1905, 1955, 2005
Three Moments of Modern Chinese Literature*

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ABSTRACT
This essay examines the dynamics of modern Chinese literature by looking into three moments: 1905, 1955 and 2005. 1905 appeared to be one of the inchoate moments that set the tone of the politics of literature in subsequent decades. 1955 marked the heyday of antagonism (as well as unlikely dialogue) between the two Chinese regimes in literary and cultural production. While 2005 may appear to have been “a year of no significance,” a question can be asked: To what extent can one say the specters of 1905 and 1955 have dissipated, or have never left?

By setting the literary phenomena of 1905, 1955, 2005 side by side, I have no intention to reinstate the laws of historical causality. In sharp contrast to such a mechanical notion, I look for clues and traces that would enable us to recognize anew the complex voices in the formation of modern Chinese literature. I propose that Chinese literary modernity does not take place with a single formula, for an elite group of writers and readers, or at a sanctioned historical moment. Modernity indicates not a mythical telos but a historical re-positioning. Only when one is aware of the multiple temporal zones played out against each other in the dialectics of modernity can one continuously enact as well as undo the spell of the modern.

Key Words: Modernity

On September 24, 1905, at the Beijing railway station, a bomb exploded and caused a bloody chaos. The bomb was set off by a young man named Wu Yue 呉樾 (1878–1905), who meant to assassinate five envoys sent by the Qing court to
investigate monarchical constitutionalism overseas. The bomb blew up too soon, however; instead of the members of the imperial delegation, it killed Wu himself.\textsuperscript{1} Wu's wife, who had encouraged her husband to engage in the assassination, committed suicide upon hearing of his sacrifice.

In many ways the death of Wu Yue and his wife dramatized the explosive nature of late Qing sociopolitics in 1905. This is the year that saw the Russo-Japanese War being fought in Manchuria and other places, a war resulting in the rise of Japan as a new imperialist power in Asia. But for thousands of Chinese intellectuals the more imminent concern was the abrogation of the thousand-year-old imperial examination system. When the Qing court decreed to abolish the system, it set in motion a domino effect on the paradigmatic shifts in Chinese learning, education, bureaucratic mechanism, and cultural politics. Meanwhile, revolutionary forces loomed ever larger. The United League 同盟會 (Tong-meng hui) was established in Tokyo in August, 1905.

One can enumerate other events that happened in 1905, including a nationwide boycott of American products in response to the American renewal of Chinese Exclusion Acts; the installation of the first long-distance official phone line between Beijing and Tianjin; the Chinese investment in railroad and mining rights in Sichuan and Shanxi; the making of the first Chinese film Dingjun shan 定軍山 (Dingjun mountain), starring the leading Chinese opera singer Tan Xinpei 譚鑫培, in Beijing; the death of Huang Zunxian 黃遵憲 (1848–1905), diplomat and pioneer of late Qing poetry reform; and the five imperial commissioners' overseas mission to investigate constitutional monarchy, that led to Wu Yue's suicidal bomb attempt.

While 1905 may represent an eventful year in Chinese sociopolitical history, in what sense has it inscribed its significance—or insignificance—in cultural and literary practice? Cultural reform, above all, was heralded by late Qing literati from Yan Fu to Liang Qichao as the cardinal of all reforms, and literature in particular was singled out as essential to awakening Chinese souls.

Wu Yue and his wife, for instance, did not just lose their lives in an aborted assassination attempt. Their sacrifice became all the more memorable thanks to Wu Yue's essays in a collection titled Ansha shidai 暗殺時代 (A Time of assassination), and a poem by Wu's wife bidding farewell to her husband who was about to undertake his mission. Wu's wife wrote:

\textsuperscript{1} For more details of Wu Yue's background and assassination attempt, see Nan Guo, \textit{Pili shouduan: Wu Yue zhuan} (An explosive undertaking: a biography of Wu Yue) (Taipei: Jindai zhongguo chubanshe, 1981).
I wish my husband to love his country and save his countrymen
Few are the men who could harbor such courage
I regret for not having the talent to offer support
But please do not feel sad for our separation.\(^2\)

The poem attests as much to Wu’s and his wife’s revolutionary comradeship as
to their romantic pact. Whereas Wu appears ready to act out both chivalric
gallantry and anarchist martyrdom, Wu’s wife demonstrates a death wish sug-
gestive of both a chaste wife and a radical woman like Sophia Provoskaya, one
of the best known foreign figures in late Qing China.\(^3\) Wu Yue’s and his wife’s
writings as well as works in commemoration of the couple registered the tenor
of the literary politics at the time and subsequent decades. Where politics begot
literature, ink demanded blood.

The case of Wu Yue and his wife was not alone in 1905. In April that year,
Zou Rong 鄒容 (1885–1905) died in jail at the age of twenty. Together with
Zhang Taiyan 章太炎 (1869–1936), Zou was imprisoned in 1903 due to his anti-
Manchu essays in the Subao 蘇報 (Jiangsu news), a case that drew the attention
of even the Empress Dowager. Zou’s Gemiai jun 革命軍 (Revolutionary army,
1903), was to be remembered not only for its vehement revolutionary thought but
for its romantic posture, one that united youthful passion and will to death.

The woman revolutionary Qiu Jin 秋瑾 (1875–1907) was writing in Japan
that summer her tanci narrative Jingwei shi 精衛石 (The stones of Jingwei).
Inspired by the myth of the Jingwei Bird tirelessly filling the sea with pebbles
at the cost of its own life, Qiu Jin promoted in her work women’s emancipation
in conjunction with the call for radical revolution. Two years later she would
sacrifice her own life for her cause, and her narrative remained an unfinished
project—uncannily reflecting the Sisyphean theme of the Jingwei Bird’s tale.

In December of 1905, an overseas student, Chen Tianhua 陳天華 (1875–1905),
drowned himself in Japan in protest against the Japanese government’s tight-
cened control over overseas Chinese students’ political activities. Besides his
political engagement, Chen was a writer known for such nationalist ballads as
Jingshi zhong 警世鐘 (The bell that alarms the world, 1903). Wu Yue is said to
have adopted a revolutionary vocation under the influence of Chen’s works.

\(^2\) 勸君愛國救同胞，幾個男兒意氣豪；愧我無才能共濟，莫因離別賦牢騷。See Liu Na, Shanbian: Xinhai gemiai shiqi zhi wusi shiqi de zhongguo wenxue (Transformations: Chinese litera-
ture from the Republican Revolution era to the May Fourth era) (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui

\(^3\) Ibid., 99.
When he died, Chen’s novel *Shizihou* 獅子吼 (Lion’s roar, 1905) was still being serialized in the *Minbao* 民報 (People’s daily). Framed in a dystopian allegory, the novel tells of a Country of Chaos (Hundun guo, 混沌國) being encroached on by a small, barbarous people from northeastern Asia, and it calls for a radical insurrection so as to rescue the country from its demise.  

A high-strung, contentious call for political provocation permeated twentieth century Chinese literature, and 1905 appeared to be one of the inchoate moments that set the tone of “calls for arms” in subsequent decades. But if 1905 is memorable, it is not merely because it registered a linkage between literature and politics. As will be discussed in the following, this was a year that saw historical urgency and global relevancy find multiple literary manifestations, as evinced by works by writers such as Liu E, Wu Jianren, Zeng Pu, Huang Xiaopei, and many others. While national crisis might concern all these writers, the ways by which they inscribed their lived and imagined experience demonstrate a kaleidoscopic vision of China, one that would dazzle even a reader of this century. It is these writers’ contested curiosities and experimentations that brought about the “politics” of literature.

Departing from the vantage point of 1905, this essay proposes to examine another two moments, 1955 and 2005. The choice of dates is not as arbitrary as it might seem. 1955 marked the heyday of antagonism between the two Chinese regimes. Against the backdrop of the Cold War, the Nationalist regime brought the anti-communist campaign to a new climax, while the Communist regime was further tightening the screws on its own propaganda machine. When writing turned from individual vocation into state-mandated mission, writers lost the autonomy that had been conceived half a century before. External interventions aside, they had to cope with the *implosion* of the raison d’être of writing—their predicaments may have derived from the very poetics that gave rise to modern literary politics, and they would pay ever increasing prices for the marriage of art and revolution in the next two decades.

Chinese societies underwent a drastic transformation in the last quarter of the modern century, so much so that, as 2005 has drawn to a close, one may look back at mid-twentieth-century ideological fanaticism and literary propaganda as if they were often more than that. While 2005 may appear to have been a year of no significance, questions may already be asked: To what extent can one

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4. It is noticeable that Chen’s is an eclectic treatise, his sources including Darwin’s evolutionism to Huxley’s Social Darwinian thought, Rousseau’s *The Social Contract*, and Huang Zongxi’s loyalist treatise *Waiting for the Dawn* (Mingyi daifang lu).
say the specters of 1905 and 1955 have dissipated, or have never left? What lessons on literary modernity can one draw from the changes and continuities of the three historical periods? Has the cultural and literary politics that still preoccupies Chinese intellectuals and literati brought out a new way of imagining China? Most importantly, are scholars and critics in China and overseas ready to reassess the paths which had been glimpsed but remained untrod for various reasons; and to rethink the repressed modernities in Chinese literature?

1905

Chinese literature from the Opium War to the fall of the Qing (1841–1911) has been categorized as late Qing literature or jindai wenxue 近代文學. Conventional wisdom sees late Qing literature as a moment when the old literary order was falling apart and the new one was yet to be established—a transitional period that anticipated modern Chinese literature proper in the May–Fourth era. This approach has come under re-examination in recent decades. Since the 1980’s, scholarship has suggested that the conception, production and dissemination of literature during the last decades of the Qing demonstrated a vigor and variety that could hardly be confined to the parameters prescribed by May-

5. The term was first invoked in the twenties but it did not become popular till after the fifties, in conjunction with two other periodization terms, xiandai wenxue and dangdai wenxue, which refer to Chinese literature from 1911 to 1949 and from 1949 to date respectively. Studies of late Qing literature started as early as the turn of the twentieth century. In 1921, Shen Yanbing wrote “Jindai wenxue tixi de yanjiu” (A study of early modern Chinese literary system) which for the first time used the term “jindai” to refer to late Qing literature. The next ten years saw a series of publications on “jindai” literature but the time span of “jindai” remained vague. For Chen Zizhan, it covers the period from the Hundred Day Reform to the May Fourth (Zhongguo jindai wenxue zhi bianqian; Changes in early modern Chinese literature, 1929); for Chen Duxiu, it can be dated as far back as Yuan and Ming (“Wenxue geming lun”; On literary revolution, 1917). Zheng Zhenduo in Chatuben zhongguo wenxue shi (An illustrated history of Chinese literature) describe jindai as a period from the Jialing reign of Ming (1522) to the even of the May Fourth (1918), but he later revised this periodization and made 1840–1918 the time when jindai literature took place. For more discussion, see Guo Yanli, “Ershi shiji zhongguo jindai wenxue yanjiu xueshu licheng huigu” (A review of early modern Chinese literary studies in the twentieth century), Wenxue yichan, 3(2000):3–12. Also see Dai Yan, Wenxueshi de quanti (The power of literary history; Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2002). The three periods have been said to constitute a timeline of the rise and development of Chinese literary modernization, one that paralleled a sociopolitical progression in China’s search for modernity. This timeline has spawned continued debate in recent years, thanks partially to the post-Maoist campaign to rewrite literary history and partially to the post-modernist recognition of multiple modernities.
Fourth discourse. To be sure, May-Fourth writers set in motion a series of paradigm changes, and thus realized what late Qing literati had not, or had not been able to imagine. But May-Fourth claims to modernity may have equally obscured, or even eliminated, a great number of possibilities that had once thrived in the late Qing era; had they been given another chance, these possibilities could well have given rise to many other, richer configurations of Chinese literary modernity.

“How modern was late Qing literature?” therefore, is a question that solicits a paradoxical answer. For those who associate the modern with such notions as “ideology,” “consciousness,” or even “historical necessity,” late Qing literature may seem to fall short of the kind of discursive rigor that dominated May-Fourth literature. For those who associate the modern with formal innovations in both linguistic and extra-linguistic terms, late Qing literature may reflect a material condition as yet not fully formed or re-formed. Nevertheless, historical hindsight has taught us that the newness of “historical consciousness” as represented by May Fourth literature may not always seem new, not at least in comparison with select European counterparts it set out to emulate, and that mere attempts at formalist or formalized rejuvenation does not guarantee a breakthrough onto global center stage where truly new modernities compete for attention.

This is where the modernity of late Qing literature—particularly the corpus of literature produced from the 1890’s to the 1910’s—becomes polemical. Late Qing literature surfaced in the midst of clashing historical forces—from the Opium War to the Boxer Rebellion, and from technological advancement to epistemological renovation. Unlike orthodox May Fourth literature, which was couched in a discourse more readily subject to transnational circulation, late Qing literature represented an undertaking of self-renewal at an inchoate and incoherent stage; it figured as an anomaly in which indigenous inputs and foreign stimuli, radical provocations and conciliatory responses were still engaged in drastic contestations. While this literature reflected the capricious circumstances when China was pushed onto the stage of early modernity, it demonstrated a raw, creative force that was not recapitulated once Chinese writers

achieved mastery of readymade foreign models.

As discussed in more detail elsewhere, I derive my notion of literary modernization from some other fields of the natural and social sciences.\textsuperscript{7} I see the advent of modern at any given historical moment as a fierce competition of new possibilities, in which the results do not necessarily reflect the best possibility or even any one of the possibilities. Many innovations, whatever their capacity to generate more positive outcomes, do not survive the contingency of time. By contingency I do not mean literary modernization is senseless, shorn of any meaningful pattern. Rather I mean that no outcome can be predicated from the outset or in retrospect to follow a singular path of evolution, and no actual constituent would even recur a second time in the same way, because any pathway to the realization of the modern proceeds through thousands of mutable and amorphous stages.\textsuperscript{8}

Precisely because of its nature of being unprecedented, a new thing does not necessarily prevail among forces competing to renovate the status quo, much less guarantee entry into the canon. The radical elements predating the arrival of sanctioned modernity may remain either unappreciated till another juncture of changed historical consciousness or, more likely, forever obscure. In the case of late Qing literary reform, the literati’s calls for a revolution in poetry and fiction no doubt paved way for the May Fourth movement, but one cannot overlook the fact that what these reformists ruled out might have contained seeds which, if planted, would have grown up into a very different ecology.

In this argument I am not harking back to idealist definitions of the modern

\textsuperscript{7} Introduction, \textit{Fin-de-siècle Splendor}.

nor to playful deconstructions of them. It is therefore intriguing to hear recent voices that describe my approach as either a-historical or causal, either monolithic or deconstructionist, critical stances I set out to take issue with.9 I endorse the calls to historicize the polemics of modernity, but I argue that in the name of historicization, many discussions do not go far enough. To appreciate the chameleon nature of late Qing literature requires that one truly believe in Chinese literature’s capacity to refashion itself, even at a disadvantageous moment, knowing that manifestations of modernity, in theory and in practice, need not have been limited to certain prefigured and European formulae.

A familiar scenario about the rise of late Qing fictional discourse starts with Yan Fu 嚴復 (1854–1921) and Xia Zengyou’s 夏曾佑 (1886–1924) “Benguan fuyin shuobu yuanqi” 本館付印説部緣起 (Announcing our intention to publish a supplementary fiction section, 1897).10 In their essay Yan Fu and Xia Zengyou draw upon biological and social Darwinism to account for the intrinsic appeal of fiction. For them, whereas history may fall short in showing what life should be, fiction can rectify history so as to ensure the perpetual commemoration of the heroic and romantic ideals in humanity.11 In response to Yan and Xia, Liang Qichao 梁啓超 (1873–1929) introduced in “Yiyin zhengzhi xiaoshuo xu” 譯印政治小說序 (Foreword to our series of political novels in translation, 1898) the political novel, a genre Liang believed responsible for the success of the Japanese

9. See Xiaobing Tang’s review of my book Fin-de-siècle Splendor in which he indicates that by foregrounding late Qing literary modernities, the book overlooks the logic of historical consciousness and necessity, Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies (1998): 623–630. Rebecca Karl and Peter Zarrow, in their introduction to their edited book Rethinking the Reform Movement of 1898: Political and Cultural Change in Modern China (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Asia Center, 2002), 7–8, suggest that I have taken an approach of “belated modernity” to late Qing literature, therefore “reinscribing a unitary notion of ‘modernity’ that is Western-defined and Western-centered, temporally teleological and spatially neutral.” Intriguingly enough, the notion of “belated modernity” is exactly that which I set out to critique (see Fin-de-siècle Splendor, 6–17). Much contrary to their criticism, I make it the major theme of my book to challenge “unitary modernity,” as evinced even by its title. In his book review for Journal of Asian Studies (1998) Theodore Huters comments that I’ve taken a deconstructive approach to late Qing literature; but in his recent book Bringing the World Home: Appropriating the West in late Qing and Early Republican China (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005), 5, Huters seems to have changed his mind, suggesting instead that my discovery of the late Qing ‘modernities’ prejudices the period as being a backward extension of the over desires to catch up with the world developed by ‘May Fourth generation’. See Huters’ footnote 15, 280.

10. Jidao (Yan Fu) and Bieshi (Xia Zengyou), “Benguan fuyin shuobu yuanqi” (Announcing our policy to print a supplementary fiction section), in Chen Pingyuan and Xia Xiaohong, Wangqing xiaoshuo lihen ziliao (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1989), 1–12.

Restoration, as the type of fiction that would benefit China. Liang's promotion of the political novel was later substantiated by his founding of the magazine *Xin xiaoshuo* 新小說 (New fiction) and the publication of the inaugural essay “Lun xiaoshuo yu qunzhi zhi guanxi” 論小說與群治之關係 (On the relation between fiction and ruling the public) in 1902. The essay opens with the famous passage that affirms the didactic role of fiction and its positive political and moral consequences:

To renovate the people of a nation, the traditional literature of that nation must first be renovated . . . Why? It is because fiction exercises a power of incalculable magnitude over mankind.

Similar statements can also be found in essays by contemporary literati like Tao Youzeng 陶佑曾 (1886–1927), Wang Zhongqi 王鍾麒 (1880–1913), Su Manshu 蘇曼殊 (1884–1918), and numerous magazine and newspaper editorials.

The discourse headed by Yan Fu, Liang Qichao and fellow critics was later recognized as the mainstream of late Qing literature. But did the “new fiction” that Yan Fu, Liang Qichao and peers yearned for really become the dominating genre of late Qing society? Were the theories about “new fiction” popular because they brought forth new ideas, or because they were a rehash of an old, familiar beliefs? C. T. Hsia remarks that despite his employment of Darwinian terms to explain the power of fiction, Yan Fu is “very much of a traditionalist” and that Yan Fu was “being dishonest with himself when arguing for the greater appeal of fiction over history in strictly Chinese terms.” The same criticism may well apply to the fiction criticism of Liang Qichao and other contemporaries. For all his attraction to foreign theories and Buddhist concepts, the Confucian idea of “literature should carry the Way” (wen yi zai dao 文以載道)

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12. Liang Qichao, “Yiyin zhengzhi xiaoshuo xu” (Preface to our series of political novels in translation), in Chen Pingyuan and Xia Xiaohong, 21–22.
13. Liang Qichao, “Lun Xiaoshuo yu qunzhi zhiguanxi” (On the relationship between fiction and ruling the people), in Chen Pingyuan and Xia Xiaohong, 33.
15. See Huang Lin, 608–12.
17. Ibid., 186.
18. Ibid.
remains as the backbone of Liang Qichao’s theory of the novel.19

Insofar as fiction was deemed a genre that has poisoned Chinese society in the past hundreds of years, there must be something paradoxical when Yan Fu and Liang Qichao embraced it, in the hope that the poisonous genre will transform itself into a miraculous potion which will cure Chinese society. It will be remembered that Plato drove poets out of the Republic for fear that their works would weaken the morale of the citizens of his ideal state. In the case of late Qing critics, a similar argument leads to a rather different conclusion: Yan Fu and Liang Qichao welcome fiction, asserting that its incredible power will first cleanse it of its own poisonous nature and then be administered to revive the audience it had earlier poisoned. A vicious circle runs in their discourse. They are, or at least appear to be, completely taken in by the morals traditional critics might only pay lip service to; they defamiliarize themselves from what they are only too familiar with. The “novelty” of their literary belief lies ironically in their relentless exaggeration of rather than rejection of the past.

One should also keep in mind that when the discourse on “new fiction” was on the rise, there were already different views on literary and politics expressed by Liang Qichao’s contemporaries. In 1904, Wang Guowei 王國維 (1877–1927) took up the classic The Story of the Stone 石頭記 (The Dream of the Red Chamber 紅樓夢) and reinterpreted it in the light of theories traceable to Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Kant. He sees in the Chinese romance a most compelling tension between desire and the object of desire, between human suffering and the sublimation of that suffering in art.

Wang Guowei has been given a more dubious position in modern Chinese literary history, on account of his Qing loyalism and his taste for classical literature. It was not till recent years that scholars came to assess his works in a different light.20 As one critic puts it, “Liang Qichao brandishes the banner of ‘new fiction,’ but the core of his literary concept is old. Wang Guowei recommends classical Chinese fiction, while at the center of his literary thought is something very new.”21 If Liang Qichao should be praised, it is not due to introducing anything foreign so much as ingeniously reviving traditional Chinese literary didacticism and utilitarianism by packaging them as Western and Japanese imports. By contrast, Wang Guowei deserves serious attention less

because he upholds the old Chinese fictive tradition than because he fits Western theories into a radical reading of Chinese classics, thus adding a new, Chinese dimension to what we understand as modern.\(^{22}\)

As opposed to Liang Qichao’s theory of didacticism as well as Wang Guowei’s theory of catharsis, Huang Moxi 黃摩西 (1866–1913) and Xu Nianci 徐念慈 (1875–1908) approached fictional writing and reading from a formalist perspective. Drawing their inspiration both from the aesthetic views of Hegel and Kant and from the Ming-Qing fiction annotation tradition, they argued that fiction should be in the first an aesthetic entity. The effect of beauty, as Xu Nianci observes, lies in a rational immersion in nature, a distinctive expression of individuality, an arousal of affective pleasure, a figural formation, and a representation of the ideal.\(^{23}\) Both Huang and Xu were skeptical about the “new fiction” fever; the latter even implied that the common people constituted no more than ten percent of its total readership.\(^{24}\)

While enlightened late Qing critics wanted to make “use” of fiction for a noble cause, fiction remained the delinquent genre that kept refusing to be domesticated. The “misuse” of the causes of enlightenment took place almost at the same time as Liang Qichao and peers publicized their agenda for a “new fiction.” Contemporary writers did not only produce fiction of dubious subjects under the banner of edifying the public; they also wrote self-reflectively, about the outrageous spectacle of a society that trafficked in the new and the modern. A quick glance at the œuvre of late Qing fiction shows that, for every item of “new fiction”, there appear many counter-examples, works later to be called depravity novels, black screen novels, chivalric romance, fantasy, and so forth. When he is occupied by a “more important” political cause, Liang Qichao drops his enthusiasm about writing fiction.\(^{25}\) In the essay “Gao xiaoshuojia” 貴小說家

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23. In the publication announcement of Xiao shuo lin (Fiction grove) in 1907, Huang Moxi (Huang Ren) comments, “We used to give too little credit to fiction, while we are now overrating the importance of fiction.” Instead of treating fiction as a medium for didacticism and propaganda, Huang emphasizes its aesthetic expression of humanity by proclaiming that fiction is “one of the aesthetic expressions of literature.” See Chen Ping-yuan and Xia Xiaohong, 233. Under the influence of Hegel, Xu Nianci interprets the essence of fiction as a way to transcend human experiences. See Xu Nianci, “Xiao shuo lin yuanqi” (Origin of Fiction Grove), in Chen and Xia, 234. Also see Huang Lin, 613–17.

24. Jiuiwo (Xu Nianci), “Yu zhi xiaoshuo guan” (My view of fiction), in Chen Pingyuan and Xia Xiaohong, p. 310. Also see Yuan Jin, 28.

25. Xia Xiaohong, Jueshi yu chuanshi: Liang Qichao de wenxue daolu (From enlightenment to canonization: the literary road of Liang Qichao), (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe,
(To fiction writers), Liang admits that “the past ten years saw the tremendous degeneration of social morals and manners, and what aspect of that degeneration has not been traceable to an influence of the so-called new fiction?” Since the statement was made in 1915, the alleged decline of “new fiction” could be traced back to 1905, the year Liang’s own magazine New Fiction was closed. In other words, “new fiction” decayed at the moment it arose; it sounded already passé even before its newness was absorbed by the general public.

In picturing the development of late Qing literary reform, therefore, one should be always alert to the gap between what the writers and critics thought they achieved and what they really did, what the elite expected their readers to like and what their readers liked. With this understanding, one finds a complex constellation of fictional experiments in 1905, in such a way that one can talk about the first climax—or anti-climax—since the “new fiction” movement around the turn of the century.

Liu E 劉鴻 (1857-1909) finished in the fall of 1905 the last five chapters of the first volume of Lao Can youji 老殘遊記 (The travels of Lao Can), arguably the most prominent work of late Qing fiction. In these five chapters Lao Can sets out to rescue a woman wrongly accused of murdering her family members. Exasperated by the judge’s bigotry and crudity, Lao Can made the famous remark, “All men know that corrupt officials are bad, but few know that incorruptible officials are even worse. Whereas a corrupt official knows his own faults and dares not play the tyrant openly, an incorruptible official imagines that since he never takes bribes he is free to do whatever he likes.” This statement brought a polemical twist to the contemporary inquiry into the terms of justice versus violence, and its ethical implication would be continuously revisited by Chinese writers in the next century.

On the other hand, Zeng Pu 曾樸 (1871-1935) published the first twenty chapters of Niehaihua 秾海花 (A flower in the sea of sins), based on the popular leg-

1991), 72. In 1903, Liang Qichao took a trip to the States, and the travel became the most direct reason for him to stop writing The Future of New China. But a more likely reason, according to Xia, is that Lingo’s political view underwent a major change at the time. Liang gave up the idea of revolution as a possibility to reform China; this new political awareness contradicted the novel’s original thesis, which is based on the dialectics between revolutionism and meliorism.
27. Ibid.
end that the courtesan Sai Jinhua had a liaison with the German commander-in-chief Waldessee in the Boxer’s Rebellion and in that capacity, she helped save China from being ravished by the eight foreign armies. A courtesan romance written as if it were a historical novel (or perhaps vice versa), A Flower in the Sea of Sins turns upside down familiar moral and ethical bearings, practical or ideal. Celebrating a courtesan’s promiscuous body as the force which could bring redemption to a humiliated China, the legend would find a prominent place in twentieth century cultural and political dynamics, its power being felt even in the period of the Great Cultural Revolution.

Both The Travels of Lao Can and A Flower in the Sea of Sins have been received since the 1920’s as the classics of late Qing literature. By contrast, Wu Jianren’s 吳趼人 Xin shitouji 新石頭記 (A new Story of the Stone) did not become known till recent years. One of the most versatile among late Qing fiction writers, Wu Jianren (1866–1910) has been known for his exposés and sentimental romances. But it is in a science fantasy such as A New Story of the Stone that Wu demonstrates talents yet to be recognized by critics. A rewrite of Cao Xueqin’s 曹雪芹 classic Shibou ji 石頭記 (The story of the stone, 1791), A New Story of the Stone first appeared in Nanfang bao 南方報 (Southern News) in 1905. Dwelling on the same mythical framework of “mending heaven,” Wu casts the Stone as a lonely traveler in time. The first part of the novel deals with Baoyu’s or the Stone’s travel in a yeman shijie or Barbarous World, his witnessing the horror and atrocities of the Boxer Rebellion, and his arrest for heretically spreading advocacy of democratic ideas. In the second part, Baoyu stumbles into the Civilized World (wenming jingjie 文明境界), a utopia strong in military power, political structure, scientific advancement, educational institutions, and moral cultivation. In a way reminiscent of Candide’s encounter with the sage king of Eldorado, Baoyu’s journey in the Civilized World culminates in his visit to its venerable ruler, Dongfang Qiang 東方強 (literally Eastern strength). Through Dongfang Qiang’s description of the political system of the Civilized World, Wu Jianren lays out his own blueprint for utopia, one based on a late Qing scientific interpretation of the Confucian notion of ren 仁 or benevolence.29

Notice how Wu Jianren reinterprets the theme “meaning Heaven” in his work. While Heaven remains the ultimate symbol of the plenitude of Meaning, it is informed neither by compassion, as in established religious discourse, nor by legitimation, as in established political discourse. Rather Heaven becomes a new telos that justifies China’s search for wealth and power. The Heaven Wu

29. See my discussion in Fin-de-siècle Splendor, 279–284.
Jianren's Baoyu intends to mend in *A New Story of the Stone* is at one with the Heaven envisioned in Yan Fu's translation of Thomas H. Huxley’s *Evolution and Ethics*, Tianyanlun 天演論 (Evolution of Heaven, 1898, italics mine).\(^3\)\(^0\) It is a Heaven emblazoned with the new Darwinian slogan of the “survival of the fittest by the grace of Heaven” (*wujiang* *tianze*物競天擇). Wu Jianren might not have been fully aware of the range of ambiguities that arose in his usage of the term; but, if one follows the logic of his novel, one has to ask: at a time when the crack in Heaven is growing to a point beyond repair, can Heaven really be mended? Should one try to mend it? Or should one let Heaven collapse and replace it with something else?

A serious crack was discovered in the concept of *Heaven* at the turn of the century. The legitimacy of imperial power dissipated in proportion to the scale of foreign invasion and internal corruption; the concept of “mandate of Heaven” was put into question. Situating the Civilized World in the future perfect mood of a utopia, Wu Jianren makes his Jia Baoyu an idealist who already had missed his opportunity when he set out to make amends for his idealism. He can only be a late spectator of what “will already have” happened, while he sojourned somewhere outside of history. Between the miserable past and the fantastic future, a fold in time has occurred, and it is in that parallel time that the most exhilarating thing for China has taken place. Time has been conceived such that it alienates both History and the individual’s search for plenitude in the course of history; the temporal duration through which China’s transformation takes place remains mysteriously bracketed.

Liu E’s, Zeng Pu’s and Wu Jianren’s novels thus demonstrated three of the directions of later Qing writers in 1905. Whereas Liu E created a lonely traveler on a Chinese landscape devastated by manmade and natural atrocities, Zeng Pu created an ambitious woman thriving on the domestic and international stages of politics cum erotics. Wu Jianren, arguably the most innovative among the three, ushers us into a fantastic world in which lyrical subjectivity and historical consciousness, philosophical rumination and scientific thought are brought into play. These writers addressed a wide range of subjects—space and time in re-configuration, gendered politics, scientific engagement, decadent escapade, among others—on which one can map out a broad constellation of fictional endeavors made known in 1905.

Whereas *Huang Xiuqiu* 黃绣球 (Huang Xiuqiu) introduces a new woman

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striving to reform the status quo, *Hong Xiuquan yanyin* 洪秀全演義 (A romance of Hong Xiuquan) highlights the arch-rebel of the Taiping Rebellion who had almost brought down the Qing empire. In *Shisheng* 市聲 (Voices of merchants), the popular notion of “business war” 商戰 (shangzhan) was dramatized in a group of Shanghai merchants’ adventures against foreign investments; in *Weilai jiaoyuji* 未來教育記 (A history of future education), education reform became a dominant concern for the newer generation of intellectuals. Both *Ku shehui* 苦社會 (Bitter society) and *Ku xuesheng* 苦學生 (Bitter students) described overseas Chinese’s hardships, while works such as *Ershizai fanhuameng* 二十載繁華夢 (Splendid dreams of the past twenty years) chronicled the corruption and abuses in China in the typical form of exposé. Foreign figures were frequently brought to bear on a social or political issue. Rousseau’s ghost appeared in *Lusuo hun* 盧梭魂 (The ghost of Rousseau) in which the French thinker teams up with the Ming loyalist Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲 to overthrow the tyrannical rule of Hell; Madame Roland inspired her Chinese disciple Huang Xiuqiu in a dream encounter of *Huang Xiuqiu*. In *Zhina gelunbu* 支那哥伦布 (China’s Columbus), a Chinese explorer sets out to discover the new world and ends up establishing his own republic; in *The Travels of Lao Can*, Sherlock Holmes is invoked to highlight his Chinese counterpart’s analytical mind and investigative expertise.

The most impressive aspect of the fiction of 1905 is still the formation of a scientific discourse in conjunction with the revamping of the paradigm of space and time. The fantastic travel through time in *The New Story of the Stone* aside, *Yueqiu zhimindi xiaoshuo* 月球殖民地小說 (Moon colony, 1905) imagined a group of Chinese and Japanese adventurers flying a balloon to the moon. China is depicted as a place no longer suitable for living and the moon, being the nearest planet where these people can take shelter from the chaos on earth, becomes their new destination. Three of the dominant images of the novel, the *moon*, the *balloon*, and the *space odyssey*, deserve a closer look. Flying in the sky, riders in the balloon are able to view China from a better-than-bird’s-eye view; they see a China whose scope increasingly diminishes in proportion to the widened horizons. The balloon in the sky creates a (narrative) perspective from which one is made to re-examine the space that China occupies in proportion to that of the Earth. The epistemological disorder created through the aerial voyage makes the active reconfiguration of the image of China an urgent priority. Indeed, aerial “China” is neither the geopolitical center of the world nor even a

31. The novel was serialized in *Illustrated Fiction* from 1904 to 1905. I am using the edition published by Guangya chubanshe (Taipei, 1984).
very large part of it.

After the moon has become a destination for Chinese immigrants, next come plans to visit other planets. Donghai Juiwo's 東海覺我 (pseudonym of Xu Nian-cí) "Xin faluo xianshàng tan" 新法螺先生譯 (A new account of Mr. Windbag, 1905), a story about a Chinese scientist's one-man expedition to outer space, culminates in his aborted attempt at flying to the sun. Mixing contemporary speculations on outer space and traditional Chinese wisdom about the extraterrestrial, the story represents one of the most fascinating moments of late Qing science fiction. This is not only a layman scientist's fantasy of adventure but also an engaged scholar's dramatization of an ancient empire in crisis. Borrowing Benjamin Schwartz's description of Yan Fu, Xu Nian-cí's contemporary, one may say Mr. Windbag embodies the two archetypal modes shared by late Qing intellectuals: the Faustian desire for knowledge at the risk of transgressing established closures, and the Promethean passion that calls for dedication and self-sacrifice for the welfare of general humanity. At both imaginary and epistemological levels, a stage has been set for Chinese writer to reposition themselves in the world called modern.

1955

Literature of the late forties to early sixties emerged during one of the most volatile moments in modern Chinese cultural history. In the wake of the Communist takeover of mainland China and the Nationalist retreat to Taiwan in 1949, Chinese literature bifurcated into two traditions, each flaunting a distinct political and aesthetic program. Although politics and literature had been closely tied together since the rise of "new fiction" in the late Qing era, it was in the decades of the mid-century that writing finally transformed itself into political action, and became a vocation that regularly demanded as much blood as ink.

Mid-century literature in Taiwan as in mainland China cannot be appreciated without referring to the legacy of the late Qing and May Fourth tradition. Historians have characterized the external causes that led to the rise of the Maoist cultural and literary hegemony. Little, however, has been discussed

32. Faluo, or Charonia tritonis, originally refers to a kind of large sea shell used as a musical instrument in Buddhist ritual or bugal in military activities. The novel was first published by Xiaoshuolin chubanshe in 1905.
33. See, for example, Merle Goldman, Literary Dissent in Communist China (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967); also see Rudolf G. Wagner, Inside a Service Trade: Studies in Contemporary Prose (Cambridge, MA: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard
about the gradual *implosion* of a Chinese revolutionary poetics, one that was initiated by late Qing and May Fourth literati and reached its logical (dead)end in the hands of Mao and his literary cohorts. This revolutionary poetics manifests itself in the conviction of an immediate link between fictional rhetoric and national policy, in a Promethian symbolism of rebellion and sacrifice, in an “obsession with China,” and in an apocalyptic vision of national rejuvenation through revolution. Writing becomes the textual manifestation of revolution.

The fiction revolution advocated by late Qing intellectuals again comes to mind; its furor is best summarized by Liang Qichao’s famous announcement that “to renew people’s hearts and remodel their character, one must first renovate fiction.” For all their antitraditionalist pose, intellectuals of the May Fourth era primly reiterated their late Qing predecessors’ calls for a new, revolutionary literature. Chen Duxiu’s militant manifesto for a new literature, Hu Shi’s proposal for a literary revolution, and Lu Xun’s “call to arms,” are but the most prominent examples. Starting from the late twenties, leftist writers and critics from Qu Qiubai to Mao Dun equipped this revolutionary literature with Marxist-oriented theories, debates, campaigns, creative writings and translations. Their contributions should be seen as the consequences of, not the causes of campaigns to remodel China through literature.

Mao Zedong’s Yan’an talks and the literature that rose in the wake of the

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talks should be regarded as a radical outcome of this revolutionary poetics. The talks brought out its authoritarian potential, in that they confirm the mystical "power of an incalculable magnitude" of literature on the one hand, while believing that this power cannot be fully played out unless it has been disciplined. At its most utopian level, Maoist literature is said to be able to bridge the gap between the elite writers and the illiterate audience, the "literary" subject and the "everyday" event, individual talents and dogmatic tradition, deplorable past and irresistible future.

With the founding of the new republic, it was logical to expect that writers could finally put into practice a discourse they had long yearned for. The fact is, however, that 1949 marked the beginning of a rapid degradation of literature in both vitality and variety. In July 1949, three months before the formal establishment of the regime, the first National Conference of Writers and Artists was held in Beijing, followed by the founding of the United Association of Chinese Literature and the Arts and the Association of Literary Workers. In 1953, the Association of Literary Workers was renamed the Chinese Writers' Association. As the highest organization for writers, it resolved to make Chinese Marxism the guideline of literature and the arts, and socialist realism the method of creativity and criticism. The Leninist/Maoist concept that literature should serve as a "cog and screw in the revolutionary machinery" was finally realized nationwide, as seen in the rapid emergence of writers' associations and party-sponsored magazines and activities.

This most rationalist move to organize writers into leagues of mouthpieces on behalf of party policies, nevertheless, proved to be a devastating blow to their creativity. Numerous accounts have been written about the suffocating atmosphere of the early fifties. Things went so bad that, on the eve of the "Hundred Flowers" Movement, Mao Dun, then the culture minister of the PRC, summarized the new nation's literary production of the first six years as "'too dry, every piece alike.' This dryness surely stems from the general adherence to stereotyped concepts; this uniform monotony from formulism, from arbitrary

38. See Merle Goldman's classic study of the Yan'an Talks and the literary and political practice inspired by the talks, 1-50.
40. See, for example, Goldman's and Wagner's books; also see D. W. Fokkema, Literary Doctrine in China and Soviet Influence, 1956-1960 (The Hague: Mouton, 1965).
confinement to a narrow range of themes and ideas."\textsuperscript{41} Meanwhile, the purging of recalcitrant intellectuals, a tradition dating back to the Yan'an days, had become ever more gruesome.

From the "literary revolution" to "revolutionary literature," all that writers pursued was a modern China free from the old, cannibalistic shackles, a China which would finally attain the state of humanism, equality, and enlightenment. Realism, be it labeled critical, revolutionary, or socialist, became the major format of this discourse, not merely because of its mimetic presupposition but also because of its adherence to a rationalist agenda and to total truth claims. Nevertheless, close analysis reveals that the end and the means of this poetics did not coalesce; its inherent "rationalist" agenda calls for justice and humanity, but its practice was subject to spells of fanaticism and radical mannerism. The intelligentsia adopted attitudes as readers that they readily contradicted as writers. As readers, they celebrated the immanent power of literature to reveal the nature and destiny of all humanity, while as writers they counted on the capacity of literature to obey the whims and purposes of every propagandist. Their rationales both downplayed and overestimated language and literature as cultural institutions.\textsuperscript{42}

Before Chiang Kai-shek resumed his position as president of Nationalist China in 1950, a campaign against the Communist regime had started in Taiwan, the last Nationalist bastion. Driven by indignation at the bloody Communist takeover and the pathos of exile, anti-communist writers developed a literature of nostalgia, about their homeland, and about their arguable good old days. Understandably, all their pathos, indignation and nostalgia are directed toward the anti-communist cause, to the hope that the Nationalist government would soon reclaim its legitimate position. A discourse arose which was later sarcastically ridiculed as "anti-communist eight-legged literature,"\textsuperscript{43} a literature loaded with communism-bashings, extreme sentimentalism, melodramatic plotting, and simple, polarized characterization.

\textsuperscript{41} Mao Dun, "Wenxue yishu zhong de guanjianxing wenti" (The key problem concerning literary and art work), \textit{Weiyi bao} (Gazette of literature and arts) 12:3 (1956); quoted from C. T. Hsia, \textit{A History}, 338.


\textsuperscript{43} Ye Shitao, \textit{Taiwan wenxue shigang} (An outline of the history of Taiwan literature; Gaoxiong: Wenxuejie, 1987), 88-89; Huang Chongtian, \textit{Taiwan xinwenxue gaiguan} (A general view of new literature of Taiwan; Taipei: Daoxiang chubanshe, 1992), 69.
This, however, should not keep one from speculating on the logic of writing that preoccupied many writers. Inasmuch as literary production is part of the military campaign, through which the government counter-attacked communist evils, the formulaic, repetitive quality of literature may not all have been a defect. Its "virtue" may lie precisely in its easy, recyclable features. As long as the anti-communist war was going on, one could never produce enough literary ammunition to fight the enemies. According to a conservative estimate, more than fifteen hundred writers wrote vigorously in the fifties, producing over seventy million words, or literary bullets, in the service for the anti-communist crusade.44

For all the ideological antagonism between the two regimes, one finds striking similarities in Nationalist and Communist ways of administering literary activities. The Nationalist Party, after all, was structured on the Soviet model, its literary policy schooled by the same Leninist concepts that inspired the Chinese Communists. Learning from the painful experiences of the past, the Nationalist government tried hard to enhance the pedagogical and military function of literature; this policy was theoretically backed up in 1953 by Chiang Kai-shek's "supplementary treatises on education and recreation," written to accompany Sun Yatsen's "Principle of Livelihood" (minsheng zhuyi yule liangpian bushu 民生主義育樂兩篇補述), and by Chiang's call for "literature for the sake of war" (zhandou wenyi 戰鬥文藝) in 1955. The government also saw to aesthetic hygiene by launching movements such as the campaign of "Chu sanhai" 除三害 (eradicating the three killers of leftist, pornographic, and decadent literature), to clean out the poisonous elements of literary practice. It aimed to create a literary sanatorium, insuring its own Nationalist brand of health.

But Chiang Kai-shek's anti-communist literature proved after all much less effective than Maoist discourse.45 1955 saw at least three campaigns that had lasting impacts on PRC literary politics: the campaigns against Hu Shi 胡適 (1891–1962); Hu Feng 胡風 (1902–1985) and his followers; Ding Ling 丁玲 (1904–1986) and Chen Qixia 陈企霞 (1913–1988). While Hu Shi had been known as a

44. Works by these May Fourth writers were not allowed to be published till the government abolished the martial law in 1987.
45. In view of the uncanny parallel between communist and anti-communist literature of the early fifties, a cynic might conclude that the two regimes produced the same type of literature. Take off their tendentious, militant labels, and one finds twin traditions. Their difference is one in degree, not in kind. Nevertheless, these subtle differences, I argue, should not be ignored, as they resulted in very different Taiwan and mainland Chinese literature in the following three decades.
champion of liberalism since the twenties and therefore appeared to be a ready target for Communist attack, the cases of Hu Feng and Ding Ling resulted from an internecine fight among party liners. Ding Ling was a leading woman writer and a recalcitrant follower of Maoist policy before 1949. Her ups and downs in the Yan'an period indicated not only her ideological choice but also the brutal power struggle among literary cadres. This tension became more invincible after 1949, and for all her international popularity, Ding Ling came under vehement attack in 1955 and she would be sent into exile and imprisonment for the next twenty-two years.

The quarrel between Hu Feng and Mao Zedong as to how reality, subjectivity, and history were to be represented was traceable back to the early forties. Though sharing Mao’s call for a literature in the service of revolution, Hu Feng’s emphasis on wounded subjectivity and its recovery through ideological sublation betrays a different theoretical heritage from Mao’s; this heritage includes at least elements of Hegelian and Lukacsian aesthetics, May Fourth critical realism, and a Dionysian penchant for decadence and destruction.46 Hu Feng and his followers picture in their critical treatise a humanity seriously maimed by inhuman history, so much so that it cannot be rehabilitated until the primitive, individual power inherent in it is called forth. Mao and his cohorts acknowledge the suffering of humanity, but argue that to do justice to “the insulted and the injured,” they first have to subordinate individual subjectivity—which seemed to have gone out of control in Hu Feng’s hands—to a collective, historical subjectivity.47

In the People’s Daily between May 13 and June 10, 1955 there appeared a series of writings attacking the “Counter-Revolutionary Hu Feng Clique”. Hu Feng, his disciple the talented novelist Lu Ling 路翎 (1923–1994), and 200 other writers and intellectuals found themselves enemies of the people and were arrested. The mastermind of the campaign was none other than Mao himself. In the preface to the compilation of the materials about the Hu clique, Mao wrote that Hu and his followers were counter-revolutionaries hiding inside the revolutionary camp, an underground, independent kingdom.”48 What followed was a

46. C. T. Hsia, History, 303–305.
48. See, for example, Goldman’s analysis, chapters 5–7.
twenty-five-year long persecution, Gulag fashion. But all this was only an over-
ture. A more bloody literary politics was yet to come, followed by more spec-
tacular waste of talents and lives.

Chinese writers since the turn of the century had written under the pressure
of governmental coercion as well as factional struggles; history from the literary
revolution to revolutionary literature was punctuated by numerous accounts of
censorship, arrest, imprisonment, confiscation, and execution. The tension
between artistic freedom and ideological constraint concerned writers, espe-
cially those from the leftist camp, as early as the twenties. Modern Chinese
writers did not have to wait till the Communist era to acquire their first lesson
on the dangers of writing. If this was the case, what made writing in the early
PRC era and the following decades an impossible vocation?

As mentioned above, governmental surveillance was the primary cause; the
new regime enforced the law of literary practice and censorship so strictly that,
by contrast, the Nationalist days were like heaven. Nevertheless, beyond these
extra-textual reasons, one must inquire into the problems arising from core revo-
lutionary poetics, now formally installed by the authorities.

If the bottom line of revolutionary poetics is to see to the arrival of an
apocalyptic moment that reveals the final truth of History, writing—for modern
Chinese writers in the May Fourth and post-May Fourth eras—means a yearning
for that imminent revelatory moment. Writing becomes an act of anticipation.
Paradoxically, writing can also be an act of procrastination, since through fore-
telling the future revolution, it also inscribes the prolonged stay of the “present”
which should have long ago receded into the past. However popular, post-May
Fourth writings by a master such as Lu Xun or Mao Dun entailed a negative
dialectic; this dialectic indicates that the more a writer wrote, the more he or she
articulated his or her incapacity to reach the ideal state of rationality accessible
only through revolution. Writing in the pre-revolution days thus can best be
defined as an act of self-denial—a desperate naming of what Reality is not.49

Now that the much anticipated revolution had taken place and, as a result
of it, a new society had been founded, writers were told that they could finally
inhabit the new discourse their earlier writings promised to execute but failed to
achieve. This new discourse, however, turned out to have a double bind. On
the one hand, it informed the writers that the revolution had succeeded, and thus
conditions for the existence of pre-Revolutionary literature had disappeared. If
it was first occasioned by social and political injustice before 1949, modern writ-

49. See my discussion on Mao Dun in Fictional Realism, chapter 2.
ing had become a redundant act in the new society, except for recalling the bad old days and reaffirming the happy status quo. On the other hand, this new discourse informed writers that the revolution was still going on; more class enemies were yet to be overthrown, and more anti-capitalist wars were yet to be fought. But if writers resumed their critical positions of pre-Revolutionary days, according to the argument above, they would have only postponed rather than hastened the completion of the Revolution. In either way the writers were forced into a corner, where they had to submit to the role prepared for them by the party. The result is a hollowing out of the rationale that substantiated the moral courage and theoretical rigor of “literature for revolution” before 1949. While deploring the fact that the literature of the fifties had been totally tamed, one has to bear in mind that writers half a century before, if not even earlier, had begun the construction of their own literary zoo.

A quick review of fiction produced in mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong will show the extent politics infiltrated into literature. In compliance with governmental policy, land co-op movement became the main subject of fiction in the mid-fifties. Both Li Zhun’s 李准 (b. 1928) Bùnèng zòu zhètiàolù 不能走那條路 (Do not take this path, 1953) and Zhao Shuli’s 趙樹理 (1906–1970) Sānlǐ wān 三里灣 (Three mile bay, 1955), for instance, tell of the problems of an emerging new landowner class in confrontation with the co-op system. Only a few years after they were given land, these farmers had gathered enough fortune and strongly resisted the new policy of sharing their newly won properties with “the people.”

Neither novel features the archenemies of conventional communist fiction, such as Nationalist spies, landlords, and foreign invaders. Instead, moral and ideological conflicts are seen as breaking out within the socialist utopia, among social strata whose purity should not have been suspect. In Don’t Take This Path, peasants who had obtained lands in the recent land reform movement had developed among themselves an unexpected class struggle. Owing to shrewd management and hard work, a peasant named Song Laoding, for example, had accumulated a small fortune in just a few years, and was now ready to buy more land from those who failed to do so. In Three-Mile Bay, a veteran party member, Fan Denggao, who had fought heroically in the Sino-Japanese War, emerges as the major barrier to the land co-op movement. Through a sequence of predictable conflicts and reconciliations, both novels end with the repentance of the characters with questionable ideological consciousness, followed by a festive anticipation of the benefits of the co-op system.

The two novels raised unexpected questions, however. If the proletariat
and the party cadres are supposed to be two of the pillars of the new nation, how come, only a couple of years after the land reform movement was carried out and the nation was founded, there are signs of (self-)betrayal? If the cadres and peasants have to be reeducated to meet the progressive historical mission, shouldn’t the rest of the Chinese “people” be even more closely watched and disciplined? Obediently following the governmental policy, Li Zhun and Zhao Shuli write “innocently” about what history should be. The pastoral tone of their two novels is the most flagrant of signs, reminding one of what is missing from the new countryside.

But compared with what was published, what was expurgated was equally important. In the 1955 edition of Lao She’s 老舍 (1896–1966) *Luotuo xiangzi* 骆驼祥子 (Camel Xiangzi, 1937), one of the most important novels in pre-1949 Chinese literature, the last chapter was deleted. Published first in 1937, *Camel Xiangzi* originally concluded with the erstwhile hardworking rickshaw puller’s total degeneration into the lower depths of Beijing. His wish to own a rickshaw proves to be a futile effort and he ends up being the butt of sinister laughter—a comedy of the darkest kind. Revising his novel in the new regime, Lao She might have a good reason to take out the last chapter, not only because it is inconsistent in tone with regard to the rest of the novel, but because its “happy” ending only proves disturbingly suggestive of a reality which was supposed to be over. By removing the last chapter, Lao She and his censors might contend that they are offering a more upbeat projection of the real. It is, nevertheless, the missing chapter, with its repressed cynical laughter, that speaks to that reality, both in the old world of the thirties and in the new world of the fifties.

Across the Taiwan Straits, the most extreme measure was the total ban of Chinese literature written between 1919 and 1949. Removed from the market were not only names like Lu Xun, Guo Moruo, and Ba Jin, for their support of the leftist cause, but also writers such as Shen Congwen and Qian Zhongshu, for staying on the mainland after its fall.50 Despite the ban, however, writers largely followed the narrative models first perfected by post-May Fourth fiction. Chen Jiying 陳紀滢 (1908–1997) was such a case. Whereas his *Dicun zhuan* 萱村傳 (Fool in the reeds, 1950) skillfully rewrote Lu Xun’s “The true story of Ah Q” in an anti-communist context, his *Chidi* 赤地 (Red land, 1955) recapitulated the

50. Few established writers followed the Nationalist government to Taiwan; among them Liang Shiqiu, Tai Jingnong, and Xie Bingying were better known names. Hu Shi went to Taiwan in 1952, so did the woman writer Su Xuelin, who once waged a war with Lu Xun in the thirties.
model of family saga, as illustrated by works such as Ba Jin’s 巴金 Jia 家 (Family, 1932). But in contrast to the spatial imagery of Li Zhen’s and Zhao Shuli’s fiction, Chen’s is about the loss of the homeland, followed by a traumatic sense of dislocation.

Next to Taiwan, Hong Kong was another haven for writers who did not want to live under communist rule. Of the so-called “writers coming to the south” (nanlai zuojia南來作家), the most remarkable case was Eileen Chang 張愛玲 (1920–1995), the princess of the (pre)mature fin-de-siècle cult in forties’ Shanghai. Chang chose to stay in Shanghai after 1949, and even published two works with tongue-in-cheek pro-communism, Shiba chun 十八春 (Eighteen springs, 1951) and Xiao Ai 小艾 (Little Ai, 1951). But Chang’s cynical view of Chinese sociopolitical dynamics and her persistent inquiry into the dark aspect of Chinese humanity finally forced her to leave her beloved Shanghai in 1952. Chang stayed in Hong Kong till 1955. Before she embarked on her voyage to the States, she had completed two novels, Yangge 秧歌 (The rice-sprout song, 1954), and Chidi zhilian 赤地之戀 (Naked earth, 1954), under the sponsorship of the United States Information Service. Both novels are characterized by Chang’s personal vision of China as a desolate theatre and her sympathetic study of the psychology of the oppressor as well as the oppressed. From a “decadent” writer to a reluctant pro-communist writer, and then to a nonconformist anti-communist writer, Chang’s transition best testifies to the writer’s difficult position in a disturbed decade.

In 1955, a thirty-one year old journalist cum writer, Jin Yong 金庸 (b. 1924), started newspaper serialization of Shujian enhou lu 書劍恩仇錄 (A romance of the pen and the sword). A mixture of chivalric fantasy and historical saga, enchanting romance and adventurer escapade, the novel immediately captivated Hong Kong readers’ hearts. In the next fifteen years, Jin Yong would produce sixteen other novels, all best sellers, first in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and overseas Chinese communities, and then—since the 1980’s—in mainland China. While elite critics may have reservations about his popularity, the fact that Jin Yong is allegedly most widely read author across all Chinese communities in the second half of the twentieth century bespeaks his literary talent and managerial ability.

52. See Yu Qing, Zhang Ailing zhuan (A Biography of Eileen Chang; Taipei: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1993), 221–235.
at promoting his reputation. Mid-century Chinese literature was permeated with sound and fury, but few works, perhaps even fewer writers’ names, are still remembered by readers five decades later. After all the furor about the incredible power of “serious literature” over the Chinese people, it is Jin Yong, an author from the margins of China and a practitioner of an unlikely genre, who has the last laugh.

2005

In the January 2005 issue of the fiction magazine *Huacheng* 花城 (Flower city), there appeared a novel *Weirenmin fuwu* 為人民服務 (Serve the people). Set at the time of the Cultural Revolution, this novella describes an adulterous affair between an army cook and the wife of the general he is serving. The couple use a plaque with the inscription of Chairman Mao’s famous slogan “Serve the People” as a signal whenever they feel the need of each other. At the climax of their affair, they make love in a sealed room three days and nights, consummating their passion by smashing plaster busts of Mao Zedong, ripping up his photos and his Little Red Book, and even urinating on the leader’s slogans.

The January issue of *Flower City* was quickly recalled; *Serve the People* never had the chance to reach the people. But once the word got out about the ban, the novel became a hit on the internet—an informational technology that defies the temporal-spatial confines of ideology.

The author of *Serve the People*, Yan Lianke 閻連科 (b. 1958), was an army colonel and he took an early retirement amid the controversies over his novel. Yan joined the PLA as early as 1978 and was trained to become a prolific writer. He did not become popular, however, till the end of the nineties, with a series of works exposing either the plight of his hometown region in Henan Province or the absurdities of the revolutionary campaigns of bygone years. But these works are not realistic in conventional sense. Yan has invested in them a mixture of fantasies, burlesques, obscene interludes, and bloody sequences, thus creating a world of both frivolity and brutality, both carnivalesque libertinism and lethal melancholia.

The transformation of Yan Lianke from a cadre writer to a self-employed literatus is itself suggestive of the sea change of PRC literary politics since the eighties. Yan had already raised many’s eyebrows with novels like *Jianying rashui* 堅硬如水 (As hard as water, 2000) and *Shouhuo* 受活 (Have fun, 2003). Compared with these works, *Serve the People* may not exceed in either sexual description or grotesque exposé, so the timing and reason for its ban invite more
curiosity. As a PLA writer, Yan may have violated his terms of employment by describing the power of sex as a part of army life despite the thin historical veneer of the Cultural Revolution. It is also said that the novel was censored because its publication coincided with the passage of the Anti-Cession Law against Taiwan by the National People's Congress, a time when the support of the PLA became crucial in solidifying the “people’s” decision.

More likely is that, by invoking “Serve the People” as his novel’s title, Yan Lianke may have touched on a most tender spot of Chinese Communist discourse. It will be recalled that, “Serve the People” was a talk delivered by Mao in 1944 in memory of an army cook Zhang Side 張思德 (1915-1944) who died heroically in an accident. Of all the slogans of the PRC, it is arguably the simplest and the most powerful one for it spells out the total altruism of the Communist Party and the “death pact” between the revolutionaries, their party and the people. Yan Lianke takes up the slogan and twists it into a euphemism for a sexual scandal. But if his parody is subversive, it is not so much because he turns Chairman Mao’s holy saying into something obscene, a commonplace device in our time. By situating it in an erotic context, it unveils the libidinous core hidden by every fundamentalism. As Yan would have it, just as altruism presupposes self-sacrifice, so love begets a masochist desire for self-negation. In a most unlikely way, Yan makes his two PLA characters the Paolo and Francesca of a Chinese Inferno, and in so doing he calls attention to the lubricious appeal of “serving the people.”

2005 saw publication of at least four other works by renowned writers. Wang Anyi’s 王安憶 (b. 1954) Biaidi xiaoxiong 遍地梟雄 (Heroes at large) deals with a young taxi driver’s adventure in Shanghai, his being robbed on Christmas Eve, and his eventual joining the robbers so as to realize a heroic dream otherwise long diminished by a post-socialist age. While Wang tells of a moving story of a young man’s betrayal by his society in the vein of Lao She’s classic Camel Xiangzi, she merits more attention when pondering on the power of storytelling and individual agency. Her protagonist is willing to follow the robbers primarily because he becomes spell-bound by the stories they trade each other on the road, stories about heroes and villains arising at a time of chaos, about the sworn brotherhood among willful rioters, and the ebbs and flows of historical destiny. These stories open the young taxi driver’s eyes to a world that is a far cry from that of his own, and as such they arouse his desire to transgress the boundaries of the status quo. Wang’s is a novel not merely about a taxi driver’s robbery but also about the seductive power of imagined danger, about a young man’s will to fantasy. For her, this is how history generates itself anew. Her
novel thus takes on an allegorical dimension, about the loss and unlikely return of the creative capacity of Chinese in a post-revolutionary time.

In a sharp contrast to Wang Anyi’s *Heroes at Large*, Lin Bai 林白 (b. 1962), published *Funu Xianliaolu* 婦女閒聊錄 (An account of women’s chit-chat). Lin Bai had been known for her daring exposé of female psychology in the nineties. Her new work is striking in that instead of portraying urban, intellectual women’s inner turmoil, she presents, as she claims, an un-edited sequence of gossip, daydreams, confessions, hearsay, and comments by her handywoman, from rural Hubei Province. This woman’s ramblings cover so many subjects, characters and moods that they constitute an intriguing account of rural life in contemporary China. In so doing, Lin Bai undermines as much as enriches the prevalent feminist discourse to which she herself has been a contributor. Meanwhile, she is experimenting with a realism which cuts against the grain of socialist formulas. In Lin Bai’s view, the Chinese rural public has been demoralized by rapid economic growth and local administrative corruption, but on the other hand they still possess a raw energy which seeks an outlet against all odds. The result is a tableau-vivant full of contradictory forces of decadence and struggle, inertia and impulse.

In similar vein Jia Pingwa 賈平凹(b. 1952) published *Qinqiang* 秦腔 (Qin tune), a half-a-million-character novel about the decline of a rural town in Shanxi Province. Jia Pingwa won fame, or notoriety, for his *Feidu* 廢都 (Abandoned Capital) in 1993, a novel about urban literati’s dissipated life and futile pursuit of meaning in a post-revolutionary society. With *Qin Tune* he is said to have written a rural counterpart to *Abandoned Capital*. Through a slightly retarded man’s perspective, the novel relates the changing morals and manners of the town as it modernizes itself in the national trend of marketization. Like Lin Bai, Jia Pingwa piles sensory data and material details to create a sprawling, convoluted style commensurate with the lives under description. But whereas Lin Bai takes a matter-of-fact approach to the murky flux of country life, Jia Pingwa casts an elegiac look at the demise of regional culture, encapsulated in the declining village theater.

In the summer of 2005, Yu Hua 余華 (b. 1960) put forward *Xiongdi* 兄弟 (Brothers) ten years after his previous novel *Xu Sanguan Maixue ji* 許三官賣血記 (A Tale of Xu Sanguan the blood seller). Yu Hua was among the most prominent in the avant-garde trend of the eighties, and he appeared to have reconciled himself with mainstream discourse in the nineties. In his new work, Yu Hua revisits the bloody years of the Cultural Revolution through a family tragedy that changed two half-brothers’ fates forever. Yu Hua assumes a nonchalant
tone in telling his story, alternating between melodramatic and farcical episodes, while the story being told points to a time of total violence and absurdity. (The novel, however, turned out to be only the first part of a larger project, though it was marketed as a complete work.)

Given the various responses these novels have received, my point is nevertheless that fiction, or literature in a general sense, in contemporary China has lost its sensational impact as would have been expected in the era of either 1905 or 1955. After a sequence of pro forma investigations, nothing more serious happened to Yan Lianke, and he is now a self-employed full time writer. Wang Anyi’s new works have yet to bring her a triumph, as was the case with Chang-hengge 長恨歌 (Song of everlasting sorrow, 1996). Granting their own promotion stunts, Yu Hua and Jia Pingwa proved to have made little or no breakthrough with their works of the nineties. Lin Bai may emerge sole winner because her work has won acclaim new to her career, even from orthodox reviewers (though they have missed its subversive potential).

In any case, at a time when print culture has been diversified in accord with consumers’ tastes, and visual and virtual culture have become more prosperous than ever, the public of 2005 China did not put their hearts in reading literature. Gone are days when fiction was treated as something with “incalculable magnitude of power to change people’s minds.” But if the writers complain that their readership is getting increasingly small, they should at the time be aware that they have also been spared from the pressure writers such as Ding Ling, Hu Feng, Lu Ling, among many others, underwent, half a century before, in the era represented by the year 1955.

Paradoxically enough, questions like What literature can do for society, and What is the “right” kind of literature for reforming the Chinese soul, have continued to occupy majority critics’ and intellectuals’ minds, in a way reminiscent of their late Qing and mid-20th century predecessors. In January of 2005, at the moment when Flower City (unsuccessfully) published Serve the People, the literary journal Shanghai wenxue 上海文學 (Shanghai literature) featured an essay “Jingshen de beijing” 精神的背景 (The background of the spirit) by the Shandong based writer Zhang Wei 張煒 (b. 1956). In an overarching view Zhang Wei divides Chinese literature since 1949 into two periods; whereas the first three decades can be described as one of homogeneity and stagnation, the recent two decades are characterized by nothing but spiritual desolation—“a desert of the spirit” 精神的沙漠 (jingshen de shamo) in Zhang’s term. For Zhang Wei, although literary creation under Maoist hegemony had little freedom to speak of, writers were guided by socialist confidence and moral self-esteem to fashion
works destined to be read by millions and approved by the intelligentsia. However undesirable its actual products, literature of this period encapsulates a polemical force and a moral vision, which stood out even in a global context. By contrast, Zhang argues, contemporary Chinese literature has been so contaminated by capitalist consumer ideology that it has become totally disposable, bereft of spiritual grounding. A “true” artist and intellectual, Zhang concludes, should separate himself from his time so as to safeguard his autonomy.53

While quite a few critics applauded Zhang Wei’s essay, there were voices questioning the snobbery and complacency underlying it. It did not take long for some to associate Zhang’s provocation of the “true spirit” with the famous debate over “the humanist spirit,” also taking place in Shanghai Literature, in 1993. In that debate, it will be recalled, critics like Chen Sihe and Wang Xiaoming attacked the degenerate culture resulting from the fervor of the marketplace, and they called for the humanist spirit which seemed to have lost in the public pursuit of material gain. Chen and Wang drew strong counter-attacks for their high moral postures as well as their oversight of the historical circumstances ranging from post-Tian’anmen ressentiment to Deng Xiaoping’s pro-marketization talk of 1992. The veteran writer Wang Meng even pointed out that if the humanist spirit could never have existed in the first place under the Maoist regime, it would be disingenuous to launch a recall as if it had gotten lost. Indeed, the “humanist spirit” campaign started with an earnest goal, but quickly became either a feeble flirtation with the Marxist/Maoist brand of humanism or a nostalgic gesture motivated by a burgeoning capitalist desire for “owning” even what is already lost or never existed. More, it resonated with Liang Qichao’s discontent that his ideal “new fiction” was always already polluted, even at the moment of its genesis.

At first look Zhang Wei’s essay reads almost like a rehash of the “the humanist spirit” debate which in its own turn was already recycling the humanist discourses of the eighties and even earlier. Little surprise that it should draw criticisms from people favoring either a more diversified expression of creativity or a more specific theoretical thrust. What makes Zhang’s case intriguing is that the contesting opinions were quickly disseminated, thanks to modern technology, at a speed the debaters over the “humanist spirit” could have hardly imagined in the 1990’s. In just a few weeks, one saw in the “Vegetarian Garden for Select People” (Xiaozhong caiyuan 小眾菜園), a website run by the Shanghai

53. Zhang Wei, “Jingshen de beijing” (The background of the spirit), Shanghai wenxue (Shanghai literature) (2005) 1:3.
writer Chen Cun 陳村, the debate mushroomed into a cacophony of comments, meta-comments, gossip, and name-calling.

It was at this juncture an essay “He XX xiong tan Zhang Wei” 和XX 兄談張煒 (A discussion with XX on Zhang Wei) by Li Rui 李銳 (b. 1950), a wellknown Shanxi-based writer and friend of Zhang Wei, was posted on the “Vegetable Garden” site. For Li Rui, Zhang Wei may score by critiquing a society about to be devoured by capitalist consumerism, but Zhang has avoided the more serious question, that this capitalist consumerism is made possible by none other than China’s socialist regime. When intellectuals and literati righteously lash out at the consequences of the capitalist market system, argues Li, they ought to ask whether they could critique the regime that acquiescently endorsed the system with the same force; or worse, whether they have served as a handy mouthpiece, however unwittingly, of the regime which still needs to maintain a socialist façade. In Li Rui’s words, the most culpable are those who have “secured their privilege as running dog (of the regime) while pointing their fingers at social corruption in the posture of a tragic hero.”54 Li went so far as to insinuate that Zhang Wei had cashed in on his moral status by enjoying a fancy “mansion” sponsored by the government.55 What followed is not difficult to imagine. As the debate turned into a squabble over Zhang Wei’s property, the basic argument between the two writers, and more important, the social and ideological motivation behind it, was left unattended.

The confrontation between Zhang Wei and Li Rui merits attention not only because it recapitulates the “humanist spirit” debate of thirteen year before but also because it flaunts some of the essential issues in the debate between the neo-liberals and neo-leftists since the late nineties. At the risk of oversimplification, let it be understood that the neo-liberal claim that socialist planners have mistakenly applied scientific methodology to both nature and society. Following Frederick Von Hayek’s theory, they lobby for a society and a market as self-regulating mechanisms separated from the control of the state. In retaliation, the neo-leftists points out that these neo-liberals fail to realize the complicit relation of the market to the state—to that effect they have consumed the same scientistic myths as the leftists they set out to attack. In the name of democracy and freedom, the neo-liberals are said to have unconditionally succumbed to Western capitalist ideology which, in a most treacherous twist, has

54. Li Rui’s letter was posted on March 10, 2005. For Chen Cui’s website, see http://bbs.99read.com/list.asp?boardid=18
55. Ibid.
already joined hands with the socialist regime. For the neo-leftists, therefore, socialist revolution remains an unfinished project since justice, equality, and social well-being are still goals worthy of one’s dedication.56

This is where the quarrel between Zhang Wei and Li Rui becomes relevant. Li Rui could not have agreed more with Zhang Wei’s indictment of the overflow of economic and cultural capital in China, a sign of the Chinese sell-out to Western capitalism. But instead of further attacking the temptation of neo-liberalism cum capitalism, Li Rui turned the table round by calling into question the indictor’s own “spiritual” integrity. For Li Rui, to criticize the evil consequences of neo-liberalism is not difficult; to criticize the government behind the scene—which above all is responsible for the atrocities culminating in the Tian’anmen Incident—is most difficult. Zhang Wei’s problem, therefore, is not that he has said anything wrong but that he has not said it enough. More intriguingly, Zhang’s dangling critical stance may have reinforced the socialist claim of the government, which otherwise is the propeller of China’s capitalist-liberal turn. That Zhang has even benefited from such a stance merely bespeaks his collusion with the power machine on both the liberal and socialist fronts.

Through his criticism on Zhang Wei, Li Rui has touched on the dilemma in the discursive realm of contemporary Chinese intellectuals and literati at large. Whereas the neo-liberals are to be condemned for spreading the gospels of global modernization in a wholesale manner, the neo-leftists, as Li Rui would have it, appear no better-off because they could neither explain why Chinese socialism has gone so wrong in the past as to foster the evil outcome of capitalist-liberalism, nor provide a feasible agenda for the future China other than vague calls to collective solidarity, social justice, and welfare. More, insofar as they uphold a leftist claim at the expense of naming the core problem of the status quo, the neo-leftists have also lent legitimacy to the state they meant to critique. In labeling themselves truth-holders of “leftism,” they above all enjoy in socialist China “symbolical capital” not so accessible to the neo-liberals. Needless to

say, some of them have quickly capitalized on this symbolic capital in material terms either in China or overseas. As such they are susceptible to the disease of double-hypocrisy.

In view of their eschatological vision of an old China crumbling away, and their invocation of a utopian project based on critique and reflection, both the neo-leftists and neo-liberals remind us of the Liang Qichao who wrote *The Future of New China* more than one hundred years ago. While they build their utopian narrative on a "future perfect" mood—that things will have become better as long as the proper path is taken, neither seems to be able to proffer a plan to fill the gap between the present and the future (except for practicing criticism). The neo-leftists take in particular a posture of nostalgia, a nostalgia about the loss—nay, the absence—of a proper critical force in modern Chinese communities. Hence more longing for the critical agency in the vein of Liang Qichao, Lu Xun and Hu Feng.

Such a longing may well backfire, however. I call attention to the tortuous twists in the genealogy of modern Chinese critical discourse, in theory as in practice. Looking back, I would argue that one of the paradoxes of Chinese modernity lies not in the shortage, but excess, of critical desire and moral engagement. The most monstrous proprietor of this "excess" is perhaps the industry of criticism and self-criticism in PRC history from the forties to the seventies. And one recalls that all was conducted for the purpose of inculcation, rectification and self- and mutual-betterment before quickly being reified into truisms of politics. In view of contemporary critical calls for "rewriting literary history," "intervening with society," and colonial critique and empire studies, an "old-leftist" may respond with an ironic sense of *déjà-vu*: Aren't these familiar notions and slogans from the heyday of socialist discourse? There is no denying that these notions are still relevant to contemporary Chinese cultural and political circumstances and deserve critical engagement. The irony, nevertheless, lies in that these notions have now undergone the discursive trafficking between the first, second, and third worlds and gained a new cachet, particularly for academics. They sound both new and not so new, like the way in which Liang Qichao just promoted new, political fiction after the Japanese model in 1902, only to confirm in a roundabout way the conventional Chinese Way. These critics apply Western criticism now made to address issues of non-Western countries, sedulously avoiding all the types of mistakes pointed out by their Western tutors and seeking only those literary virtues on the list of officially approved merits. They recognize "intellectual colonialism" as an impeachable offense, and yet practice it on every level—a post-socialist and post-colonial uncanny
indeed.

For the neo-liberals as for the neo-leftists, accordingly, their challenge lies not in critiquing Chinese reality so much (always already a battleground between desirable and undesirable historical forces) as the institution of “critique” as part of that reality.\(^{57}\) For all his own hyperbolic rhetoric, Li Rui has a point cautioning Zhang Wei on the temptation of empowering himself with his critical stance. As if parodying the subversive element of any such kind critical engagement, their debate quickly turned into a scuffle about who is the “fraudulent gentleman” (weijunzi 備君子) and who is the “genuine crook” (zhixiaoren 真小人), about who is cashing in on their moral superiority in a more efficient way. They remind us nothing more than the scatological turn of late Qing fiction and fiction criticism, out of which nobody comes with clean hands.

In 1907, Tao Youzeng describes:

At the core of the twentieth century there is a great monster: it walks without legs, flies without wings, it heard without knocking; it pierces the brain, amazes the eye, satisfies the mind, improves the intellect; now solemn, now harmonious, now praising, now weeping, now exciting, now persuasive, now witty, now biting, appearing in profusion, embodying careful labor, as dazzling as lightening, immensely fascinating, it has incredibly great power and displays features distinctive in the world of literature. What is this thing? Fiction.\(^{58}\)

When he talks about the monster-like nature of fiction, Tao Youzeng has in mind fiction’s power in both technological and ideological terms. One hundred years after Tao’s observation, fiction seems to have completed its cycle of destiny as the genre to reform the Chinese mind, while the technological side of narrative circulation has reincarnated itself into forms such as cinema and internet communication. Visual and virtual studies are finding ways into a broadly defined realm of literary studies.

Given the drastic changes of literature in both production and consumption over the past century, it seems only ironic to see that the tenor of modern

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57. I hasten to add that I am neither denigrating the power of critical consciousness nor the author’s most commendable engagement by issues such as history and memory in critical terms. Precisely because I endorse his undertaking and welcome the provocative potential of his work, I hope to solicit more thought from what he has already argued. And I believe he is among the very few modern Chinese literature scholars in both Chinese and English speaking worlds who can bring us to this new plateau of criticism.

Chinese critical discourse about the use of literature remains largely intact, as evinced by the debates discussed above. Issues on nationalism and state hegemony, Chinese spirit and identity in crisis, the “use” of literature and critique still occupy mainstream discourse, while Western theoretical models have been alternately celebrated and condemned to solidify critical dialogue.

To reiterate my argument in the beginning of this essay, I propose that Chinese literary modernity does not take place with a single formula, for an elite group of writers and readers, or at a sanctioned historical moment. Modernity indicates not a mythical telos but a historical re-positioning, one that enables us to continuously resurrect the new from the old, and to tease out the conventional from the avant-garde. To examine the making of the modern in twentieth-century Chinese literature, therefore, one looks not only into areas whose modernity has been admitted but also into areas whose modernity has been overlooked or denied. Only when one is aware of the multiple temporal zones played out against each other in the dialectics of modernity, can one continuously enact as well as undo the spell of the modern.

By setting literary phenomena of 1905, 1955, 2005 side by side, I have no intention to reinstate the laws of historical causality. In sharp contrast to this mechanical notion, I am looking for clues and traces that would enable us to recognize anew the complex voices in the formation of modern Chinese literature. The parallel between the late Qing, mid-20th century, and the turn of the 21st century, accordingly, takes on an allegorical dimension. It points to certain questions: if contemporary Chinese literature recapitulates some of the distinguishing features of late Qing or mid-20th century literature, does it mean that we have not gotten too far beyond the programs of the first-generation modern writers? Or does it mean our modernist endeavors have taken us full circle since May Fourth, back to where we started a century ago?

With these observations in mind, I would like to anticipate projects that may illuminate the following prospects:

1. Projects that engage in a meta-critical view of modern Chinese literary criticism and history from the late Qing to the last decade of the twentieth century. These projects are expected not to take “criticism” or “history” as a task that assumes an a priori theoretical or moral superiority, as all too often is the case. Faced with many contemporary critics’ lament that we have yet to see the “right” criticism or “right” history appear, one may retort by saying that critical engagements and theoretical novelties are too often consumed like conventions. To be critical, in my view, means to remain alert to the lures of conventionality—in the sense of rejecting not only the conformist
practice of criticism as such but also the conformist practice that comes in
the guise of "critiquing" conventionality.

2. Projects that address the continued interplay between history and literature. One notion most often referred to in this revisitation of modern Chinese literary history is *modernity*. Given the name of the field, "modernity" or "modern" seems to be a self-renewing focus for scholarly contestation; admittedly an array of stimulating ideas and data has been solicited as a result. But have we yet engaged in dialogue with the other side of modernity, namely, historicity? I do not mean *history* has been ignored in deference to modern contentions; far from it. I do mean history as it is has been practiced, either deconstructed to the exclusion of material grounding or recaptured in a dogmatic form, and thereby once again reified. In this sense, the familiar statement "always historicize!" can at best be understood as one of self-parody, saying "always historicize as the Europeans (or Americans, socialists, liberals) do!"

3. Projects that engage in remapping geopolitical and *geopoetic* cartography. Today, critics have been enabled to read modern Chinese literature and history with a multiplicity of global tools and theories. Yet is it not a paradox that critics can subscribe to a "politics of marginality" and a "polemics of intervention," or seek "global contextualization" with "local articulation," while rigidly marginalizing all forms of Chinese modernity (and historicity) that did not emerge within some preconceived mainstream, and resolutely refusing to articulate the local contexts of modern Chinese creativity? The twentieth century saw China constantly shifting among political, historical, and literary entities, each reciting its own self-narrative and pursuing its own idea of (post)modernity. Thanks to this historical fact of fragmentation and dispersal, writers have been made to interpret the Chinese experience in ways that were difficult to marshal into a stifling unity. But how many critics of Chinese literature and culture in mainland China and English-speaking communities, when engaged in issues such as the global versus the local, nation versus state, post-colonialism and empire discourse, have paid attention to the dynamics in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Chinese communities in South East Asia such as Malaysia and Singapore?

If one of the most important lessons one can learn from modern Chinese literature and history is the tortuous nature of Chinese writers' attempt to grapple with polymorphous reality, then this knowledge can be appreciated in full only by a criticism equally exempt from formulaic dogma and ideological blindness. This is of course not an easy task. But as mentioned in the beginning of
the essay, one of the premises for our study of the Chinese modern is that Chinese writers have been and still are capable of complex and creative thought even at moments of political suppression and personal humility. I argue that any critical endeavor in the name of "modernity" must look unafraid at this historical reality, which seems to be that of contested modernities.

Coda

The passing away of Ba Jin (1904–2005) on October 17, 2005, seems to provide a most suggestive coda to this survey of three historical moments of Chinese literary modernization. When Wu Yue bombed himself to death in 1905, Ba Jin was merely a baby, but in the next twenty years he grew to become an anarchist, devoted to such noble ideas such as love, peace and mutual aid. In his early novels, assassination and martyrdom constitute a major theme though at the same time he was pondering alternative ways to rescue China. Ba Jin became one of the most popular writers in the early thirties, as a result of his *jiliu sanbu-qu* 激流三部曲 (*Torrent trilogy*), of which *Jia* 家 (*Family*, 1933) was almost a bible for one generation of Chinese revolutionary youth. Through the evocative power of his writings, Ba Jin demonstrated what a writer could accomplish in response to the call of the time.

Ba Jin remained an honest observer of Chinese plight during the wartime and an uncompromising critic of the corruptive Nationalist regime after the war. When the new Republic was founded, he nevertheless went along with majority colleagues in aligning himself with the party machine. His ex-role as anarchist became an ironic reminder of his compromised political stance. In 1955, Ba Jin was holding a prominent position in the circle of writers and he was among the board of chairmen in the campaign of the Writers' Association denouncing the Hu Feng clique. He compared Hu Feng and his followers to poisonous "pus," and recommended that the party "get rid of them in a decisive and swift way [which Hu Feng and his gang were good at]."59 In the aftermath of the Anti-Rightist Movement of 1958 he published seven essays in a row to praise the party, the best known title being "Women yaozai dishang jianli tiantang" 我們要在地上建立天堂 (*We want to build a paradise on earth*). Even so, Ba Jin was not spared during the Cultural Revolution; amid widespread tortures his beloved wife Xiao Shan 蕭珊 (1914–1972) died pathetically. Ba Jin wrote more than 150

essays between 1978 and 1986, in the general title Suixiang lu 隨想錄 (Random thoughts)—a most poignant testimony to the commitment and betrayal, perseverance and repentance, of a Chinese writer whose career spanned most part of the twentieth century.

Ba Jin spent his last six years hospitalized, reportedly most of the time in a semi-conscious or un-conscious state. Despite his and his family members’ intermittent requests for euthanasia, he was carefully kept alive at the order of the government. He would not have been aware of the changes of Chinese literature in the new century, to say nothing about the banning of a novel like Serve the People or the quarrel between Li Rui and Zhang Wei. But did these incidents really matter at a time when literature had lost its sanctioned position? Or do we really want to see literature be sanctioned again, as in the days of the twenties and thirties, when Ba Jin was a young anarchist; or the fifties, when Ba Jin was a progressive people’s writer; or in the post-Mao era, when Ba Jin was a leading indictor and confessor of the Revolution?

In his memory, party leaders and celebrity writers and critics all praise Ba Jin as the “conscience of China,” the one who “tells the truth”. Few, however, would think about the paradox implied in these honorifics. In a vocation which highlights fictionalization, Ba Jin has undertaken a contradictory mission: he may have told too much “truth,” good or bad, at each historical moment, often at the expense of artistic nuance; or he may never have told enough of “truth,” because total truth-telling would have led to eternal silence. Either way, it flaunts the dilemma Ba Jin and most of his colleagues have shared. But this desire for and demand of “truth” from fiction writers is perhaps the residual “obsession with China” characteristic of Chinese literature of the past century. In any case, when the veteran anarchist passed away quietly at the Huadong Hospital in Shanghai, there could hardly be heard echoes of the bomb, or any literary voice of equal explosive nature, set off by Wu Yue one hundred years ago.
1905、1955、2005
——中國現代文學上的三個時間點

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摘要


本文雖然並列這三個年代，但無意暗示歷史因果律的必然。相反的本文企圖重探世紀以來中國文學複雜的軌跡。我認為中國文學現代性不能以特定時期、公式、創作或閱讀群體來斷定；現代性的意義不在於內爆真理的呈現，而在於對歷史坐標的不斷定位。只有當我們折衝現代的多元時間面向間，我們才能持續啓動，也化解，現代迷樣的魅力。

關鍵詞：現代性

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