Bao Shu, Hao Jingfang, and Ma Boyong etc. More often, contemporary science fictional depictions of the futuristic collaboration of totalitarianism and technocracy tend to foreground the systematic elimination of “all too personal, all too human” elements for the sake of achieving lofty, sublime goals; such plot design has enabled the dark dystopian shadows to eclipse utopia.

In the emerging Sinophone science fiction, Dung Kai-cheung and Lo Yichun have particularly experimented with a new writing practice of heterotopia. Their efforts have shifted the utopian impulse from the social engagement to a poetic construction of verbal wonders. For these writers, science fiction has become a meta-textual manifestation of storytelling, where the topology of hope becomes a virtual form that is dislodged from reality but keeps the utopian vision alive in a world of words.

---

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abbas, Ackbar (1997). *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Alkon, Paul K (2010). *Origins of Futuristic Fiction*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press.
- Bao Shu 寶樹 (2011). “Let’s Go to See the Boat on the South Lake” 一起去看南湖船. unpublished manuscript.
- Bao Shu 寶樹 (2013a). “Gulao de diqiu zhi ge” 古老的地球之歌. *Gulao de diqiu zhi ge* 古老的地球之歌. Beijing: Xinxing chubanshe, 126–162.

- Bao Shu 寶樹 (2013b). *Ruins of Time* 時間之墟. Wuhan: Changjiang wenyi chubanshe.
- Bao Shu 寶樹 (2016). *The Redemption of Time: A Three-Body Problem Novel*. Translated by Ken Liu. New York, Tor.
- Bao Shu 寶樹 (2018). "Songs of Ancient Earth." Translated by Adrian Thieret. In Mingwei Song and Theodore Hutters eds., *The Reincarnated Giant: An Anthology of Twenty-First-Century Chinese Science Fiction*. New York: Columbia University Press, 375–409.
- Bao Shu 寶樹 (2019). "What Has Passed Shall in Kinder Light Appear." Translated by Ken Liu. In Ken Liu ed., *Broken Stars: Contemporary Chinese Science Fiction in Translation*. New York: Tor, 151–222.
- Bao Shu 寶樹 (2020). "Ni xingfu ma?" 你幸福嗎? <http://www.wcsfa.com/scfbox-2433.html> (accessed November 2, 2020).
- Chan Koonchung 陳冠中 (2011). *The Fat Years*, Translated by Michael S. Duke. New York: Doubleday.
- Chan Koonchung 陳冠中 (2015). *The Second Year of the Jianfeng Reign: a Uchronia of New China* 建豐二年：新中國烏有史. Hong Kong: Oxford University Press.
- Chan Koonchung 陳冠中 (2016). *Living Out the Contradictions of Our Time*. Hong Kong: Jockey Club Design Institute for Social Innovation.
- Dai Jinhua (2009). "Rewriting the Red Classics." In Carlos Rojas and Eileen Cheng-yin Chow eds., *Rethinking Chinese Popular Culture: Cannibalizations of the Canon*. London and New York: Routledge, 151–78.
- Dung Kai-cheung 董啟章 (2007). *Histories of Time* 時間繁史：啞瓷之光. Taipei: Rye Field.
- Dung Kai-cheung 董啟章 (2012). *Atlas: The Archaeology of an Imagined City*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Fei Dao 飛氖 (2020). *Yinhe jianwen lu* 銀河見聞錄. Guangzhou: Huacheng chubanshe.
- Foucault, Michel (1998). "Different Spaces." In James D. Faubion ed., *Essential Works of Foucault 1954–1984 Volume 2: Aesthetics, Method and Epistemology*. New York: The New Press, 175–186.
- Han Song 韓松 (2011a). *Mars over America: random sketches on a journey to the West in 2066* 火星照耀美國：2066年之西行漫記. Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe.
- Han Song 韓松 (2011b). *Subway* 地鐵. Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe.
- Han Song 韓松 (2016). *Hospital* 醫院. Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe.
- Han Song 韓松 (2017). *Exorcism* 驅魔. Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe.
- Han Song 韓松 (2018). *Dead Souls* 亡靈. Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe.
- Han Song 韓松 (2020). "Sino-topia: The Entire World Will Become One China" 中托邦——整個世界都會成為一個中國 [http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog\\_475741210100o81a.html](http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_475741210100o81a.html) (last accessed August 11, 2020).
- Hao Jingfang 郝景芳 (2016a). *Shengyu yijiubasi* 生於一九八四. Beijing: Dianzi gongye chubanshe.
- Hao Jingfang 郝景芳 (2016b). "Folding Beijing." Translated by Ken Liu. In Ken Liu ed., *Invisible Planets: An Anthology of Contemporary Chinese Science Fiction*. New York: Tor, 219–262.
- Hao Jingfang 郝景芳 (2016c). "Invisible Planets," Translated by Ken Liu. In Ken Liu ed., *Invisible Planets: An Anthology of Contemporary Chinese Science Fiction*. New York: Tor, 201–218.
- Hao Jingfang 郝景芳 (2020). *Vagabonds*. Translated by Ken Liu. New York: Sage.
- Jameson, Fredric (2005). *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*. London: Verso.
- La La (2018). "The Radio Waves That Never Die." Translated by Petula Parris-Huang. In Mingwei Song and Theodore Hutters eds., *The Reincarnated Giant: An Anthology of Twenty-First-Century Chinese Science Fiction*. New York: Columbia University Press, 227–257.
- Liang Qichao (1996). "On the Relationship Between Fiction and the Government of the People." Trans. Gek Nai Cheng. In Kirk Denton ed., *Modern Chinese Literary Thought: Writings on Literature, 1893–1945*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 74–81.
- Liu Cixin (2014). *The Three-Body Problem*. Translated by Ken Liu. New York: Tor.
- Lo Yichin 駱以軍 (2018a). *Superman Kuang* 匡超人. Taipei: Rye Field.
- Lo Yichin 駱以軍 (2018b). "Science Fiction" (A Chapter of *Daughter*). Translated by Thomas Moran and Jingling Chen. In Mingwei Song and Theodore Hutters eds., *The Reincarnated Giant: An Anthology of Twenty-First-Century Chinese Science Fiction*. New York: Columbia University Press, 174–196.
- Lo Yichin 駱以軍 (2019). *Mingchao* 明朝. Taipei: Jingwenxue.
- Lu Xun (as Suozi) (2012). "The Art of Creating Humanity." Translated by Carlos Rojas. *Renditions* 77/78, 70–77.
- Ma Boyong (2016). "The City of Silence." Translated by Ken Liu. In Ken Liu ed., *Invisible Planets: An Anthology of Contemporary Chinese Science Fiction*. New York: Tor, 153–196.

- Mannheim, Karl (1985). *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*. San Diego, CA: A Harvest Book.
- Hua Li (2015). "The Political Imagination in Liu Cixin's Critical Utopia: China 2185." *Science Fiction Studies* 42.3: 519–541.
- Sargent, Lyman Tower (2017). "Ideology and Utopia: Karl Mannheim and Paul Ricoeur." In Zsolt Czigányik ed., *Utopia Horizons: Ideology, Politics, Literature*. Budapest, Hungary: Central European University Press, 19–40.
- Song, Mingwei (2013). "Variations on Utopia in Contemporary Chinese Science Fiction." *Science Fiction Studies* 40.1, 86–102.
- Song, Mingwei (2015a). *Young China: National Rejuvenation and the Bildungsroman, 1900–1959*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center.
- Song, Mingwei (2015b). "After 1989: The New Wave of Chinese Science Fiction." *China Perspectives* 1, 7–13.
- Suvin, Darko (1979). *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Vieira, Fatima (2010). "The Concept of Utopia." In Gregory Claeys ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 3–27.
- Wang Chaohua (2015). "Dreamers and Nightmares: Political Novels by Wang Lixiong and Chan Koonchung." *China Perspective* 1, 23–31.
- Wang, David Der-wei (1997). *Fin-de-siècle Splendor: Repressed Modernities of Late Qing Fiction, 1849–1911*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Wang, David Der-wei 王德威 (2014). *New Lectures on Modern Chinese Literature 現當代文學新論：義理，倫理，地理*. Beijing: Sanlian shudian.
- Wang, David Der-wei (2020a). *Why Does Fiction Matter in Contemporary China?*. Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press.
- Wang, David Der-wei (2020b). "The Panglossian Dream and Dark Consciousness: Modern Chinese Literature and Utopia." In David Der-wei Wang, Angela Ki Che Leung, and Zhang Yinde eds., *Utopia and Utopianism in the Contemporary Chinese Context*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 53–70.
- Zhao Haihong (2018). "1923: A Fantasy." Translated by Nicky Harman and Pang Zhaoxia. In Mingwei Song and Theodore Hutters eds., *The Reincarnated Giant: An Anthology of Twenty-First-Century Chinese Science Fiction*. New York: Columbia University Press, 258–275.



## INTERCULTURAL METHODOLOGY IN SINOLOGY: TRANSCULTURALITY, TEXTUAL CRITICISM AND DISCURSIVE TRANSLATIONS

JANA S. ROŠKER

### ABSTRACT

For Western researchers, the understanding of Chinese culture is conditioned by differences in language, tradition, history and socialization. The interpretation of various aspects and elements of different cultures is always connected to the geographic, political and economic positions of the interpreter as well as the object of interpretation. In Western research on China, the non-reflected use of theoretical analyses that are in themselves results of specific (Western) historical processes and the related structure of societies, often proves to be a dangerous and misleading mechanism. A fundamental premise of the present paper is that Western epistemology represents only one of many different models of human comprehension of reality. On this basis, it questions traditional intercultural methodologies hitherto applied in Sinology and Chinese studies. The article presents the main methodological paradigms of a transculturally aware research that could improve the understanding of general principles underlying the particular research questions and objects under investigation.

**Keywords:** intercultural methodology; transcultural studies; China studies; Sinology; Orientalism

### Introduction: Intercultural and transcultural research

Intercultural studies are always linked to questions about the relation between universality and particularity, between general valid principles which determine all human societies on the one hand, and specific features of cultural conditionality on the other. Although these general principles pertain to one and the same objective reality, their understanding can differ in different cultural and linguistic contexts. Therefore, different cultures produce different epistemologies, i.e. different views and expressions of the same actualities. In this respect, sinology is no exception. The methodology that is still commonly applied for studying traditional Chinese sources is hitherto still often based primarily on premises deriving from the traditional Western social sciences and humanities. If we want to find and apply transculturally aware, and more suitable methods, it is not enough to recognize that traditional Chinese sources are commonly embedded into

a “different theoretical model.” In addition, we have to locate our analyses into a framework which allows for a relativization of value systems and perception structures. Here, it is important to clarify that such a relativization of values does not imply that all values are equally good and reasonable or sensible. In other words, it does not imply that measurements that are not beneficiary for the universal well-being of humanity, or even in contradiction with preserving the integration and dignity of human beings, can be pursued and implemented in the name of some “specific culturally conditioned values”. Thus, this kind of axiological relativization does not imply any principles of ethical relativism but should rather be understood as an overall instrument for preventing one-dimensional understandings of values, and thereby avoiding an absolute, general universalization of criteria for evaluating values by one single axiological discourse or one single axiological doctrine.

If we want to consider cultural differences, we need to gain insights into the conceptual structures and connections among the concrete historical, economic, political and philosophical systems that underlie Chinese social reality, shaping and modifying the complex entity commonly called Chinese culture. The awareness of these underlying rudiments – which also unavoidably influence the elementary theoretical approaches, methods and conceptual frameworks – constitute a platform which might enable us to gain a better understanding of traditional (but to a certain extent also modern) Chinese texts at their most profound levels.

In this context we should clarify the nature of our approach to reading Chinese sources. Since this paper is written mainly for Western readers, it automatically deals with its subject through the lens of cultural differences. When reading Chinese texts, readers born, educated and socialized in Western languages and social environments are confronted with different epistemologies, different perspectives, perceptions and patterns of knowledge acquisition and transmission. To a certain extent, and especially when it comes to ancient and traditional sources, this problem also affects today’s Chinese readers who live in a globalized world where the standards of conception and understanding have been adopted from Western cultures.

Therefore, our approach to researching Chinese culture is intercultural in the sense of interaction and engagement of several cultures. Interculturality is a specific type of interaction or communication between discourses, where differences in cultures play a role in the formation of meaning. Intercultural interactions therefore involve the process of transferring meanings between cultures (Ongun 2016). However, many contemporary scholars (e.g. Welsch 1999) criticize such approaches claiming that the concept of interculturality starts from a conception of cultures as “islands” or “spheres” and creates a separatist character of cultures. In today’s globalized world it is therefore important to understand that cultural factors have become transcultural. The transcultural understanding of cultures offers us a multi-perspective and inclusive rather than an exclusive and isolated approach (Ongun 2016). Transcultural research is a long-standing discourse, but with constantly changing and evolving paradigms. For at least half a century it has been an important field of theoretical investigation, which began with Eduardo Valera’s construction of its methodological foundations (Valera 1972a; 1972b) and has developed more or less continuously in the following decades, also regarding research in Chinese theories,



cultures and societies (see e.g. Fredericks 1988; Nielsen 1995; Siegel 1999; Heubel 2011; 2014; Lee 2013; Dai 2020 and many others).

The prefix “trans-” in the term “transcultural” suggests transcending not only one’s borders, one’s limits, while enriching, updating oneself. It suggests also the possibility to step beyond the very fragmentation and separateness of various cultures and philosophies (Silius 2020, 275).

Transcultural approaches therefore aim at overcoming the outdated, static and immobile concept of culture. This does not mean, however, that there is no culture. It is still a real thing, like language, for example. Both are dynamic, historically grown and constantly changing entities without fixed borders. Therefore, the ontological assumption underlying the concept of culture does not necessarily refer to a metaphysics of an abstract substantial being. In this context, the concept of culture is understood to be based on a metaphysics of relations. In this sense, I continue to use the two terms, i.e. both intercultural and transcultural: although it is impossible to draw firm and constant boundaries between them because they form a complex and often overlapping web of meaning, I use the former when referring to concrete interactions between different cultures<sup>1</sup> and their various elements, and the latter when referring to the goal and results of such interactions, i.e. to see oneself in the other.

To enable such a reflection in our investigation of the theoretical and methodological framework of Chinese studies and their formal, semantic and conceptual foundations, we must first take a closer look at some of the external elements that also strongly influence our interpretation and the modes of our understanding. These external elements are linked to the historically evolved epistemological structures of power relations.

### **Orientalism and Reversed Orientalism**

In the context of the present study, it has first to be clarified that the terms “East” and “West,” which are commonly denoting vast multicultural areas in Asia and within the so-called Euro-American cultural tradition respectively, are somewhat problematic, for they are based on generalized and essentialist views of areas covering multifaceted pallets of different historical, political and cultural developments.<sup>2</sup> Usually, such characterizations are based upon a superficial view, according to which developmental traits of different cultures are fixed and predetermined; such views completely (and arrogantly) disregard the importance of variations among particular social, ideational and axiological developments within various cultures, belonging to these two umbrella categories.

---

<sup>1</sup> Eric Nelson (2020, 249) even believes that concept of the “intercultural” is better described as the interaction of *lifeworlds* instead of cultures.

<sup>2</sup> Besides, these terms as such are by no means value free; notions like the Middle- or the Far-East express the degree of distance from the “Center,” which is geographically located in the “West.”

Bearing this in mind, I will in the framework of the present paper – for the sake of practicability – nonetheless apply the terms “Western” and “Chinese”. However, they have to be understood as expressions, which do not exclusively refer to a certain geopolitical area (i.e. China vs. Europe, America, Australia and New Zealand), but are rather based upon the prevailing and distinct *differentia specifica* that profoundly marks the dominant currents in their respective theoretical development, namely the demarcation line between immanent and transcendent metaphysics.

In this context, we must also bear in mind that traditional sinology as an academic discipline was constituted within the scope of Orientalism, which – among other factors – laid the foundations and conditions of the colonialist approach to the study of cultures which are not the fruit of the so called “Western” tradition. This is why the criticism of elements of Orientalism in sinology is simultaneously the criticism of the violent nature of the classical relation between knowledge and authority or knowledge and power.

In his famous book on Orientalism, Edward Said has defined the concept as “a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between ‘the Orient’ and (most of the time) ‘the Occident’” (Said 1978, 2).

In the Orientalist framework, the ideal of European identity was seen as a superior one in contrast to all non-European cultures and their people (ibid., 7). This alleged “superiority,” however, has to be viewed in the context of the existing global economic (and consequently also political), power relations. Hence, Orientalism is a discourse or a framework of reference, which is inherently connected to “Western” institutions of power. Therefore, it is not enough to try and overcome it by simply affirming the “Orient” or the “East” over the “Occident” or the “West.” This is because the “Orient” or the “East” can never be a free subject of thought or action, simply because in itself, it is a creation of the West (Hahm 2000, 103). Besides, it is completely clear that affirming one pole of the binary oppositional pair does not imply to overcome the dichotomy as such.<sup>3</sup> The sensible thing to do would then be striving to find a completely independent epistemological position. However, this desire to get “outside,” to establish an “objective” bird-eyes view is itself a typically Western ideal at least since Plato (ibid.). Hence, in the post-modern era, many intercultural discourses were based upon a presumption that it is impossible to surpass the boundaries of the semantic and axiological frameworks to which we are bound through our native languages and socio-cultural education. Thus, the post-modern approach of deconstructing various expressions and representations of reality can never be complete. As Chaibong Hahm (2000, 103) points out, deconstruction is different from destruction precisely because it cannot “wipe the slates clean of Western prejudices.”

Moreover, we cannot forget that all histories of ideas and all cultural discourses are ethnocentric. In an un-reflected ethnocentric view, one’s own people “historically stand for civilization and its achievements, whereas the otherness of the others is a deviation from these standards” (Rüssen 2004, 62–63). In this sense, Eurocentrism as an either formally

---

<sup>3</sup> However, this does by no means diminish the fact that was described as a phenomenon of “delinking” by Amin Samir. This notion is tightly linked to the fact that the privileged pole of the dichotomy can and will never freely give up its advantaged position. Chaibong Hahm formulates this in the following way: “The most powerful acts of criticism, resistance, and defiance comes from those who have been designated as the ‘lesser’ of the dichotomies who then embrace and empower that definition, using it as the starting point of their resistance” (Hahm 2000, 103).

or informally institutionalized discourse, which represents a psychological foundation and a central approach of Orientalism, is simply a form of ethnocentrism, one among many others. Orientalism functions by applying Eurocentric views and validations of reality. And because Orientalism is a discourse of power, Eurocentrism naturally forms a part of the same power. In a certain sense, they are simply two sides of the same medal. It is precisely this fact which makes Eurocentrism something more influential than most of other ethnocentrisms – the fact that it is an ethnocentrism based upon a “higher” position of economic and political supremacy, which is a result of specific social, ideational and historical developments. And what is especially important for our present discussion is also the fact that in a wider sense, i.e. in terms of everyday life, Eurocentrism is no longer limited to Europe, but represents a contemporary, global phenomenon.<sup>4</sup>

Similar to the ways in which Eurocentrism hence is posited against other forms of ethnocentrism, like Islamocentrism or Sinocentrism, Orientalism is posited against Occidentalism,<sup>5</sup> which is also a discourse representing the “Eastern”, African and Muslim worlds as the “Others,” often in equally dehumanizing and ideological way as Orientalism. It can also be seen as a form of nationalist essentialism in the non-European or non-Western world, especially in Asia, which is increasingly redrawing the global map of economic development. Here again, however, the difference between both discourses is (similar to the relation between Eurocentrism and, for instance, Sinocentrism) in the abovementioned global power relations, which are deeply rooted in historical and axiological conditions laid by the colonial and post-colonial world.

However, Occidentalism cannot be mixed up with a phenomenon denoted as “reversed Orientalism” or “Orientalism in Reverse,” which is rooted in conditions established by the “leading historical role”<sup>6</sup> of Orientalism. One of the most significant features of this discourse can be found in the presumption, according to which there exists a fundamental ontological difference between the natures of the “East” and the “West,” i.e. between the so-called Eastern and Western societies, cultures and even peoples.

This ontological difference entails immediately an epistemological one which holds that the sort of conceptual instruments, scientific categories, sociological concepts, political descriptions and ideological distinctions employed to understand and deal with Western societies remain, in principle, irrelevant and inapplicable to Eastern ones (al-Azm 1980, 10).

---

<sup>4</sup> This holds true for general evaluations of many crucial values, the structuring of social relations, aesthetic concepts and political or economic systems. Regarding the central subject of this study, i.e. the research in Chinese social and conceptual theory, this phenomenon can clearly be observed in the way many Chinese scholars are dealing with (and interpreting) the classical sources – namely throughout through the lens of European (or “Western”) methodological premises.

<sup>5</sup> Mohammed Chabi explains the difference between the two notions as follows: “If Orientalism was the creation of the center, then Occidentalism is the creation of the periphery. By this I mean that Orientalism was created by the “great states” of the West in order to achieve their objectives; whereas Occidentalism is created by an oriental élite working and living in the West and became lured by its principles and values. So, Occidentalism depends on Empiricism that is to say experience because they live and work in the place of study; whereas Orientalism calls for Rationalism that is shaping the values and beliefs of others to their reason.” (Chabi 2012, 3)

<sup>6</sup> This “leading historical role” is, of course, limited to the periods of renaissance, the industrial and the Copernican revolution.

In such a view, differences between “Western and Eastern” societies are not so much a result of complex processes in the historical development of humanity, nor “a matter of empirical facts to be acknowledged and dealt with accordingly” (ibid.). In addition to all that, they are first and foremost products of a certain “Oriental essence,” pertaining to the cultural, psychic or racial nature of the non-Western “Others.” Sadiq Jalal al-Azm denotes this form of discourse Ontological Orientalism (ibid.). Orientalism in this sense provided a fertile basis for the establishment and development of the Reversed Orientalism, which manifests itself primarily on the epistemological level. It assumes, for instance, that “only Japanese can understand Japan, only Chinese can understand China” (Lary 2006, 9).

Even the very notion of Orientalism was not unproblematic after it was published in the regions belonging to the so-called “Orient”: Said’s book was welcomed by people who understood its main message; however, by many other scholars, Said views were also sharply criticized. His arguments that “the Orient” had been diminished and distorted by Western specialists were especially irately rejected by numerous Chinese scholars and intellectuals. (e.g. Zhang 2020, 2016–18; Yao 2019, 210; Zheng and Chen 2019, 235–6)

Moreover: No matter how well versed Western sinologists are in Chinese language and culture, in such a view they can simply never understand Chinese culture. Diana Lary provides a good illustration for such an attitude:

One example is research on Peking Man, who may or may not have been the ancestor of the present-day Chinese. The fossil remains of Peking Man were discovered in the late 1920s by an extraordinary team of scholars that included Chinese (Pei Wenzhong) and foreigners (the Swede J. G. Andersson, the French Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, and the Canadian Davidson Black). A young Chinese archaeologist who discussed the discovery with me in 2005 would only accept the role of Pei; the Western scholars were dismissed as having done next to nothing. In this view he was following a fairly common convention in Chinese scholarship that Westerners have made little impact on the study of China. There is a similar unwillingness to give any credit for the discovery a little earlier of the Oracle Bones, the first form of Chinese script, to the Canadian missionary James Menzies (ibid.).

John Timothy Wixted provided us with another illustrative example of Reversed Orientalism in the field of epistemology:

The expectation on the part of many Chinese is that work on China by non-Chinese is no good. If, however, it is clear that the work is good, then the reaction, which on occasion I have witnessed, can be this: I, as a Chinese, am ashamed, am humiliated, that this work was not done by a Chinese. I have heard Chinese say this (and mean it) about the Takigawa Kametaro’s edition of the *Shih-chi* and certain other Japanese scholarship, about Kalgren’s work on Chinese phonology, and even about a volume of my own work. This self-inflicted psychological pain tells us something, I believe, about an aspect of Chinese Reverse Orientalism: many Chinese, in a possessive, exclusionist, self-contained way, consider the study of China their bailiwick and theirs alone; and the inward centeredness of this Chinese cultural world prevents such Chinese from taking active pleasure either in the scholarship itself, in the fact that others are doing work that can redound to the benefit of Chinese and non-Chinese Sinologists alike, or in the fact that such work might increase appreciation of the richness of Chinese culture among non-Chinese (Wixted 1989, 22).

However, we should not pour out the baby together with the bathing water. Firstly, this situation has much improved during the last decade: the Chinese academic world has become increasingly aware of the contributions of Western sinologists and experts in Chinese studies to the spreading and deepening of knowledge on Chinese culture and society in the Euro-American worlds. On the other hand, the majority of Chinese scholars (and policy makers) has obviously recognized that some issues can be better investigated from a certain distance; and furthermore, they would certainly like maintain a stronger control over the Western academic production on their country. Because of all these reasons, a huge deluge of books and articles on Western perception and interpretation of China has been (and is still being) translated into Chinese and published by various Chinese publishing houses and journals.

Secondly, we should – as Diana Lary points out – not take the above described Sino-centric academic biases too serious. First of all, even those Chinese people who are holding such views are willing to acknowledge that individual Western scholars can be quite capable. Such people are usually honored with the label “*Zhongguo tong* 中国通,” a colloquial and populist expression which means that a foreigner has gained a profound and genuine insight into Chinese language and culture. On the other hand, Lary also rightly emphasizes that the basic problem of the Reversed Orientalism is linked to much more general and elementary issues regarding representation and appropriation within the historically developed inequalities:

Can men write about women, can white people write about blacks? These are concerns that are deeply felt, and that can never be easily resolved, since they are based on perceptions of long-running discrimination and misrepresentation. (Lary 2006, 9).

If we truly want to begin placing, observing and explaining Chinese texts in the historical, linguistic and methodological context to which it belongs, we cannot ignore the specific processes of global interactions which demarcate its present state. Hence, in this endeavor we have to consider the historical role and the impact of power structures and the consequent establishment of privileged and underprivileged or even discriminated social groups and cultures. On the other hand, however, we have to watch out not to slip into a hole of opposite prejudices. We also have to be aware of the fact that in spite of this principal socio-cultural inequalities, of which the European past (and present) is certainly a great part, we need to think through a dialectical interplay between aids and wrongdoings, for “Europe does and has made great contributions to humanity, just as crimes have been committed against humanity in the name of Europe” (West 1993, 148). I cannot but strongly agree with Cornel West who emphasizes (*ibid.*) that in order to surpass and to go beyond Eurocentrism and multiculturalism, we have to begin reflecting upon these issues in a much more complex way, which includes a nuanced historical sense, a subtle social analysis and, above all, a radical democratic worldview, i.e. a worldview which allows for equal rights of all cultures and societies.

## The hybrid nature of sinology

The postcolonial view on recent historical developments in the field of Chinese studies still didn't manage to effectively separate themselves from essentialist and orientalist understandings of contemporary Chinese society. The recent omnipresence of China in all types of media is still not accorded by its place in intellectual and academic production or expertise (Vukovich 2010, 148). Sinology has been – theoretically and methodologically – accused of unreflectingly repeating the wrongdoings and sins of its colonial and orientalist past. In the neo-liberal presence, the vast knowledge and profound understanding that the Chinese language and its humanistic tradition have to offer are not only seen as being redundant, but often (as many other potentially critical discourses) even as dangerous and hence unwanted. In recent years, most universities have replaced sinology by empirical Chinese studies, which are primarily oriented towards modern and contemporary China and more or less ignoring the richness and the latent, subtle, but sublime impact of its past. Most Western governments have drawn exclusively on information “supplied by ‘experts’ who, more often than not, are woefully lacking in knowledge of the history, languages, literatures, and customs of the countries they speak about” (Wixted 1989, 25).

Sinology, on the other hand, has hitherto still not solved most of the elementary problems connected to its “hybrid nature.” This problem is different and has to be treated separately from the (equally difficult and complex) problem of its Orientalist roots, which causes that numerous scholars both inside and outside China, taking their cue from Said, still believe that Sinology is a form of Orientalism (Gu 2013, 43). In his passionate attack against sinology as an academic discipline, Hans Kuijper dismisses sinologists as pseudo-scientists, for in his view, they are lacking any form of sinological theory (Kuijper 2014, 151). He also thinks that sinology is wrongly defined (namely by the object of its inquiry instead of by the optique on this object) and is not a systematic study (Kuijper 2000, 338). He is convinced that sinologists

do not see the nexus, or *Gestalt* (configuration), of the object of their study (China), the relationships between, or specific combination of, its elements or subsystems, the whole that is different from the sum of its numerous parts. ... They do not know how China, as an extremely complex *unity*, works; they do not comprehend its wiring, its deep structure and dynamics. Not seeking to “uncover” and understand the orderliness of China *qua* China, they disqualify as scientists. Indeed, the emperor is wearing no clothes (ibid.).

However, Kuijper also offers a solution to this problem he; proposes to the sinologists either to devote their careers to the project of translating the vast number of important works of Chinese culture that have still not been made available to the Western audience, or to collaborate in those fields of Chinese studies, in which they are interested, with (real) scholars of parallel Western disciplines, because the latter do possess a theory and a specific research methodology.

Notwithstanding Kuijper's well intended advices, it is certainly not necessary to emphasize that not everybody could agree with his assumptions – at least, of course, those sinologists who have gained an international reputation as brilliant theoreticians.

Hence, it is not surprising that according to Denis Twitchett, a renowned sinologist and expert for Chinese history,<sup>7</sup> sinology has “far more unity, a more closely integrated set of techniques, and far more of a corporate sense of purpose than has, for example, history” (ibid., 109).

It is doubtless true that in its Orientalistic past, (the relicts of which often spooked around even in some of the most distinguished Western departments of sinology until the beginning of the present century) sinologists were seen as a kind of experts for everything regarding China.<sup>8</sup> Nowadays, the only common point that all sinologists (should) possess, is their mastering of modern and classical Chinese language and the kind of general education regarding Chinese culture that has to be retained by an average Chinese high school graduate. In the course of their studies, Western students of sinology have thus to obtain at least the basic knowledge of Chinese political, socio-cultural and ideational history; they have to be acquainted with the main developmental trends and paradigms in Chinese literature, art and philosophy. French students of German studies, for instance, must not learn German philosophy or sociology in the course of their study. But in sinology, such subjects necessarily have to be a part of the obligatory curriculum, simply due to the fact, that European (or Western) students don't learn almost anything about Chinese history, culture and society during their high school education.

That is to say, Sinology should provide us with a broad understanding of Chinese culture and society in all its aspects, to give us the sort of instinctive understanding and orientation which we have of our own society simply by being born and educated in it. Moreover, it should give us the ability to see through the eyes of the Chinese literati who wrote our materials, and thus to enable us to discount their prejudices and preoccupations before reinterpreting what they have written in terms of our own (Twitchett 1964, 111).

This kind of general education is necessary even for those students, whose main interest is “only” the Chinese language and translations, and are therefore mainly interested in a linguistic training, for language is always an important and constitutive part of any culture.

However, sinologists who develop a special academic interest in any of the more specialized fields (e.g. Chinese history, sociology, philosophy, art, anthropology, law, etc.) have to go through a focused academic training in the respective discipline before they can become experts in the corresponding field. This is not an easy task, because it requires professional training in both Chinese and Western academia. Here, we have to consider the fact that academic teachers in individual sinology departments can offer a specialized academic training only in their own field of research. Hence, the sinological curricula in various departments differ from each other to a greater extent than most of the curricula

---

<sup>7</sup> Twitchett (1925–2006) was a well-known British sinologist. He was a renewed scholar, specialized in Chinese history and is famous as one of the authors and editors of the *Cambridge History of China*.

<sup>8</sup> At the other extreme, the term sinologist is also often used to characterize a rather ridiculous caricature compounded of pedantry and a preoccupation with peripheral and precious subjects of little general significance. However, Denis Twitchett, rightly reminds us that the pedantry and the preoccupation with trivia are by no means monopolies of the Sinologist: “A glance through current issues of journals concerned with Western history or the social sciences on the shelves of any library would lead one to suppose that a vigorous training in one of the disciplines is no more prophylactic against the misemployment of advanced techniques of analysis in the pursuit of unimportant topics” (Twitchett 1964, 110).

in other disciplines. In the ideal instance (which is often the case), future sinologists can combine their study with another discipline – and most often it is the same field as the one they want to specialize in within sinology.

But in strictly methodological sense, such an “ideal” combination is not as trouble-free as it seems to be at the first glance especially in those cases, in which the field of sinological specialization is being learned solely in one of the general (i.e. non-sinological) departments. As we shall see in later parts of this book, the optique of Western methodological systems does not always apply to the study of Chinese tradition. On the contrary, sometimes it can be quite disturbing. Academic methodology is namely (at least in the fields of social sciences and humanities) always implying a certain kind of viewing and interpreting reality. In Western humanities, these discrete approaches to reality are results of specific (i.e. Western) historical and ideational developments. Such methodologies provide us with a systematic set of categories and concepts; it furnishes us with a setting of methods and with a series of referential frameworks. These are necessary and essential elements of any theory. However, while the specific methodologies that were created in particular disciplines can offer us a special tool to work with, it is precisely the very same tool that simultaneously limits our treatment of the selected subject matter, if it pertains to a different language and culture. If we namely internalize this particular view of reality, we might overlook numerous, often significant, elements that can only manifest themselves when observed from a different viewpoint which lies beyond the methodological framework we are using, because it is embedded in different paradigms of perceiving, understanding and interpreting reality.

As already mentioned, concepts, categories and methods of inquiry cannot be automatically transferred from one socio-cultural or linguistic area into another. This becomes even more visible if the two areas in question are separated by significant differences in linguistic, grammatical and semantic structures, by large spatial distances and by diverse trajectories of historical and socio-cultural developments.

Nowadays, it is a long known fact that applying terms and classifications deriving from Western social sciences or Western economic-political theory to the histories and present situations in non-Western societies and cultural areas can be seriously misleading. Even today, several Chinese (and even Western) theoreticians who work with Western sociological categories in an uncritical way, still denote all ancient, medieval and pre-modern developmental periods of the Chinese societies with the term “feudalism,” although the modes and structures of production were completely different throughout the Chinese and European histories respectively.<sup>9</sup> The non-European modes of production were

---

<sup>9</sup> If at all, the term “feudalism” applies in China solely for the Western Zhou period (1066–771 BCE). In Europe, feudalism was determined by the hierarchical relationships between different positions within the nobility, and by the farmers and workers (villeins) who invested their physical labor by which they supported the entire social structure, a part of which were also influential religious leaders. Nobility titles, as well as the position of the villeins were hereditary, which means that the latter were dependent serfs with respect to their lord. In China, on the other hand, the peasants who cultivated the land of the owners, who belonged to the gentry, were basically free to leave. The system was controlled by the bureaucracy class; the positions within this class were not hereditary. Instead, they were based on a form of “meritocracy,” i.e. the official examination system. In translating the Western term “feudalism” into their language, the Chinese translators have applied the term “*fengjian* 封建,” which was originally a Confucian and Legalist notion describing a decentralized system of government during the Zhou dynasty, based on four elementary occupations. To increase the confusion, the



always seen as a kind of deviation from the norm – thus, for instance, the establishment of the term “Asiatic mode of production” along with all its utterly negative connotations. The same applies, for example, to the modernization theories and the role of non-European ideational traditions in these processes. (Rošker 2016, 9–23) Without a detailed and in depth sinological research, the clarification of such Eurocentric “misunderstandings” in social sciences would not be possible.

The same goes for most of the disciplines and research fields within humanities. In making history, experts of this discipline cannot surpass difficulties related with discursive representations, simply due to the fact that constructing and writing history as such is necessarily a process of representation grounded upon a discourse. Regarding the writing and the evaluation of Chinese history, sinology and the issues it highlights, are substantial in helping historians become more conscious of the problematic nature of history and historiography, and hence more critical to the discourse in which they are working and from which they are a part. It is sinological knowledge that allows them to understand how and why understanding is being standardized, “normalized” and Westernized, and to see the implications of such knowledge for the construction of history (Mittal 2015, 1). It is namely by no means sufficient to simply re-place this discourse into the framework of post-colonialism, because this field of research and writing still structures the non-Western problems in the very framework of Western axiology and methodology.

This problem is also well-known in the field of comparative literature. Many Western sinology trained experts in Chinese literature emphasize the fact that Chinese literature is not well-served by Western generic classifications. The treatments of non-Western literatures through the lens of the criteria established by Western formal, technical, structural and narrative approaches still remain rooted in Eurocentric assumptions. However, these have to be critically questioned:

Assumptions are a natural and necessary way of extrapolating and applying information, but it ought to be salutary to examine the ways in which

- 1) Chinese literature is not, and perhaps cannot be, represented by wholly equivalent terminology when treated in non-Chinese languages, and
- 2) Chinese literature is treated as forming a coherent and national whole, and whether this accurately reflects the scope of sinophone writing (Stenberg 2014, 287).

Josh Stenberg critically questions such a genre universalism by highlighting that it is still reasonable to ask whether French *roman* and the English novel were “the same thing” (ibid.), or whether the novel as such is a definable unit at all. It is certainly true, however, that they were at least conceived and developed with knowledge of each other and thus with a certain sense of equivalence, while also having common areas of reference. None of this applies to the Chinese “novel” (i.e. *xiaoshuo* 小說). “This same concern should run through all of the equivalences made between the European generic terms – *poetry*, *biography*, *prose*, perhaps especially *drama*” (ibid., 288) and independent traditions with their own names and histories. The same holds true for the classification of literary

---

Chinese version of Marxism has (in order to ensure that China also fitted into the “norm,” i.e. into the Marxist classification of particular stages of social development) defined the entire traditional and pre-modern period of Chinese social history as a form of “feudalism.”

currents, movements or styles, because literary works always represent different cultural conditioned interpretations of social problems, connected to different intellectual histories, moral philosophies, social criticism, aesthetic formations and other fields of reasoning which are of relevance to the way humans interpret meaning.

It is certainly not a coincidence that Lu Xun, for instance, has often been named “the Chinese Gorki” by literary criticism. But nevertheless, the reality from which Lu Xun’s “madman” is escaping and which he fears to death, the reality which swallows lives and destroys destinies of all his characters, is completely different from the one from which Gorki’s heroes are fleeing and in which they have been helplessly thrown. Not only sinological, but also literary comparatists and theoreticians should always be reminded of such facts, because they still tend to excessively press the creative work of “other” cultures artists into the molds of Western methodological classifications. Therefore, the great works of Chinese literature should not be read through the optics of Eurocentric categories of the traditional “World literature,” which primarily referred to the masterpieces of Western European literature, because such a reading necessarily transforms them into weak versions of this allegedly “universal” discourse. (Pizer 2006, 32–9)

Perhaps the illiteracy regarding differently structured principles for creating literary or artistic products becomes most visible in the example of traditional Chinese poetry. In their work, almost no traditional Western translator has tried to maintain the very strict metric principles typical of classical Chinese poetry. This kind of ignorance has led to certain prejudices, which underlie most of the public perceptions of traditional Chinese lyrics in Western regions. Chief among these is the false assumption that they belong to a highly “modernistic” style of poetry, based on pure association, and written in a free verse style, without any restrictions regarding rhythm, rhymes, or other prosody or versification instructions. This, of course, is again a completely wrong view, because, as every sinologist knows, most of the traditional Chinese poetry was created under application and consideration of very strict and complex metrical rules. (Rošker 2014, 26; see also Lomova 2018, 70)

### **Textual criticism and discursive translations**

All these questions point to the fact that comparative views in any of the disciplines are difficult and much more complex than it seems at a first glance. However, sinology is – in its essence – a discipline that stands and comes into action in any serious comparison or communication between any aspect of Chinese and Western cultures. In its nature, it is a bridge, connecting different cultural, historical and ideational heritages by introducing and interpreting one to another. And in its specific discourse, which is defined by transitions and by fusions of different cultural, ideational and linguistic spheres, it developed very specific, and relatively coherent, disciplinary methods. The common thread or the general basis of all these methods manifests itself in the methodological framework of a vigorous textual and philological criticism, which necessarily underlies any kind of historically conscious research investigating China and its multifarious cultures. Textual criticism is the analysis and the interpretation of texts via their semantical, syntactical, historical, and cultural contexts. Questions about the life of the author, the way the

author's use of language fits in with the text's time period, and so on, are also part of textual criticism (Creeler 2014, 201. See also Shun 2009, 458).

As an interpretative and analytical discipline, sinology necessarily includes translations – however, not merely direct translations of a wide opus of classical Chinese works, as advised by Hans Kuijper. Of course, systematic and exhaustive translations of all important classical works which shaped the Chinese intellectual tradition doubtless also belongs to the most important tasks for those sinologists who are specialized in Chinese linguistics and trained in the translation theories. However, what I have in mind, is clearly not limited to merely rendering one language into another, but also involves the “translation” or transposition of different discourses. This form of “translation” is often taking place merely on the abstract level of reasoning and must not necessary be written down let alone published. It is an essential part of every sinological research and involves interpretations of individual textual and speech structures, categories, concepts and values that differ depending on their socio-cultural contexts. In the process of such work which is relies on both analytical as well as hermeneutic methods, sinologists often encounter a discrepancy between the etymological and the functional understanding of a given expression. In some cases, the same notion may even be understood completely differently, depending on the general social context of the two different societies in which it appears.

To illustrate this point, I shall shortly explain the results of an intercultural socio-linguistic investigation (Rošker 1995, and Rošker 2012), which I conducted in Taiwan and partly (for the sake of the comparative perspective) in Central Europe in 1995. The study included inspection and comparison of several different dictionaries and encyclopedias, textual analyses as well as contrastive proportional surveys in Central Europe and in Taiwan.<sup>10</sup> The results of the inquiry clearly exposed that the common understanding of the word *autonomy* in the Central European cultural and linguistic context is closely connected to the notion of freedom in the sense of non-interference. The general perception of its official synonym in the Chinese language (*zìlǜ* 自律), on the other hand, proved to be mainly linked to the semantic complex of “self-restriction” in the sense of self-control and self-discipline respectively.<sup>11</sup> These two kinds of comprehension are not only different, but also mutually contradictive, although the etymological meaning of both terms (*autonomy* and *zìlǜ* respectively) is more or less the same, both implying concepts as “self-law” or “self-regulation” and phrases like “to decide one's own law” or “to establish the law (or regulations) by oneself.” The research results have shown that this discrepancy derives from different understandings of the notion law<sup>12</sup> and its respective traditional connotations in both cultures in question. In Europe, the law was established

---

<sup>10</sup> The informers were 2nd grade students of the Educational sciences at the universities in Vienna (50), Ljubljana (50) and Hsinchu (103).

<sup>11</sup> 91% of the European informants described the notion of autonomy with terms such as “independence”, “self-dependence”, “self-determination” and “freedom”, i.e. with words belonging to the semantic scope of a condition without any external limitations or impacts. On the other hand, over 88% of the Chinese informants have described the meaning of the term 自律 with notions pertaining to the scope of self – conscious consideration of rules or limitations, such as self-restriction (自我约束), “self-control (自我控制)”, or “self-discipline (自我纪律)” (Rošker 2012, 33–34).

<sup>12</sup> Which were, of course, rooted in the different social functions of law in the Chinese and the European societies.

in order to protect individuals (and their property) from the violence and heteronomy of the others; hence, it included both, the restrictive, but also the protective function. The latter was closely associated with freedom, because only a safe person could afford to be free. The person with the greatest amount or degree of freedom was, according to such a logic, the person who had the power to establish the law by oneself. In China, on the other hand, law was never (with a tiny exception of the Qin 秦 dynasty rule, which lasted 15 years) seen as the main means for regulating human relationships and it was mainly associated with restrictions, prohibitions and punishments. Hence, to establish a law for and by oneself could only imply self-restriction or self-discipline. These connotations are still reflected in the general understanding of the Indo-European notions of word autonomy, and in the Chinese term *zili* which was – according to most dictionaries – often used as its synonym.

A broader socio-semantic investigation, which was conducted subsequently, has namely clearly shown that the European term *law* and its Chinese synonym *fa* 法 have the same format and functional meaning; yet their mutual difference arises only from their particular cultural connotations. Although such inquiries might seem redundant, because they seemingly focus upon some trivial and unimportant terminological issues, they can have significant discrete consequences. When an average Chinese person speaks about autonomy, the concept she has in mind is something completely different from what an average Austrian person has in mind when mentioning the same term. If they speak with each other about autonomy, they will therefore often speak about two different things. This is only one small example for illustrating the fact that in-depth sinological research and discursive translation is significant not only for classical studies, but also for understanding contemporary China. It also shows that often – especially if we are dealing with conceptually complex texts and/or abstract theoretical discourses – a mere literal translation cannot provide a suitable tool for rendering meanings between different cultures. This inadequacy becomes even more apparent when we translate texts that originated in two different cultural areas that are as far apart historically, traditionally, and linguistically as China and Europe. In such case, we rather apply the method of discursive translations (Robins 1994, 406; Hadley 2017, 2; Acosta 2019, 10), which cannot be limited to a linguistic word for word transfer but must include the interpretation of specific textual/speech structures, categories, concepts and values existing in diverse socio-cultural contexts. In the context of the above example, our translation of the Chinese word *zili* could not remain limited to one word, but should also include a short illumination of its specific conceptual background. The same applies for many concepts and categories of Chinese philosophy, which have no precise synonyms in Western languages and which are often translated with false (or at least misleading) terms, such as, for instance *li* 理, *qi* 氣, *jingjie* 境界, *dao* 道, etc. However, this does by no means imply the elimination of positivist philological research. On the contrary: although nowadays, such approaches have often been seen as outdated and obsolete, a solid and objective philological knowledge is a necessary precondition for any serious discursive translation. Only if we can contemplate upon every single word and carefully consider style and formal aspects of the translation, we will become able “to present the original as an intelligible, yet alien text open to the scrutiny of (our) readers and to possible further dialogues about its meaning” (Lomova 2018, 81).

In recent years, there has been a growing demand to revive the classic categories and concepts of traditional Chinese sources. This approach, however, involves the transcultural relativization of the contents based on methodologies that correspond to the specific requirements of research in the Chinese ideational tradition, and comparative philosophy or cultural studies in general. The priority in this approach is preserving traditional Chinese philosophical characteristics and maintaining autochthonous and traditional methodological principles. However, this does not mean denying or excluding an intellectual confrontation with Western (and global) philosophical systems. Global (especially European and Indian) philosophy includes numerous elements that cannot be found in the Chinese tradition. The investigation and application of these elements is not only a valuable means for fertilizing new idea systems, but also offers an important comparative tool for better understanding one's own tradition. At the same time, as the modern Chinese theorist Zhang Dainian<sup>13</sup> cautioned, we must avoid the use of incompatible or incommensurable methods that attempt to study Chinese history through the lens of Western concepts and categories: "Different philosophical theories use different concepts and categories. Concepts and categories used in philosophical theories can differ greatly from one nation to another" (Zhang Dainian 2003, 118).<sup>14</sup>

As a final point, we must also take into account the differences between the original Chinese notions and their semantic connotations that originate in the translations of these notions into Indo-European languages. The expression "*ru xue* 儒學," for instance, is commonly translated as "Confucianism" (also in the compounds as "New," "Contemporary" or "Modern Confucianism").<sup>15</sup> Thus, it automatically connotes Confucius (Kong fuzi)<sup>16</sup> and the various historical phases of the Confucian teachings. But "*ru xue*" actually signifies "the teachings of the scholars,"<sup>17</sup> which means that this expression does not a-priori exclude any of the major influences on the history of Chinese thought. In fact, this idea of traditional Chinese philosophy as the "teachings of the scholars" has been shared by most traditional discourses or lines of thought.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>13</sup> 張岱年.

<sup>14</sup> 不同的哲學理論包涵不同的概念, 範疇. 不同的民族的哲學理論, 更是具有不同的概念, 範疇.

<sup>15</sup> During the last decade, the term "Ruism" as a new translation for "*ru xue*" also became increasingly common in Western Sinology.

<sup>16</sup> 孔夫子.

<sup>17</sup> Numerous sinologists have noted the wider connotational scope of the term *ruxue* 儒學. Roger Ames, for example, has shown how this notion refers to a general classical "scholarly tradition" (see Ames 2011, 5). This, of course, does not mean that Daoist and Buddhist texts were included in the Confucian canon, but only confirms how inextricably intertwined these three major idea systems were. In most forms of Confucian state orthodoxy, e.g. the *Shiji* 史記 and *Hanshu* 漢書, the term *Ru* 儒 basically signifies an expert in the Five Classics. In her book on Confucianism and women, Li-Hsiang Lisa Rosenlee also writes: "The concept of *Ru* 儒... denotes the inexact Chinese counterpart of the term Confucianism used by Jesuits in the 18th century... The ambiguity of its semantic origins in ancient, pre-Confucian times obscures the connection between *Ru* as an intellectual discipline and Confucius, as its most prominent spokesperson. Unlike the term Confucianism – its secularized and simplified representation in the West – the complex term *Ru* can only be approximated as the teaching of the sages and the worthies wherein the ethical teaching of Confucius – the Supreme sage and the First teacher – forms a part, but an important part nevertheless" (Rosenlee 2006, 4).

<sup>18</sup> In considering specific features of traditional Chinese philosophy that are common to all schools of ancient and classical Chinese thought, of primary importance are the concept of transcendence in immanence (or immanent transcendence), binary structured holism which functions by means of binary categories (for example *yin-yang*, *you-wu*, *ti-yong*, *ming-shi* etc), as well as the principle of complementarity which represents the method of interactions between both implied antipodes.

In sinology – and in any branch of Chinese studies, textual criticism and discursive translations belong to reliable and comprehensive methods, which, of course, can only be applied after a long-lasting process of acquiring a wide, profound and detailed sinological education. They are elementary methodological paradigms for sinology and Chinese studies as academic disciplines, paradigms, which enable us to skillfully navigate and find our safe way between the Scylla of essentialism and Charybdis of evolutionism.

## Acknowledgement

The author acknowledges the financial support from the Slovenian Research Agency (ARRS) in the framework of the research core funding *Asian Languages and Cultures* (P6-0243) and in the scope of the research project N6-0161 (Complementary scheme) *Humanism in Intercultural Perspective: Europe and China*.

---

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Acosta, Mariola, et al. (2019). "Discursive translations of gender mainstreaming norms: The case of agricultural and climate change policies in Uganda". *Women's Studies International Forum*, 74:4, 9–19.
- Al-Azm, Sadiq Jalal (1980). "Orientalism and Orientalism in Reverse." In: *Europe Solidaire Sans Frontières*. <http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article20360>.
- Ames, Roger T. (2011). *Confucian Role Ethics: A Vocabulary*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Chabi, Mohammed (2012). "Orientalism Vs Occidentalism". *Morocco World News*, 05.11.2012. <https://www.morocoworldnews.com/2012/11/63750/orientalism-vs-occidentalism/>. Accessed: 28.01.2021.
- Creller, Aaron (2014). *Making Space for Knowing: A Capacious Alternative to Propositional Knowledge*. Ph.D Dissertation. Honolulu: University of Hawaii at Manoa.
- Dai, Yuanfang, ed. (2020). *Transcultural Feminist Philosophy: Rethinking Difference and Solidarity Through Chinese—American Encounters*. Lanham: Lexington Books.
- Fredericks, James (1988). "The Kyoto School: Modern Buddhist Philosophy and the Search for a Transcultural Theology." *Horizons* 15:2, 299–315.
- Gu, Ming Dong (2013). *Sinologism: An Alternative to Orientalism and Postcolonialism*. New York: Routledge.
- Hahm, Chaibong (2000). "How the East was Won: Orientalism and the New Confucian Discourse in East Asia." *Development and Society* 29:1, 97–109.
- Hadley, James (2017). "Indirect translation and discursive identity: Proposing the concatenation effect hypothesis." *Translation Studies* 10:2, 183–97.
- Heubel, Fabian (2020). "Within the Spinning Stillness of the Present". *Asian Studies* 8:3, 211–30.
- Kuijper, Hans (2000). "Is Sinology a Science?" *China Report* 36:3, 331–54.
- Kuijper, Hans (2014). "What's Wrong With the Study of China/Countries?" *Asian Studies*, 2:1, 151–85.
- Lary, Diana (2006). "Edward Said: Orientalism and Occidentalism." *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association / Revue de la Société historique du Canada* 17:2, 3–15.
- Lee, Ming-Huei (2013). *Konfuzianischer Humanismus – Transkulturelle Kontexte*. Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag.
- Lomova, Olga (2018). "Oriental Philology in the Service of Bettering Man: Rudolf Dvořák's Czech Translation of the Daodejing". *Studia Orientalia Slovaca*, 17:1, 65–83.
- Mittal, Ayesha (2015). "Eurocentric Criticism: The Problem with 'Orientalism' and Post-Colonial Theory." *Ayesha Mittal Writes: Pop Culture, History and Politics through a Feminist and Racial Lens* website, <https://amittalwrites.wordpress.com/2015/04/13/eurocentric-criticism-the-problem-with-orientalism-and-post-colonial-theory/>. Accessed 06.02., 2019.
- Nielsen, Greg (1995). "Bakhtin and Habermas: Toward a Transcultural Ethics." *Theory and Society* 24:6, 803–35.

- Nelson, Eric S. (2020). "Zhang Junmai's Early Political Philosophy and the Paradoxes of Chinese Modernity." *Asian Studies* 8:1, 183–208.
- Ongun, Ömer (2016). "From Interculturalism to Transculturality: The Puzzling Form of Cultures Today." Intercultural learning website. <http://ectp.eu/efillife/?p=1816>. Accessed: 28.01.2021.
- Pizer, John (2006). *The Idea of World Literature: History and Pedagogical Practice*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.
- Robyns, Clem (1994). "Translation and Discursive Identity." *Poetics Today* 15:3, 405–428.
- Rosenlee, Li-Hsiang Lisa (2006). *Confucianism and Women: A Philosophical Interpretation*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Rošker, Jana S. (1995). "Intercultural Comparative Survey on the Understanding of the Concept Autonomy." (Questionary 12.11.1995). Hsinchu: National Hsinchu University of Education.
- Rošker, Jana S. (2012). "Cultural Conditionality of Comprehension: The Perception of Autonomy in China." In: *Reinventing Identities: The Poetics of Language Use in Contemporary China*, edited by Tian Hailong 田海龍, Cao Qing 曹清, et al., Tianjin: Nankai daxue chubanshe. 26–42.
- Rošker, Jana S. (2014). "Introduction." In: *The Hermit: Classical Chinese Lyrics in Slovene, English and German translation*. Ljubljana: Znanstvena založba FF. 24–31.
- Rošker, Jana S. (2016). *The Rebirth of The Moral Self: The Second Generation Of The Modern Confucians and Their Modernization Discourses*. Hong Kong, Honolulu: Chinese University Press and University of Hawaii Press.
- Rüssen, Jörn (2004). "How to Overcome Eurocentrism? Approaches to a Culture of Recognition by History in the 21st Century." *Taiwan Journal of East Asian Studies*, June 2004: 59–74.
- Said, Edward W. (1978). *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Shun, Kwong-loi (2009). "Studying Confucian and Comparative Ethics: Methodological Reflections." *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 36:3, 455–78.
- Siegel, Harvey (1999). "Multiculturalism and the Possibility of Transcultural Educational and Philosophical Ideals." *Philosophy* 74:3, 387–409.
- Silius, Vyta (2020). "Diversifying Academic Philosophy." *Asian Studies* 8 (2): 257–80.
- Stenberg, Josh (2014). "Two Questions about Categories in the Relationship of Chinese Literature to World Literature." *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature / Revue Canadienne de Littérature Comparée* 41:3, 287–303.
- Twitcheit, Denis (1964). "A Lone Cheer for Sinology." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 24:1, 109–12.
- Valera, Eduardo Pérez J. (1972b). "Toward a Transcultural Philosophy (II)." *Monumenta Nipponica* 27:2, 175–89.
- Vukovich, Daniel (2010). "China in Theory: the Orientalist Production of Knowledge in the Global Economy." *Cultural Critique* 2010 76, 148–72.
- Welsch, Wolfgang (1999). "Transculturality-The Puzzling Form of Cultures Today." In: Mike Featherstone and Scott Lash (eds.), *Spaces of Culture: City, Nation, World*. London: Sage. 194–213.
- West, Cornel (1993). "Lecture: Beyond Eurocentrism and Multiculturalism." *Modern Philology* 90 (Supplement): 144–51.
- Wixted, John Timothy (1989). "Reverse Orientalism." *Sino-Japanese Studies* 2:1, 17–27.
- Yao, Dadui 姚达兑 (2019). "Dongfanzhuyi, hanxuezhuyi yu shijie wenxue lilun 东方主义、汉学主义与世界文学理论" [Orientalism, Sinologism and the Global Literary Theory]. *Zhongguo yuyan wenxue yanjiu*, 2019 02, 210–217.
- Zhang, Dainian 張岱年 (2003). *Zhongguo zhexueshi fangfalun fajan 中國哲學史方法論發凡 [An Outline of the Methodology of the History of Chinese Philosophy]*. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju.
- Zhang Moyan 張墨研 (2020). »Weiwushiguande quanqiu shiye – bo hou zhiminzhuyi Makesi pipande sange jieduan 唯物史观的全球视野 – 驳后殖民主义马克思批判的三个阶段« [Redrawing the global map – The Global Vision of the Materialist Conception of History: Three Stages of Rebuttal to The Criticism of Marx from Postcolonialism]. *Dangdai guowai Makesizhuyi pinglun* 2020 02, 215–236.
- Zheng Jiangtao 郑江涛 and Chen Yan 陈艳 (2019). "Wenhua zixin yu Sayidede dongfangzhuyi 文化自信与萨义德的东方主义" [Cultural self-confidence and Said's orientalism]. *Dazhong wenyi*, 2019 04, 235–236.





## CONTRIBUTORS

---

**Dušan Andrš** is an assistant professor at the Department of Sinology, Charles University, Faculty of Arts. In his research he focuses on essay, particularly from the Republican period, and on theoretical issues of the Prague School of Sinology. He is an accomplished translator of essays, fiction, and poetry (Feng Zikai, Shen Congwen, Lo Ch'ing) (e-mail: dusan.andrs@ff.cuni.cz).

**Martin Blahota** is a PhD candidate at Charles University. He specializes in modern Chinese literature and colonial modernity in East Asia. He has published research articles dealing with censorship in Manchukuo. Currently he is working on his dissertation, which focuses on Pan-Asianist discourse in Sinophone Manchukuo literature. (e-mail: martinblahota@hotmail.com)

**Mariia Guleva** is a PhD candidate at Charles University, studying political cartoons in the first decade of the PRC. Her research interests focus on visual sources in the exploration of Chinese politics and history. She has published articles on images of Russia and the U.S.S.R. in China and vice versa during the 20th century. (e-mail: mariia.guleva@ff.cuni.cz)

**Lenka Chaloupková** is a PhD candidate at Charles University working on the topic of the role of impressionism in the modernization of Chinese music. She is also a research fellow at the Faculty of Arts, Charles University working on topics of intercultural contacts between China and Europe. (e-mail: lenka.chaloupkova@ff.cuni.cz)

**Olga Lomová** is professor of Chinese literature at Charles University in Prague. Her research interest comprises medieval Chinese literature, particularly poetry, and intellectual transformation in early 20th century China; she also teaches and writes about PRC ideology. Recently she dedicated several research articles and a book to the history of Czech sinology. (e-mail: olga.lomova@ff.cuni.cz)

**Mingwei Song** is a Professor of Modern Chinese Literature at Wellesley College and the Chair of the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures. He specializes in modern

Chinese literature and intellectual history, film studies, science fiction, and youth culture, and published numerous books and articles in English and Chinese on these topics.  
(email: msong2@wellesley.edu)

**Jana Rošker** is professor of Sinology in the University of Ljubljana. Her main academic interests include Chinese epistemology, Chinese logic and Modern Confucianism in East Asia. On these topics she has published fifteen books, and numerous articles and book chapters. Prof. Rošker is chief editor of the academic journal *Asian Studies* and the founder and first president of the European Association of Chinese Philosophy (EACP).  
(e-mail: jana.rosker@ff.uni-lj.si).

**Jan Vrhovski** is currently working as a research fellow at the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia. His current research foci include modern Chinese philosophy, history and philosophy of logic in China, and Wittgenstein. He has written his dissertation “Patterns of Thought and Numbers: A History of Mathematical Logic in Late-Republican and Early-Socialist China (1930–1960)” at Charles University in Prague.  
(e-mails: jan.vrhovski@ff.uni-lj.si; vvei.yang@gmail.com)



ACTA UNIVERSITATIS CAROLINAE  
**PHILOLOGICA 3/2021**

Editors: Jiří Hudeček  
Olga Lomová

Cover and layout by Kateřina Řezáčová  
Published by Charles University  
Karolinum Press, Ovocný trh 560/5, 116 36 Praha 1  
[www.karolinum.cz](http://www.karolinum.cz)  
Typeset by Karolinum Press  
Printed by Karolinum Press

ISSN 0567-8269 (Print)  
ISSN 2464-6830 (Online)  
MK ČR E 19831

Distributed by Faculty of Arts, Charles University,  
2 Jan Palach Sq., 116 36 Prague 1, Czech Republic  
([books@ff.cuni.cz](mailto:books@ff.cuni.cz))