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Yi Li



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# ARTICLES



ARTICLE

## Not Just Tears and Laughter: Rethinking the Spatiality of Emotions in Zhang Henshui's *Fate in Tears and Laughter*

Fangyuan Huang

Princeton University

### ABSTRACT

This article rethinks the spatiality of emotions through the lens of Zhang Henshui's *Fate in Tears and Laughter*, one of the most popular novels in the Republican era (1911-1949). Drawing on Ling Hon Lam's work on the spatiality of emotion in premodern Chinese theater, this study reformulates emotion as a space that transposes an affective body into a spectatorial position in front of the emotion-realm mediated by theatricality. This article sets out to delineate the melodramatic polarization of emotions (tears and laughter), the spatial topography of emotion embedded in geographical loci, and the emotional spectatorship in which a private self is enmeshed in a public domain through bodily engagement in laughing, crying, and sympathizing with fictional characters. It contributes to a new understanding of the affective assembly of emotions evoked by reading experiences that is not so much an innate faculty but rather the coded registers of an imagined community.

**KEY WORDS:** *Fate in Tears and Laughter*, emotion, spatiality, theatricality, Zhang Henshui

### Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Scholars working on literary modernity in the late Qing (1644-1910) and early Republican Era (1911-1949) cannot ignore the overwhelming presence of old-style literature, usually labeled as the “Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies School (*Yuanyang hudie pai* 鴛鴦蝴蝶派)” and the “Saturday School (*Libailiu pai* 禮拜六派).”<sup>2</sup> Two approaches to this literature are common. The first is to follow the May Fourth intellectuals’ exclusion of old-style literature from consideration in the discursive invention of a new fiction as the epitome of modernity. From this perspective, butterfly literature is the opposite of

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1. Editor's Note: This article was edited by Stephen Boyanton, who has since left LMC to pursue other projects. We wish him well.

2. The “Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies School” primarily refers to romantic love stories that originated in the late Qing and early Republican eras and gained wide popularity among the public in the 1910s and 20s. The inseparable lovers in the old-style novels are compared to mandarin ducks and butterflies in pairs. The “Saturday School” takes its name from an eponymous magazine *Saturday* (*Libailiu* 禮拜六), which published not only stories similar to “Mandarin Duck and Butterfly,” but also detective novels, black curtain novels, knight-errant novels, social novels, etc. The two labels “Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School” and “Saturday School” began to merge and were used interchangeably to refer to middlebrow literature that included love stories, novels of knight errantry, and detective stories. In a recent re-evaluation of the late Qing and Republican era “popular literature,” Fan Boqun 范伯群 uses “Mandarin Duck and Butterflies-Saturday School” to foreground the diverse genres and contents subsumed under the rubric of this school. As a matter of convenience, in my discussion of popular novels in the late 1920s and early '30s, I deploy the term “Butterfly School” to specify their shared sentimental lineage.

modern literature. The second is to recuperate the long-repressed Butterfly school as a necessary complement to the elite-led May Fourth literature, but this approach is still premised upon the conception of a traditional, less modern if not anti-modern, and even vulgar body of middlebrow literature called Butterfly literature. The third is what I call “mutual illumination,” which problematizes the binary construction of popular and elite literature and studies how they overlap and infiltrate one another to problematize any fixed boundary between them. The juxtaposition of the two seemingly incompatible concepts is manifested in the term vernacular modernism, which describes the secularization of modern aesthetics in lived experience. By invoking this term, I have in mind Miriam Hansen’s conceptualization of the mass-produced, mass-mediated experience of modernity and modernization for wider consumption and everyday usage. I am not particularly interested, however, in rephrasing previous scholarly engagements with the mishmash of plebeian, everyday life and the urban, modern sensations of Shanghai. Instead, I use Hansen’s vernacular modernism more as a prompt than an answer. I argue it is necessary to foreground the variegated spatiality embedded in the affect of vernacular modernity as an entry point into the interrelations between indigenous locality and imagined community, between private emotions and public resonance in the Republican era. I am making a claim that is both more general and more specific than the spatial circulation and dissemination of new media and discourses. It is more general because it is not bounded by the physical, geographical space of the urban milieu. Instead, it opens up the topology of emotional territories and spatial imagination. It is more specific because rather than treating the literary text as a free-floating, dematerialized phenomenon, I focus on the print mediality of a popular literary text and interrogate the ways the text strikes a sentimental chord in many Republican readers.

In this article, I situate my discussion of the spatiality of emotions in the reading experience of *Fate in Tears and Laughter* (*Tixiao yinyuan* 啼笑因緣). This novel deserves more research not only because its unprecedented popularity extended to suburban and rural areas, but also because it grafts emotive responses (“tears” and “laughter”) onto modern sense-making, epitomizing a culmination of sentimental education that Enlightenment discourse often fails to register. Written by Zhang Henshui (張恨水, 1895-1967), *Fate in Tears and Laughter* (hereafter, *Fate*) was serialized in the *Kuaihuo lin* 快活林 (*Forest of Lightheartedness*) column of *Xinwen bao* 新聞報 (*The News*), one of the two largest newspapers in Shanghai, from March 17 to November 30, 1930. Following the newspaper serialization, the novel was almost immediately published in book form. Zhang Henshui recalls in his memoir that the copies sold of *Fate* far exceeded those of his other novels.<sup>3</sup> According to him, *Fate* became

3. Zhang estimated in his memoir in 1949 that *Fate* had gone through a total of over twenty editions, not including copies in Southeast Asia and pirated editions. He recalled that the first two editions in 1930 had ten and fifteen thousand copies, respectively. The subsequent editions (1930-1949) ran an average of three to four thousand copies (Zhang H., ‘*Xiezuozhengya huiyi*’ 44).



an instant hit among the public from top-ranking officials to lower-class courtesans (Zhang H., “*Wode xiaoshuo guocheng*” 275). People everywhere—not only in Shanghai—talked about it and bought newspapers every day to see how the story developed (Zhang Y. 133). It is impossible to gauge the sensations elicited by this novel without taking into full consideration the print medi-ality under which it was produced, circulated, and consumed. In Shanghai of the 1920s, the readership of popular fiction reached between several hundred thousand to a million according to publication figures. If we take into account the circulation of newspapers, the readership of serialized novels was much larger. The novel’s popularity was premised on the development of modern printing techniques, the lower cost of newspapers and magazines, and mass literacy among urban residents. In addition, before film and radio were easily accessible to mass audiences, reading fiction undoubtedly remained one of the most convenient and inexpensive ways to pass the time.

We might ask, therefore, what’s particular about *Fate*? Why did it win the hearts and minds of so many readers? Sweeping social transformations took place around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in China. In order to make sense of their present, the nature of which was increasingly hard to pin down, the urban public looked for a form of entertainment that could disseminate intuitive knowledge, conceptual tools, and a glimmer of hope. Sentimental articulations were instrumental in distinguishing right from wrong and sensible human beings—in the eighteenth-century sense—from apathetic ones. Scholars working on the rise of modern fiction in England and France take emotion as a criterion to measure the transition from aristocracy to a modern world order.<sup>4</sup> Popular sentimental novels, exemplified by Samuel Richardson’s epistolary novels *Pamela* and *Clarissa*, evince that the practice of sentimental codes replaced desacralized religious beliefs and functioned as the moral basis of the urban bourgeoisie. For example, Pamela’s assertion of chastity and her unflinching resistance to her master’s seduction attest to the establishment of a new moral order despite commercial flows and socio-economic transformations. An individual’s moral strengths and virtues instead of hereditary status and wealth determined his or her worthiness. In his pioneering study on popular literature in modern China, Perry Link connects the bourgeois sentimentalism of the Industrial Revolution in England to popular sentiments in early twentieth-century Shanghai. He discerns the impending need for blatantly sentimental stories in the 1910s when “changing social patterns left individuals, especially among the young, with less support from traditional family and community ties” (55). Hence

4. The rise of modern novels in Europe took place in tandem with the Industrial Revolution. Sentimental novels along with other early forms of novels paved the way for the emergence of modern fiction in Western Europe and elsewhere. See Margaret Cohen’s *The Sentimental Education of the Novel*, a study of French sentimental social novels during the first decades of the nineteenth century; and Jonathon Zwicker’s *Practices of the Sentimental Imagination*, an examination of the continuation between early modern and modern fiction through the lens of sentimental literature in Japan in the nineteenth century.

for Link, fiction reading is a source not only of information but also of affective experience: it mobilizes individuals to observe new behavioral norms while reaffirming their psychological security.

Building upon previous scholarship on the relationship between the rise of modern novels and the discovery of interiority, this article serves as a modest yet much-needed intervention into our study of modern Chinese literature in the grand epoch of revolution and enlightenment. Before such diverse affective responses to sweeping social changes are elevated into aesthetics and ideology, it is necessary to expand the discovery of May Fourth writers' individual and subjective narrative underwriting of their Enlightenment and revolutionary discourses to the subjective world of the urban populace, who, as passive readers, were often silenced. The implications of sentimental fabulations should not be excessively linked up with the makings of interiority and selfhood. I am more interested in excavating the intersubjectivity of feelings of the mass reading public, arguing that feeling, in essence, is feeling with, feeling into and feeling through others. Walter Benjamin insightfully points out that nothing attracts the attention of nineteenth-century writers more than a crowd that was "getting ready to take shape as a public in broad strata who had acquired facility in reading" (166).<sup>5</sup> Benjamin's comment proves amazingly apt in twentieth-century China, where modern publics emerged from a class of readers, spectators, opera consumers, and later from audiences for mass media performances. Spellbound by new forms of mass media and cultural practices, one's feelings were constantly mediated by the interaction between self and others, between individual and environment.

Insofar as the mass of feelings evoked by cultural practices such as reading implies feeling with, feeling into, and feeling through others, at the heart of my discussion lies the readers' unprecedented emotional immersion in the novels. The vernacular storytelling of *Fate* creates a sense of intimacy between readers and text and enjoins readers to consume stories in tears and laughter. *Fate* generates a heightened sense of what I call "affective literacy"—intuitive know-how and vernacular wisdom ingrained in the sympathy and bodily sensations evoked by reading. Readers of Zhang's novels are initiated into a social ambience and learn to negotiate the terms of sentimental education.

Moreover, the size of the readership offers a point of departure to discuss what I call "the spatiality of emotion." Here, I take up Ling Hon Lam's explication of emotion-realms that treats emotion as the immediacy of what passes between affective bodies as atmosphere and ambience. Drawing on Heidegger's *Dasein* and phenomenology, Lam compellingly foregrounds emotion per se as a space, a situation, and the mood we find ourselves "involved in,

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5. To Benjamin, the crowd serves both as a shorthand for the emerging public and as a shadow cast by the coalescing urban mass. "The Crowd—no subject was more entitled to the attention of nineteenth-century writers. It was getting ready to take shape as a public in broad strata who had acquired facility in reading. It became a customer, it wished to find itself portrayed in the contemporary novel" (*Illumination* 166).

delivered through, and coming upon" (5). Delivered across space, the affective body's "deliverance into" and "face-off with" the emotion-realm are the keys to the dreamscape and theatricality of emotions (7, 202). In so doing, Lam challenges the paradigm of emotion as a state of mind "being imprinted by, overflowing onto, or mingling with things in external space" (4). Lam audaciously reformulates emotion as a spatial structure and an ontological condition which delivers an affective body in front of the emotion-realm mediated by distanced spectatorship and theatricality (4, 189). In this study, I further this line of thinking by emphasizing that a moving affective body is integral to the conceptualization of emotion as a space. The affective body is transported through space as an illusory spectacle, a spatial image to register the felt reality of relation with other bodies. In addition, I find it necessary to delineate the boundary between emotion and affect, despite the fact that the two terms are often used interchangeably. Broadly speaking, emotion is socio-linguistically structured and implies a psychological, and at least slightly interpretive and performative experience. In the Chinese context, the rough equivalent of emotion is *qing* 情,<sup>6</sup> a combination of feelings and circumstances, sentiment and facts. Affect, however, is less codified and lies on the other end of the spectrum. It is physiological, intense, unfixed, an eruption of pre-linguistic sensations or potentialities. My understanding of affect is inspired by the Bergsonian concept of body-image, which is invested in the affective movement of the body in a continuum of aggregated images that covers the interval between self and other, body and object. The moving body is key to understanding the spatiality of emotions.

To do this, this paper will concentrate on the spatiality of emotions in affective, geographical, and communal terms and argue that the emotional topography of *Fate* codifies and charts people's feelings, sentiments, and states of mind and bridges the rift between body and environment, between selfhood and community. To begin with, I discuss the spatial polarization of tears and laughter as leading to a heightened sense of moral dilemma. Then, I chart the spatial topography of emotions in which joys and sorrows are not internal overflows vis-à-vis external stimuli but rather are registered in the physical milieus of Beijing, ranging from the lively Bridge of Heaven (*Tian-qiao* 天橋) to the tranquil Western Hills (*Xishan* 西山). I will show how the spatial topography of emotions—centering on the kinesthetic activity of a body across physical and narrative space—generates an affective mapping of the city. Lastly, this article articulates the ways the interaction between the private sphere of silent reading and the public resonance of the emotions brings the gravity of affective literacy home to an imagined community of sympathetic readers. Feelings elicited by silent reading vibrate with the feelings of the characters in the novel and, by extension, with the feelings of a sympathetic

6. Emotion and *qing* are not entirely equivalent. *Qing* in the Chinese context can designate passion, nature, principle, and reality. In the late Ming, *qing* was viewed as a universal force in animation that gives life to the myriad things. See, for instance, the seventeenth-century compendium *Qingshi* 情史 (*A History of Love*).

collective. From the author's sentimental mapping of emotional territories to a solitary reader's acting out emotions on behalf of fictional characters, the act of silent reading through the tears and laughter of the fictional characters not only enacts an emotional mapping of literary topography in tears and laughter but also stimulates sympathetic resonance within an imagined community.

### Reading through Tears and Laughter: Melodramatic Rendering of Emotions

Stuck in between two intertwining yet counterintuitive incentives—the individual pursuit for freedom and romantic love on the one hand and the lure of Confucian familial bonds on the other—a sentimental education comprises the main classroom for securing practical views of social reality. In response to the heightened sense of chaos in reality, a mode of narration that is emotional, sensational, and even redundant is aptly attuned to the ebbs and flows of life experiences. Peter Brooks deploys melodrama as a descriptive term (without pejorative connotations) to refer to a melodramatic mode central to modern sensibility, the origins of which can be located within the context of the French Revolution and its aftermath (14). Unlike Peter Brooks' observation that melodrama is recognized as a constant among literary modes, melodrama in the Chinese context should be understood less as a constant among different literary genres than a narrative mode of aesthetic operation, a sense-making apparatus saturating a variety of mediums and platforms. To borrow Brooks' insight, elements of melodrama—the hyperbolic presentation of conflicting forces, polarization of morality, and excess of emotion—register a need to locate and make evident the choices of life which we hold to be of overwhelming importance (viii). Emotions, in particular, are foregrounded to “represent the theatrical impulse itself” (107), to “act out” the heightening sensations of daily life, and to evoke the moral imperative to make a choice.

*Fate's* original title in Chinese, *Tixiao yinyuan* 啼笑因緣, is saturated with spatial polarization of emotions: from *ti* 啼 (tears) to *xiao* 笑 (laughter) and vice versa. Tears and laughter as a pair of affective responses correspond to *you* 憂 (inner emotions of worry or sorrow) and *xi* 喜 (happiness, light-heartedness) respectively. *Yinyuan* 因緣 is a compound word deriving from Sanskrit *nidāna*. *Yin* 因 (Sanskrit: *hetu*) means primary or first cause and *yuan* 緣 (Sanskrit: *pratyaya*) designates the process in which the primary cause is entangled and bounded with other agents and conditions. Taken together, *yinyuan* refers to fate, destiny and karmic causality. In traditional tales, karma echoes the belief in moral recompense for one's actions (*baoying* 報應) and addresses the ethos of punitive justice. At the advent of the modern, *yinyuan* speaks to both traditional ethos of retribution and new possibilities emerging from social changes. The characters' lives are inevitably permeated with uncontrollable forces of modernization that either draw people closer or tear them apart. Therefore, personal joys and sorrows are grafted onto larger socio-historical dynamics.

In terms of generic lineage, Weijie Song discerns a pronounced linkage between *Fate* and the late Qing social exposé novels. He argues that “tears and laughter” implies the romantic tradition and the tradition of social satire. On the one hand, “tears” designates both personal romantic feelings and emotive response to social and political conditions (Song 110). On the other, “laughter” evokes the tradition of satire to mock social perversities with parody and laughter. Together, weeping and laughing imply weaving stitches of individual sentiments into the larger social tapestry. While Song is attentive to the implications of the affective evocation of tears and laughter, he doesn’t further this line of inquiry by probing the linguistic renderings of emotive registers and the spatial sedimentation of affect, as in the connection between fictional sentiments and affective responses of the reading public.

The weaving of tears into laughter allows us to examine the melodramatic circulation of emotions and the ways in which emotive responses are mapped onto beliefs and sense-making. The alternation and the interpenetration between joy and sorrow, laughter and tears are vividly registered in *Fate*.<sup>7</sup> While “tears” gestures towards the private sphere of *ernü* 儿女 (young lovers) weeping in seclusion, laughter is encoded with sociality—a signal of the self being with a group. The term *ernü qingchang* 儿女情長 (the stubborn endurance of young lovers) evokes the literary imagination of young lovers’ indulgence in the circulation of joy and sorrow, departure and reunion, breaking up and reconciliation, echoing Jonathan E. Zwicker’s remarks on the sentimental fiction of tears in nineteenth-century Japan, “these very visible tears [in the texts] lead to a different register of tears (...) as mechanisms designed to elicit tears from the historical reader” (43).

The plot of *Fate* centers on Fan Jiashu’s 樊家樹 romance with three young women in Beijing. Jiashu comes from a well-to-do family in Hangzhou. In the 1920s, he leaves for Beijing to study for the college entrance examination and stays in his rich cousin Tao Bohe’s 陶伯和 house. One day, he meets the poor street drum-song singer Shen Fengxi 沈鳳喜 during a street performance near the Bridge of Heaven and falls in love with her. He also befriends a female knight-errant Guan Xiugu 關秀姑 and her father Guan Shoufeng 關壽峰, who perform martial arts to make a living. Later, Jiashu accompanies his cousins to an upper-class restaurant and encounters He Lina 何麗娜, the daughter of a millionaire. Both the glamorous Lina and the chivalrous Xiugu fall for Jiashu. At the highpoint of Jiashu’s relationship with Fengxi, he gives an engagement ring to her, but disaster begins to strike when Jiashu leaves Beijing for Hangzhou to visit his mother. During Jiashu’s absence, a warlord named General Liu Dezhu takes a fancy to Fengxi and traps her in his mansion. Seduced by the warlord’s wealth and luxurious lifestyle, Fengxi

7. Hsiao-wei Wang Rupprecht discusses the structural design of *Fate* through the alternation and interpenetration of polarized emotions and other axes of correlatives amid characters’ union and separation. Her careful reading is helpful in understanding the polarization of emotion in a melodramatic mode (80-86).

becomes his concubine. Moved by Jiashu's love for Fengxi, Xiugu decides to hide her romantic feelings for Jiashu and helps bring Jiashu and Fengxi together for a farewell meeting. However, as soon as her secret rendezvous with Jiashu is discovered, Fengxi is tortured, abused, and driven insane by General Liu. Meanwhile, the villainous warlord takes a fancy to Xiugu and attempts to marry her to replace the insane Fengxi. Xiugu tricks the warlord into visiting a temple in the Western Hills and takes revenge by killing him. In the end, Xiugu and her father Shoufeng arrange a reunion between Jiashu and Lina in the Western Hills.

Xiugu forfeits her secret love for Jiashu on discovering his affection for Fengxi. Overshadowed by Lina's wealth and beauty, Xiugu withdraws even further. Jiashu's choice between Fengxi and Lina is full of melodramatic potential, as Fengxi and Lina look almost identical to each other. Their uncanny physical resemblance leads to a series of misrecognitions and misunderstandings by Jiashu and their acquaintances. Despite their marked similarities, the two girls are drastically different in their upbringings, class, values, and personalities. Fengxi is a naïve and gullible seventeen-year-old drum-song singer while Lina is a Westernized and dignified young lady of around twenty who lives a luxurious lifestyle.<sup>8</sup> Jiashu's decision therefore hinges not so much upon the beauty of the girls as on his psychological struggles between incompatible values and morals. His negotiation between Fengxi and Lina is unraveled spatially as he wavers between the polarized worlds of the high and the low, the imported and the indigenous.

Fengxi's emotional struggles between Jiashu and General Liu are rendered in nuanced articulations, which promote the reader's sympathetic identification with her. Her internal theater unravels as she vacillates between two marriage choices, and ultimately, two different ways of living and two conflicting moral imperatives. Fengxi is so caught up in this dilemma that any emphatic rhetoric breaks down, and via theatrical codes of representation, the intensity of her emotional struggles is visualized in a rich variety of emotive gestures. For instance, after being invited to attend an opera performance by General Liu, she first "forces a smile (*qiangxiao* 強笑)" upon going back home. When General Liu's gifts of jewelry gratify her vanity, she "smiles slightly (*weiwei yixiao* 微微一笑)." Later, when she is awakened by a sense of guilt regarding Jiashu, she is stupefied with worries (*fachou fadai* 發愁發呆) and "gives a mirthless smile (*lengxiao* 冷笑)" in front of General Liu's material temptations (Zhang H.109, 112-114). From feeling uncomfortable at first, to being pleased with warlord's solicitousness, and eventually to being

8. Lina's full name He Lina approximates the female name Helena in both spelling and pronunciation and hits at both the degree of her beauty and her Westernized behavior. T.M. McClellan notes that Shen Fengxi and Lina fall readily into the dichotomy of pear/magnolia, reminiscent of the contrasting associations attached to the female protagonists Liniang (pear) and Yunqian (magnolia) in Xu Zhenyan's *Jade Pear Spirit* (*Yuli hun* 玉梨魂)(11). While Lina is reminiscent of the "magnolia" lady Yunqian 筠倩 in Xu's novel, I argue that Fengxi is different from the pear-type female protagonist in the 1910s. She is more modern and assertive than Liniang.



disturbed by a sense of guilt, her wavering in between a guilty consciousness over Jiashu and avarice for General Liu's wealth is powerfully acted out. Fengxi's various gestures bear an indexical relationship to the heightened drama within her emotional realm and magnify the significance of the choice she is going to make. On the one hand, Fengxi knows that Jiashu's love for her is not based on money and Jiashu is willing to ensure her economic and spiritual independence.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, she is too weak-minded to resist the superficial lure of material abundance.<sup>10</sup>

In a stream of consciousness, her thoughts wander back to the past and recall Jiashu's affection for her, then flash forward to a promising future of becoming a rich madame if she marries General Liu. Fengxi's mind oscillates between awakening and dreaming before she forfeits the prospect of becoming a new woman and chooses the path to self-destruction. In the end, Fengxi becomes a plaything of the warlord and subject to torture and abuse. Reduced to a screaming wreck, Fengxi is punished because of her moral flaws. The moral undertones of Fengxi's choice revitalize the tradition of karmic retribution and testify to the moral regime operating at the level of melodramatic exposition.

### Between Tears and Laughter: A Topography of Emotions

In *Fate*, emotions are mapped onto the geographical territory of Beijing. Through the eyes of Fan Jiashu, a sojourner from Hangzhou in the south, the narrator unfolds Beijing almost like a tour guide for the readers. Jiashu's mapping of Beijing is sustained by the vivid depictions of local landmarks and social customs and "creates territories in which emotions, feelings, and meanings can be enciphered and deciphered" (Song 34). The different cultural sites serve not only as external stimuli to animate emotions but as affective spaces that retain the memory of experiences as well. This mingling of emotion and landscape to constitute an emotion-realm has been discussed extensively in *shihua* 詩話 (remarks on poetry) and *cihua* 詞話 (remarks on song lyrics)—two well-established genres of Chinese literary thought. In poetic composition, the boundaries between feelings (*qing*) and landscape (*jing* 景) are often traversed. The Chinese notion of landscape is distinct from the Cartesian notion of a preexisting environment with an objective and unmediated quality, independent of human agency. It may help to give an example where Wang Guowei (王國維, 1877-1927) pictures a poetic space diffused with mood and imbued with emotion.<sup>11</sup> Traditional poetry commentaries, however,

9. Jiashu confesses to Fengxi about the nature of their love: "Our love is by no means based on money, and I would never dare to insult you by using this stinky money, but I am willing to help you to be self-reliant, so as not to collect money like before," (110). Translations from Chinese into English are mine, unless otherwise noted.

10. Fengxi's shallow materialistic penchant is vividly presented: "Fengxi only felt that wealth was compelling, and she didn't know how to deal with it. As if she were a lady, she was busy taking care of these jewelry properties" (111).

11. In *Renjian cihua* 人間詞話 (Poetic Remarks on the Human World), Wang Guowei offers a well-known remark on the traversal of boundaries between the scenery and the emotion, "People talked about poetry in the past and distinguished the descriptions of scenery from the expression of emotions. However all descriptions of scenes are also expressions of emotions." (34).

emphasize not so much the spatiality of emotion as an ontological condition but rather as the externalization of interiority. To them, emotion reflects an inner state of mind, the spatiality of which bears an indexical relationship to its diffusion across external things.

Rather than presuming that emotion is the overflowing of an inside to an outside, I regard emotion as a space in and for itself in likening the topography of emotions to that of the city. Drawing on French philosopher Gaston Bachelard's proposal of a topo-analysis of space auxiliary of psychoanalysis, I adopt a topological schema and examine the way in which affective space informs and shapes the individual psyche, which for Bachelard is "the systematic psychological study of the sites of our intimate lives" (8). The interactions between space and emotions can be interpreted as the spatialization of emotion and the sentimentalization of space. Spaces of intimacy, such as the house, serve as a shelter from the shaky outside and provide an ideal nest for daydream and imagination.

Furthermore, theatricality is crucial to our understanding of the spatiality of emotions because it unsettles the distinction between subject and object, inner and outer. Lam's provocative reformulation of emotion as a space helps me to craft a spatial topography of the emotional realm less in terms of internal response to external space than in terms of a moving body and its being thrown into a mood (*Stimmung*) that is a third space in and for itself. In other words, a sentimental topography does not center on emotion as a stable state of mind but rather on the varying relations between body and environment, which involve both detachment and engagement of self. Seen in this light, emotions should be understood as a mode of self-differentiating reflexivity. Such reflexivity—generating and dissolving the subject simultaneously—unsettles the boundary between a body and scenes. The movement of the body hither and thither generates space and maps out affective territories.

If we trace the affective origin of tears and laughter in *Fate*, we will find that the emotional territories of the author were significantly inscribed by his own sojourning experiences in Beijing. The melodrama of tears and laughter is intimately bound up with the topography of the city in the mindscape, echoing Bachelard's observation that "for a knowledge of intimacy, localization in the spaces of our intimacy is more urgent than determination of dates" (9). Hence Zhang Henshui recalled, a year later, almost every detail of the space where he had written the novel's outline. In his preface to *Fate*, he attributes his sensations to the affective landscape of Zhongshan Park (*Zhongshan gongyuan* 中山公园) in Beijing.

I carried a pocket diary in my bag, walked through Four Pleasures Veranda, crossed the stone bridge, and went straight up the hill. In between a series of earthen hills, there was a thatched pavilion with a stone table and chairs perfect for relaxing. It is a secluded place, without people coming and going,



and I took my time to appreciate the scenery—as refined as a painting with fine brushwork. I let those external stimuli agitate my emotions. In a good mood, phantasmagoric scenes of joys and sorrows, departures and reunions occurred to me. I didn't want these phantoms to pass away immediately. I took out my diary and wrote them down hastily with a pencil. What are these phantoms? To tell you the truth, they are what you are reading now. When I created these phantoms in my mind, the plot fell into place naturally like the scenes of a movie on the screen, one scene after another, constantly pouring out (...) It was in this way that *Fate in Tears and Laughter* was produced. I don't know if I had any purpose, nor do I know if what I wrote in this way makes any sense. In short, it's all about a fantasy that I wrote down on that day and in that place (Zhang H., "Author's Preface" 239).

袋裡揣了一本袖珍日記本，穿過四宜軒，渡過石橋，直上小山來，一列土山之間，有一所茅草亭子，亭內並有一副石桌椅正好休息。這裡是僻靜之處，沒有什麼人來往由我慢慢的鑑賞這一幅工筆的圖畫。我只要藉這些外物，鼓動我的情緒。我趁著興致很好的時候，腦筋裡構出一種悲歡離合的幻影來。這些幻影。我不願它立刻即逝，一想出來之後馬上掏出日記本子，用鉛筆草草的錄出大意了。這些幻影是什麼？不瞞諸位說，就是諸位現在所讀的《啼笑因緣》了。當我腦筋裡造出這幻影之後，真個像銀幕上的電影，一幕一幕，不斷的湧出。…這一部《啼笑因緣》，就是這樣產生出來的。我自己也不知道我是否有什麼用意，更不知道我這樣寫出，是否有些道理。總之，不過捉住了我那日那地一個幻想寫出來罷了。

The pavilion near the lake was imbued with emotions; the scenery in front of author's eyes was aligned with his thoughts and daydreams. It is, however, overly hasty to conclude that outside stimuli mediate the private sphere of emotions without paying sufficient attention to the co-extensiveness of the topography of emotions and the *mise-en-scène*. Insofar as the exterior landscape serves as an affective medium agitating the body towards action—following Bergson's yoking of affect with bodily sensation—affective engagement and detachment alter the distance between body and object as if it is experienced physically through bodily movement in space. By the same token, the author's emotions are realized by his bodily impulse to act out these emotions dramatically. His emotion-scape is likened to a series of "phantasmagoric scenes of joys and sorrows, departures and reunions" (ibid. 239) on a virtual stage. The mental illusions of joys and sorrows are compared to a series of cinematic images on the silver screen unfolding unremittingly in front of the author, from which we may infer an incipient mode of spectatorship in front of one's own mental images in addition to a beholder's position in front of the physical topography. The psychic topography converges with the physical one precisely because the distance between body and object is bridged by affect.

The affective space anchored in Zhongshan Park left an indelible impression on Zhang Henshui. When the novel was completed in November, 1930,

a year and a half had passed since the jotting of the outline on a summer day. At the end of the preface, Zhang conceives himself sitting on the same bench in Zhongshan Park where he felt inspired, this time perceiving an emotional landscape different from that more than a year ago. The gap between real life and fictional illusions has shrunk:

At that time, the willows, lotuses, ponds, water pavilions were probably all the same, but one could no longer meet with the girl of that year, the magpie of that year. The fantasies of life can form a fiction of falsified facts. However, life really does resemble a phantasm! I don't know whether to laugh or cry (Zhang H., "Author's Preface" 241).

那個時候，楊柳、荷錢、池塘、水榭，大概一切依然；但是當年的女郎，當年的喜鵲，萬萬不可遇了。人生的幻想，可以構成一部假事實的小說；然而人生的實境，倒真有些像幻影哩！寫到這裡，我自己也覺得有些“啼笑皆非”了。

What was once real now has an illusory, dreamlike quality to it—more so does the fictional staging of joys and sorrows, partings and reunions. The author experiences a disjunction of temporality and does not know whether to laugh or cry in face with his previous staging of emotions. Nothing is everlasting: only words inscribed on paper capture some traces of what happened; only the affective territory of Beijing mapped in the fictional world retains and replays the phantoms of emotions.

It comes as no surprise that Zhongshan Park inspired Zhang Henshui's literary creation of tears and laughter.<sup>12</sup> Since its opening in 1914, the Park served as a favored gathering place for old literati and new intellectuals alike. It was a space sedimented with the emotions of poets and writers and became a source of inspiration, a venue for literary composition and the subject of literary writing. Therefore, in order to map the emotional topography of the novel, it is necessary to go through the literal topography of Beijing through the characters' eyes (observation) and feet (movement). The urban locales and cultural scenes for staging emotions in the novel include the Altar to Agriculture (*Xiannong tan* 先農壇), the Laozi Pavilion (*Laozi guan* 老子館, an indoor space for performing northern folk arts), Zhongshan Park, North Lake Park (*Beihai* 北海), Ten Temples Lake (*Shichahai* 什刹海), and the Western Hills. They become the settings for chance encounters, social gatherings, and frequent rendezvous between Jiashu and the three women. A detailed description lends a "reality effect" (Barthes 141-148) to these places that in turn verifies the authenticity of the narration. On top of that, the interplay between geographical space and collective social practices constitutes an interface of experience that inaugurates affective engagement ranging from

12. The place where Zhang Henshui wrote the novel was previously known as *Central Park* (*Zhongyang gongyuan* 中央公園) as evoked several times in the novel. It was renamed Zhongshan Park in 1928 in honor of Sun Yat-sen (Sun Zhongshan 孫中山, 1866-1925). This change explains away the difference between "Zhongshan" in Zhang Henshui's preface and "Zhongyang" in his novel.

perception to action. Alexander des Forges notices that the urban spaces represented in novels already preconfigure a certain set of ways to behave (68). For example, the park is a space for roaming, daydreaming, and lamenting frustrated desires.<sup>13</sup> The Bridge of Heaven is a semi-closed space for mass entertainment where observers and performers look at each other in such a way that one becomes both a spectator and a spectacle at the same time. In the Guans' eyes, Ten Temples Lake is much more plebian and enjoyable than the refined North Lake Park and the snobbish Zhongshan Park. The interplay between geography and affect echoes what Weijie Song calls "the literary topography of emotion" (2), which is superimposed upon the topography of the city.

Reminiscent of the scenes of bazaars, crowded teahouses, and popular inns, the opening scene in the novel takes place at the Bridge of Heaven, located between Yongding Gate and Zhengyang Gate. Its east borders the Temple of Heaven and its west approaches the Altar to Agriculture. As a part of the walled enclosure of the outer city of Beijing, the area has been long known as a locale where people from all social classes congregated, consumed, entertained, and gossiped. Unlike public parks that were only open to the public after the Xinhai Revolution in 1911, The Bridge of Heaven had been a hustling commercial market for cheap daily necessities and folk entertainment since the Qing dynasty.

The Bridge of Heaven is the locale where Jiashu develops a strong attachment to Fengxi. It is in the teahouses, taverns, and street restaurants there that Jiashu builds a friendly relationship with Xiugu and her father Guan Shoufeng. The overlapping of social experience in various times effects a sentimental mapping of the Bridge of Heaven which creates layered emotional territories. On her first date with Jiashu at the Altar to Agriculture, Fengxi experiences polarized states of emotions from exhilaration to melancholy. The physical space anchors spatial traces of bodily acts. The cypress forest, the stone table, and the two stone benches constitute the physical space for their secret meeting, which is then superimposed upon the virtual milieu of sedimented joys and sorrows. When Jiashu arrives at the same place before Fengxi breaks off their relationship, their intimate past replays before his eyes and their bodily movement in an affective space rekindles his memories of their pledges of love and devotion. The stone bench Jiashu sits on was the one Fengxi sat on when she burst into tears with her arms resting on the stone table and her head buried in her arms—a scene in which her extreme happiness gave rise to sadness. Jiashu's subsequent acts of relating himself to and distancing himself from the position of Fengxi create affective relations between body and space. In this time-space continuum, Jiashu feels the presence

13. In the early Republican era, imperial gardens were transformed into public parks in Beijing. As a representative of urban modernity, the public park served as a cultural space of leisure and entertainment for urban residents, and in particular, as a setting for romantic trysts between young lovers. Lin Zheng has written several articles about the social function and cultural imagination of public parks in Beijing ("The Urban Sojourner," 34-38, "From Imperial Gardens," 119-132, "The Zoological Garden," 325-401).

of Fengxi so powerfully that he is on the verge of tears (Zhang H. 155). Jiashu's emotional reaction, mediated by the body of Fengxi in the same locale, suggests both synchronic and diachronic connections between an affective body and a physical locale: emotions may be evanescent, but they are anticipated, elicited, and inscribed by the connections between an affective body and the space it inhabits.

The vicissitudes of time, however, lead not only to the transience of emotions but also to the ephemerality of space. The spatial traces in time attest to the interplay between individual memories and historical changes. In Chapter 15, Guan Shoufeng recalls that Ten Temples Lake and Taoran Pavilion (*Taoranting* 陶然亭) used to be surrounded by water, but the vast lake has now changed into farmland. The novel's sentimental mapping of tears and laughter provides instantaneous snapshots of fleeting sentiments and instantiates the attempt to capture a transient reality—engulfed by transformation—in language.

The novel begins with the lively scenes of the Bridge of Heaven and concludes with an indoor scene in a Western-style villa at the Western Hills far away from the crowd. Jiashu reunites with He Lina in the villa:

Jiashu stood absentmindedly, holding the chrysanthemum in his left hand, and rubbing the flower stem with the index finger and thumb of his right hand. After a while, he smiled faintly. As a matter of fact (...) obsession with form leads to emptiness. Like shrike swallows flying in different directions, people are going their separate ways. In a knowing smile, when buddha holds up a flower, lie infinite feelings beyond words (Zhang H., *Fate* 24).

家樹呆呆的站著，左手拿了那枝菊花，右手用大拇指食指，只管掄那花乾兒。半晌，微微的笑了一笑。正是 … 畢竟人間色相空，伯勞燕子各西東。可憐無限難言隱，只在拈花一笑中。

The geographical and psychic enclosure of the Altar of Agriculture in the opening chapter forms a stark contrast with the open setting in the end. A sense of ineffable transcendence emanates from the unfinished ending. The last line of the heptasyllabic verse alludes to empathic feelings for and with others in Zen Buddhism. When happiness and sorrows dissipate, polarized tears and laughter are substituted by a revelation between tears and laughter. On the one hand, emotion is spatialized by the interplay between an affective body and its dwelling in the world. On the other hand, contingent emotions are transcended by a sudden epiphany of the inexplicable truth. The eternal is paradoxically recapitulated in fleeting moments of sorrow and joy, parting, and reunion.

Reading in Tears and Laughter: From Intimate Reading to Public Resonance

In *Fate*, reading classical romance reenacts the theatrical mode of staging one's feeling on behalf of others and lends spectacular forms to emotion. For example, disturbed by modern pleasure-seeking and sensual extravagance, Jiashu resonates with the mood of traditional vernacular novels and projects his feelings in the mask of a fictional other—the sensitive and sentimental

hero of the classical romance. After his first encounter with He Lina at a Western dance hall, Jiashu retreats to his room reading *Dream of the Red Chamber* (*Honglou meng* 紅樓夢, *Dream* hereafter) for comfort (28). Jiashu appreciates *Dream*'s cultural imaginary which registers the fantastic air of talented scholars (*caizi* 才子) and sensitive beauties (*jiaren* 佳人) in a plot centering on the melancholic love triangle between the male protagonist Jia Baoyu 賈寶玉 and his two cousins—Lin Daiyu 林黛玉 and Xue Baochai 薛寶釵. Jia Baoyu's wavering between Daiyu and Baochai recalls that of Jiashu between Fengxi and Lina. The scene Jiashu comes across is none other than Baoyu listening to Daiyu playing the zither (*qin* 琴) (Cao and Gao 1376-77).

Apparently, Jiashu immerses himself in Daiyu's composition of autumnal sounds on zither for the purposes of purification and restraint. However, listening to the zither further stirs rather than pacifies Jiashu's emotions, reminiscent of Cui Yingying's 崔鶯鶯 erotic arousal by Zhang Sheng's 張生 performance on the zither in *The Western Chamber* (*Xixiang ji* 西廂記). To Jiashu's mind, Daiyu playing the zither in *Dream* serves as a major reference to the scene where the drum-song singer Shen Fengxi chanted the drum song "Daiyu Mourning the Autumn (*Daiyu beiqiu* 黛玉悲秋)." Harboring feelings for the singer, Jiashu is unsettled again by this association. The affective body of a fictional reader (Jiashu) enters into a scene within a scene, a story within a story, and in the process of traversing the boundaries between self and other, the moving body facilitates the convergence of the two scenes predicated on theatrical identification. Baoyu listens to Daiyu playing the zither; Jiashu "feels into" his alter-ego, Baoyu, and engages with the calm and purifying ambience of the zither, as if he were Baoyu. On the other hand, in becoming Baoyu, Jiashu is transported in front of himself, observing himself listening to Fengxi's singing. The alternating states of Jiashu's emotions are generated by the deliverance of his body back and forth between the two scenes—moving and being moved are two sides of the same coin. The mobility of the body generates the interplay between detachment and engagement, between feeling one's feelings and feeling into another person's feelings, thereby speaking to the intersubjective nature of feelings. Feeling into Baoyu enables Jiashu to perceive and judge his own feelings from a third-person point of view. In being in front of oneself and being embedded in oneself simultaneously, the spatial interval between one's body and other's body is bridged by affect.

Jiashu's intimate reading registers the interchange of feelings between him and Jia Baoyu. From this perspective, the feelings aroused by silent reading are not exclusively private in nature. Instead, they vibrate with the feelings of the characters in the novel and, by extension, with the feelings of a sympathetic collective. Scholars working on the emergence of publics in modern China frequently refer to the Habermasian bourgeois civil society and Benedict Anderson's *imagined communities*.<sup>14</sup> It is important to note that both Benedict Anderson

14. For example, Haiyan Lee draws on Jürgen Habermas' *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*



and Jürgen Habermas underscore the roles that fiction and newspapers play in the formation of public consciousness in terms of producing common themes, values, as well as a sense of simultaneity from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries. While calling attention to institutional practices and print capitalism, their theorization of community overlooks the affective dimension of the community and the performativity of emotions elicited from newspapers and novels *per se*.<sup>15</sup> Compared with the imagined community I will delineate, nation-state and public spheres are saturated with political implications.

In the case of fiction reading, theatrical identification with the characters inaugurates the formation of a community. The reader's spontaneous identification with a character in a novel is not only a matter of projecting his or her own desire onto the character, but also of putting oneself in the situation of the other. The reader's self-othering experience serves not only to elicit sympathy for others—to feel into what others feel—but also to perform one's feelings and inner awareness. One feels oneself impartially when one moves away from oneself and recasts oneself as an external spectacle. Self-reflexivity also comes into play when one stages oneself as a spectacle and sees oneself on behalf of the other. When Xiugu absorbs herself in *Dream*, "things depicted in *Dream* keep playing out one after another in reality" (Zhang H. 47). The romance in *Dream* triggers Xiugu's mulling over Jiashu's implicit intentions of giving her *Dream* to read. She relates Jiashu's inarticulate feelings for her, and hers for him in turn, to the romantic feelings of Jia Baoyu in *Dream*. Again, theatrical identification plays into one's reading practice. One acts out the story of someone else in line with the plot and feels what it would be like to become others so as to articulate ineffable feelings. For Xiugu, only through obliterating the distance between self and other can Jiashu's inarticulate emotions and intentions be rendered conceivable.

Through fiction readers' theatrical identification with fictional characters, silent reading for private enjoyment contributes to the formation of social bonds that are not reliant upon physical proximity. In 1932, an anecdote about *Fate* appeared in *Shenbao* 申報, (known in English as the *Shanghai News*). Its author, Wu Xiang 吾鄉 (possibly a penname) wrote about a newlywed wife's obsession with enacting the scenes from the novel. For instance, she fashioned herself as He Lina, compared her husband to Fan Jiashu, and even let one of her acquaintances play the role of Tao Bohe. Her husband once drank in the company of other girls at some social engagement. The wife got very

and gives a comprehensive analysis of the formation of bourgeois identity and a sense of community through the lens of the literary public sphere in early Republican China ("All the Feelings That Are Fit to Print"). For a discussion of the rise and fall of the public sphere in broader scope and greater chronological depth, see Marie-Clair Bergère's *The Golden Age of the Chinese Bourgeoisie, 1911-1937*. Leo Ou-fan Lee draws on Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* to illustrate how print mediums such as newspapers, periodicals and novels formed a new reading public and refashioned imagination of a new community of the nation (45). 15. Habermas does hint at some degree of theatricality when he mentions that readers (of newspapers and novels) learn to orient their internal experience toward an imagined audience. However, he does not delve into the mediated interiority featuring such spatial practices as self-displacement but focuses on the implications of readers' social engagement.

angry and when others teased her that since Fan Jaishu has a Shen Fengxi by his side, why not let her husband have one as well? She retorted back, “aren’t Shen Fengxi and He Lina the same person?” (Wu 11). The novel fan’s quick-witted retort keeps one between laughter and tears. She didn’t distance herself from theatrical role-playing, nor did she resort to a stable construction of (non)identity by asserting that she was not He Lina and her husband was not Fan Jiashu, hence her husband’s behavior should not be tolerated. Instead, she stuck to her theatrical impulses and played with the nebulous boundaries between fiction and reality. In the intra- and extra-fictional context, the female fan’s penchant in assuming the persona of Lina is also indicative of her identification with the cultural capital and modern values that Lina embodies. Nevertheless, when it comes to Jiashu’s affection for Shen Fengxi, the fan shifted her focal point from the novel to the eponymous film—an additional layer of theatrical role-playing—by underscoring the very fact that in the film the roles of Lina and Fengxi were both played by one actress. The fan’s subsequent engagement with the movie queen Hu Die (蝴蝶, 1908-1989) diverts a reader’s theatrical alignment with a fictional character to that with a real person. Feeling into characters is not incompatible with feeling into real representatives as long as they deserve readers’ emotional investment, cater to readers’ aspirations of refinement, and are one of “us.” In other words, reading is first and foremost reading together with others and, by extension, reading into the social beings to which readers aspire.

Having surveyed the dialectical relationship between self and other through the lens of theatricality, we arrive at a better understanding of the spatiality of emotions in terms of sociality. The connections between characters and sentimental readers are on a continuum with a community of sentimental readers. Tears and laughter within and without the fiction are intertwined. If we can feel the pain of the characters and weep for their fates, we can also weep for other pitiable beings and sympathize with a larger community. In turn, others will shed tears for us and share our laughter. There are innumerable Shen Fengxis in real life and there are countless warlords as ruthless as General Liu. The sufferings of ordinary people not only lend themselves to exposition but are also affectively registered as situated sensations within the community.

In her study of public passions in Republican China, Eugenia Lean alerts us to the pitfalls of falling into the dichotomy of a rational and autonomous public domain vis-à-vis an emotional and passive mass public. By examining the role of public sympathy in swaying the legal proceedings against Shi Jianqiao (施劍翹, 1905-1979), Lean shows how mass-mediated feelings and sensations not only helped create a fluid public-in-becoming but also channeled a powerful critique of the regime (8-9). Haiyan Lee directs our attention to the print mediality of feelings and points out that the Republican readers’

inclination to shed tears ensures them of their sensibility and, on top of that, of their humanity (301). To borrow Lee's observation, "through the experience of reading and weeping, the readers are transformed into private individuals capable of coming together to form a public—a sentimental community" (301). However, Lee suggests that feeling is intrinsic to a singular, discrete self before it is interchangeable with other kindred emotions.

Building on Lean's and Lee's research, I foreground the role of sympathy in the formation of community. I contend that through silent reading, the self, from the very outset, is marked by intersubjectivity and entwined with an imagined community. Such a public in becoming is premised on the immediacy of lived experience and aestheticized emotive responses from deserving individuals capable of sympathizing with one another.

The serialization of *roman-feuilleton* inaugurated reading experiences distinct from that of early modern China. The day-by-day serialization was crucial to the formation of an imagined community in the late Qing (Des Forges 74-75), primarily because the update on a day-to-day basis and the timely solicitation of readers' feedback by newspaper editors generated a sense of simultaneity. First, the progressing narratives in the installments imitated the unfolding of readers' daily life, and the experience of reading was in sync with the experience of living. Newspapers' publishing of reader correspondence, in turn, lent more visibility to the reading public. On October 21, 1930, the column editor of *Xinwen bao* solicited and published readers' predictions about the final endings of Zhang Henshui's *Fate*, obtaining 117 responses (fig. 1). The article lists eight different versions of the denouement and elaborates in detail the outcomes for all three female characters. As addicted readers wrote to editors and authors, demanded updates or new sequels, a reading community emerged from the private sphere of leisure reading.

As such, a sentimental subject—by sharing tears for the unfortunate and venting grievances against social injustice and absurdities—is integrated into a sentimental public. An individual matter becomes the subject of public sympathy, and social interchange of opinions in turn feeds into individual sensibility. The sentimental readers reading through tears and laughter are thus able to read together in tears and laughter independent of geographical proximity.

**啼笑因緣結果猜測**

此次收到寄函一百七十七封，列表如下：

一、猜與何麗嬌結婚者最多	四十三
二、猜與沈鳳雲結婚者	三十三
三、猜與謝秀姑結婚者	二十一
四、猜三人同嫁姜家樹者	二
五、猜姜家樹與謝秀姑結婚者	二
六、猜姜家樹與何麗嬌結婚者	二
七、猜姜家樹與沈鳳雲結婚者	二
八、猜姜家樹一無所獲均不結婚者	五

至於猜三人結局則：

- 一、猜與何麗嬌結婚者六。遺失者三十九。雖而不素者
- 二、猜與沈鳳雲結婚者一。獨身者二。另嫁者
- 三、猜與謝秀姑結婚者一。獨身者二。另嫁者
- 四、猜與何麗嬌結婚者一。獨身者二。另嫁者
- 五、猜與沈鳳雲結婚者一。獨身者二。另嫁者
- 六、猜與謝秀姑結婚者一。獨身者二。另嫁者
- 七、猜與何麗嬌結婚者一。獨身者二。另嫁者
- 八、猜與沈鳳雲結婚者一。獨身者二。另嫁者

此公來者十九則之題目

一、此公來者十九則之題目

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Figure 1 Avid readers' predictions of the endings of *Fate*, *Xinwen bao*, Oct 21, 1930. Image Courtesy of the *Quanbao kan Suoyin* (CNBKSY), Shanghai Library.



## Conclusion

This article shows the multiple implications of spatiality by mapping the affective reading experience of Zhang Henshui's *Fate in Tears and Laughter*. This study does not accept the Enlightenment assumption of a private self with universal equivalence. Instead, I problematize the distinction between private feelings and public sentiments as well as the assumption that the private self is a discrete entity that precedes the formation of the public. To recalibrate our ways of understanding the Republican Era reading public, I take issue with the conceptualization of emotion as being exclusively tied to interiority. Instead, I foreground the intersubjective relationship between self and other that transposes an affective body into a spectatorial position in front of the emotion-realm mediated by theatricality.

In so doing, my research departs from the assumption that private reading interiorizes emotions and reifies subjectivity. Instead, I first probe the formation of community through the melodramatic and theatrical implications of the spatiality of emotions. The study ascribes *Fate's* appeal to the melodramatic rendering of polarized emotions that are saturated with the moral imperative that turns pathos into action. Second, this article charts the sedimented topography of emotions in which joys and sorrows are not internal overflows vis-à-vis external stimuli but rather constitute the very atmospheric environment that touches and moves an affective body. Emotional territories of tears and laughter are registered in the physical milieus of Beijing, ranging from the lively Bridge of Heaven to the tranquil Western Hills, all of which exude a sense of authenticity. Lastly, my reading of public resonance in light of theatricality suggests that readers are actively engaged in the creation of affective fantasies and spectacles via their bodily engagement in laughing, crying, and sympathizing with fictional characters.

The melodramatic polarization of emotions, the spatial topography of emotion embedded in geographical loci, and the emotional spectatorship in which a private self is enmeshed in a public domain, all contribute to a new understanding of the affective assembly of emotions that is not so much an innate faculty as the coded registers of an imagined community. From the intimate act of reading through tears and laughter to reading together in tears and laughter, a sentimental community emerges from the sentimental voyage of absorbed reading.

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ARTICLE

## Love, Betrayal, and Death: Reading East-West Crossings in Men's Cross-Dressing Performances of Tragic Heroines

Qian Liu

University of Chicago

### ABSTRACT

What is the relationship between art and life, theater, and history? Two contemporary works, David Henry Hwang's play *M. Butterfly* and Chen Kaige's film *Farewell My Concubine* (*Bawang bieji*), raise this question through men's cross-dressing performances of tragic heroines, which complicate different theatrical aesthetics and intertwine theater with fictionalized reality based on historical events. By presenting the twists of characters' real-life relationships entwined with Euro-American and Chinese operatic fantasies, Hwang and Chen complicate the 19th-century European romantic opera cliché of "tragic women dying for love" and classical Chinese theatrical aesthetics of presentational performances. The intertwining of art and life in theatrical performances contextualized in 20th-century history reveals situations of irony in the lives of ordinary people caught in historical movements. This paper examines how male characters perform tragic female roles to mediate their relationships to others and respond to given realities. Whereas previous discussions focused on gender politics, I approach the East-West tension by comparing aesthetic traditions and histories in performances. Read through the lens of the ways in which these works cross traditions, they redefine the dichotomy of East versus West as a relationship of mutual inclusion and reveal the West's underestimation of the East. Their ability to replace reality with theater enables us, at the end of both works, to read operatic suicide as salvation and survival, ironically, as a tragedy.

**KEY WORDS:** theatrical traditions, cross-dressing, tragic heroines, *Farewell my Concubine*, *M. Butterfly*

### Introduction<sup>1</sup>

As Oscar Wilde once wrote, "Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life" (33). Theater mediates imagination and reality, as actors and spectators wittingly or unwittingly turn fictionalized stories into real-life performances. Chinese director Chen Kaige's (陳凱歌, b. 1952) 1993 film, *Farewell My Concubine*, and American playwright, David Henry Hwang's (b. 1957), 1988 play, *M. Butterfly*, stage the intertwining and crossing of Eastern and Western theatrical traditions, cultures, and histories. Both works feature men's cross-dressing performances of tragic female characters, manipulating the aesthetic traditions of Peking opera and 19th-century European romantic opera and reflecting thereby on their relationships to others in life. The layered entanglement of art and life, contextualized in the turbulence of 20th-century history, reveals situations of irony in the lives of ordinary people caught at the turning points of history.

1. Editor's Note: This article was edited by Stephen Boyanton, who has since left LMC to pursue other projects. We wish him well.

Adapted from the 1988 novel by Li Bihua (李碧華, b. 1959), Chen's *Farewell* narrates the life of two Chinese Peking opera artists, Cheng Dieyi (程蝶衣) and Duan Xiaolou (段小樓), from their boyhood in the 1920s to their old age in the 1970s. In accordance with the practice of only using male performers in the tradition of Peking opera until the early 1920s, Cheng was trained to play the female role of *dan* (旦) and Duan was trained in the male role of *sheng* (生). Known for their exquisite performance of the historical play, *Farewell My Concubine* (to avoid confusion I will hereafter refer to the play—as opposed to the modern film—by its Chinese title, *Bawang bieji*), Cheng performs the tragic role of the concubine Yu (*Yu Ji* 虞姬) while his partner Duan, acts as the King of Chu (*Chu bawang* 楚霸王).<sup>2</sup> Although the workings of classical Chinese music drama emphasize that theater is “not to be confused with normal reality” because “what they enact and behold is consciously made” (Yan 67), Chen's film complicates this tradition by displaying two artists' lives filtered through and mediated by theatrical performances. Over decades, Cheng repeats aspects of the relationship between Yu and Chu onstage in his relationship to Duan offstage. Whereas Cheng, the infatuated aesthete, indulges in the theatrical illusion mingled with his clandestine affection for Duan, the latter is a realistic materialist whose decisions repetitively disappoint Cheng by conforming to the pressures of reality. The film plots these betrayals against the course of twentieth-century Chinese history, amplifying the significance of individual tensions as characters resist or yield to collective interests.

Entwined with Giacomo Puccini's oriental-themed opera, *Madama Butterfly*, the American playwright, David Henry Hwang's, *M. Butterfly* also embeds a play within a play.<sup>3</sup> Cio-Cio-San's tragic suicide for love repeats a pattern in 19th-century European romantic opera, in which, according to a noted critic, “on the stage women perpetually sing their eternal undoing” and “from the moment these women leave their familiar and ornamental function, they end up punished—fallen, abandoned, or dead” (Clément 5-7). Hwang's play, however, aims not to revive Puccini's orientalist fantasy of Western men's dominance over Asian women, but rather to explore the underestimated potential of the East to manipulate, deceive, and even destroy the West by telling the story of the French diplomat René Gallimard, who falls in love with a female Chinese opera singer, Song Liling, who turns out to be a male spy sent by the Chinese government. Song's fraudulent performance as a powerless Chinese woman beguiles Gallimard, persuading him that she is his

2. The play tells the love-tragedy between Xiang Yu (the King of Chu) and his concubine Yu Ji. At the end of the Warring States Period, the King of Chu was besieged by the forces of his rival Liu Bang, the Han dynasty's eventual founder, and was on the verge of total defeat. Before the end, Concubine Yu upheld her fidelity towards her master by committing suicide with his sword.

3. The Italian opera *Madama Butterfly* has been an enduring tale celebrating a woman's unrequited love. In the opera, the Japanese woman Cio-Cio-San falls in love with the white American naval officer Pinkerton. At the expense of betraying her family and religion, she marries him and bears him a son. However, after returning to the U.S., Pinkerton marries an American wife and decides to take his Japanese son back with him. His betrayal drives Cio-Cio-San to despair and leads to her ultimate suicide.



fragile, harmless “Butterfly,” though Song’s real purpose is to steal military intelligence on the Vietnam War. Song masterfully moves between different theatrical aesthetics and takes advantage of Western preconceptions regarding the East to disarm Gallimard, who naively underestimates the East. Shaken by the truth, Gallimard transforms into the tragic Butterfly by committing his own operatic suicide at the end of the play.

Chen and Hwang display cultural and historical crossings that reflect the tensions between their characters’ personal and national interests and recontextualize their cross-dressing performances. In resistance or conformity to collective pressures, these ordinary people resonate with operatic heroines and their tragedies in culturally and historically significant ways that reveal the irony of their lives brought about by their entanglement in historical events beyond their control. In *Farewell*, the plot traces regime changes from the Republic of China to the post-Mao era. Cheng, like Yu, refuses to conform to the “new king”—the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)—with its ideological promotion of a patriotic, socialist-realist theater and its defamation of traditional Peking opera. He is therefore persecuted and assaulted during the turmoil of the Cultural Revolution, whereas Duan, the “disgraced king,” yields to the Party at the expense of betraying Cheng and Peking opera. In *M. Butterfly*, the final twist of Gallimard’s transformation implies not merely a reversal of East-West power dynamic, but also how his misperception of the “Oriental” leads to his downfall. On the historical level allegorized by the play, Gallimard’s misreading of Song parallels the West’s underestimation of the East during the Vietnam War. Nonetheless, Song’s complex situation as a puppet of national politics also casts doubt on his seeming victory—isn’t he also a tragic victim depersonalized by governmental authority and therefore lacking agency in his own life?

### Theatrical Crossings in Men’s Cross-dressing Performances of Tragic Heroines

In *Farewell My Concubine*, Cheng plays with the tragic role of the virtuous woman (*lienü* 烈女), embodied by Yu in the historical play of the same name.<sup>4</sup> In *M. Butterfly*, on the other hand, Song plays the European operatic heroine, rendered Asian in the form of Cio-Cio-San in *Madama Butterfly*, refracted through the practices of Peking opera. In both works, the twists of the male characters’ real-life relationships are entwined with Euro-American and Chinese operatic motifs as a cause but also as an effect of the crossing of theatrical traditions, revealing personal illusions that contradict reality. In the film, Cheng’s obsession with Yu’s figure and his unchanged loyalty to Peking opera allow him to cling to the illusion of Duan’s love, which remains

4. The notion of the “virtuous woman (*lienü*)” traditionally refers to a Chinese woman who dies in defense of her honor, chastity, or virginity. Initially framed in a patriarchal context, this term has developed into multiple meanings that evoke Confucian ethics and other social expectations placed on women throughout the course of Chinese history. In general, “fidelity” is the key. For instance, it can be a woman who serves the country and dies honorably on the battlefield, or a widow who refuses to remarry another man, etc.

absent from his real life. In Hwang's play Song's misleading yet successful performance of an inferior Asian Butterfly enables him to accomplish the goals assigned to him by his country. In both works, the crossdressing male actors manipulate theatrical female roles to mediate their relationships and achieve their goals.

The techniques, aesthetics, and modes of expression in Chinese and Euro-American theatrical traditions vary dramatically. Widely known for its highly stylized singing, dancing, and martial arts, the classical Chinese music theater also "privilege[s] stylized modes of expression over psychological realism," thus having "little reference to individual subjective well-being or the inner emotive state" (Lee 2). Modern film or drama in the West "striv[es] for natural representation," but Peking opera operates according to the "premodern presentational mode [in which] emotion is communicated sartorially, gesturally and vocally according to prescribed and shared codes" (4). Although the presentational and over-exaggerated performing style of Peking opera is not realist, Cheng and Hwang's works manifest how it operates with "prescribed and shared codes" that obtain both on-stage and off-stage in men's cross-dressing performances to manipulate given realities. In light of this, Peking opera may still retain the power to shape actors' and audiences' behavior, communication, and even lives based on how they recognize, interpret, and register these codes. For instance, in terms of individuals' relationships in imperial China, such older codes would refer to the Confucian five relationships (*wulun* 五伦), based on the core values of fidelity and patriarchy—relationships of ruler and subject, father and son, husband and wife, elder brother and younger brother, friend and friend. However, as China confronted modernization and reformation in the Republican period (1912-1949) and the PRC era (1949 onwards), these codes, once valued by Chinese culture and society, were discarded.

Set in a long historical timeline, the film *Farewell* takes the complex figure of Cheng and his Peking opera performances as a device to illumine the gap between imperial and modern China. Both Cheng's life and art suffer from sociopolitical factors during the 20th-century modernization of China, which had as a goal the eradication of the prescribed and shared codes of traditional Chinese culture, theatrical aesthetics, and political ideology. During this process, Cheng becomes an ambiguous embodiment of conservatism and subversiveness. On the one hand, he manifests his conservatism by remaining loyal to Duan and Peking opera throughout his life, paying homage to Yu's fidelity to King Chu in the play. On the other hand, he is a subversive figure who challenges and complicates the framework of the five traditional relationships by mingling three of them. Growing up together as "fellow apprentices (*shi xiongdi* 师兄弟)," Cheng is Duan's younger apprentice-brother (*shidi* 师弟). When acting as the tragic heroine, Yu, on stage, he serves as



the wife of King Chu as well as his subject. In reality, he is a close friend of Duan but also wishes to be his wife. This disordered intertwining of various relationships demonstrates his composite aching for Duan's love, which is the source of his suffering. As Cheng preserves and articulates older shared and prescribed codes to resist sociocultural assaults and collective pressures, his figure embodies China in its transition to the modern era.

Lee argues that in contradistinction to Peking opera's presentational performance, modern Western theater aims to produce performances "under the imperatives of realism and authenticity" (6), favoring more naturalized and realistic performances to genuinely reflect character's psychological interiority. But the rising ascendancy of representational performance risks stunting the audience's "ability to respond to the emotional suggestiveness of traditional theater," which leads to the loss of a self-conscious sense of theatricality (8). Moreover, Lee follows Seligman et al.'s argument that the over-emphasis on sincerity "can dangerously undermine our capacity for imaginatively negotiating the inescapable boundaries of our social existence and leads us on a utopian quest for purity (...) whereby boundaries (and social differences) either harden so as to be impermeable or are willfully denied out of existence" (13). Therefore, a modern Western spectator's expectation of realistic acting can be misleadingly fatal when encountering the exaggeration and abstractness of classical Chinese music drama. Peking opera's acting depends on "how skillfully the actor animates [shared cultural] codes to reach the audience effectively" and is not the "exteriorization of the actor's psychological or emotional state" (4). The quality of "suppositionality" is essential since both actors and audiences recognize "what they enact and behold is consciously made" and is "not to be confused with normal reality" (Yan 67). In *M. Butterfly*, Gallimard's inability to recognize the Chinese cultural codes in Song's cross-dressing performance, as refracted through Peking opera aesthetics, prefigures the Western audience's similar failure. His ignorance thus ironically co-authors Song's performance. These codes are "felt, imagined, and inhabited by both performers and audiences" for disparate ends—Song utilizes them to fabricate lies whereas Gallimard mistakes them as truths (86).

With men's cross-dressing performances filtered and mediated by estranged operatic motifs, both *Farewell* and *M. Butterfly*, by complicating and intertwining different theatrical aesthetics, reveal how these male actor-characters take advantage of theater to reconfigure their positions in relationships vis-à-vis others and their given realities. Moving from on-stage to off-stage acting, from theatrical roles to real-life identities, the entanglement of theater and life produces a space for illusory love, self-indulgence, and deception to fulfill characters' public duties and private needs. While both actors' flexible acting intertwines theatrical traditions and aesthetics, certain formulations are *de facto* preserved by their audience's reaction—either belief in or disillusion with operatic fantasies—which co-authors and completes the performances.

*Farewell* centers on depicting the characters' various performances of theater and social relationships, while demonstrating their essential entanglement. On a personal level, Western realistic depiction of Cheng's psychic space complements the lack of authenticity in stylistically exaggerated Peking opera performances. This hybridity becomes an embodiment of the East-West theatrical crossing. On a theatrical level, the film utilizes the theatrical tragedy of Concubine Yu and King Chu as a lens filtering the complex relationship of Cheng and Duan. However, Concubine Yu's double roles—as concubine and subject to the King—enrich and differentiate her from a stereotypical, fragile female figure enclosed by the domestic sphere. Having participated in and witnessed warfare, she is capable of fighting in the battlefield and offering military advice to her master. Her final suicide aims to preserve her loyalty and fidelity to King Chu and complicates the play by moving it beyond the category of sheer tragic romance. Likewise, it is inadequate to generalize Cheng's affection for Duan as homosexual love. Rather, his relationship with Duan mingles with three of the Confucian five relationships. Moreover, the play's parallels to and mismatches with historical reality imbricate Cheng's attachment to Duan with the twists and ironies of twentieth-century Chinese history.

For example, Duan's engagement to the prostitute Ju Xian marks his betrayal of Cheng, creating a satirical mismatch to the original play and revealing the ethical lessons they learned from operatic librettos that shaped their values. Mackerras states that "Peking Opera[s] were a, or even the, major way that ordinary Chinese learned about the past of their own country" (21). Given that the fictionalized plots oftentimes highlight moral ideologies valued by traditional Chinese society, it is not surprising that theater has traditionally served to educate the illiterate public. The first lesson, according to their teacher, Master Guan (*Guan Shifu* 關師傅), is that "Each person is responsible for his or her own fate" (30:10-30:15). The second is that Yu's fidelity pays homage to the Chinese cultural value of remaining faithful to one's spouse unto death. Whereas the infatuated Cheng upholds these beliefs by preserving his fidelity to Duan throughout his life, his partner never takes them seriously, as he admits to Cheng: "I'm a fake king, but you're the real concubine" (1:07:16-1:07:21). His pragmatic take on Peking opera as a mere tool for making a living and his decision to marry Ju Xian—the phony concubine—dismantles the dramatic illusions in his bond to Cheng, foredooming the latter's tragedy as the real Yu. Enraged and disappointed, Cheng nonetheless keeps a prior promise and visits Mr. Yuan, a declined aristocrat known for his expertise in Peking opera. Yuan intends to patronize Cheng after being moved by his exquisite performance. Accidentally, among the treasures in Yuan's collection, Cheng finds a sword he and Duan once saw as adolescents in the Qing imperial eunuch Zhang's mansion. The sword immediately reminds him of the childish promises they made to each other when encountering it for the first time:

*Duan*: King Chu would have won with this sword to kill Liu Bang. If I were the new emperor, you'd be the queen.

*Cheng*: Someday, I'll definitely give it to you as a present.

*The Proprietor of the Pear Garden*: Be careful, my little lords. It is a real sword! (36:39-36:55)<sup>5</sup>

段：“霸王要是有了這把劍，早就把劉邦給宰了，當上了皇上，你就是正宮娘娘了。”

程：“師弟，我準送你這把劍。”

戲園老板：“哎喲，當心點，我的老爺兒，這可是把真傢伙。”

Their casual comments on the sword are, in fact, promises made to be shattered by the insurmountable gap between a theatrical paradise and a materialistic world. Whereas Duan playfully promises to make Cheng his queen if he obtains the sword, Cheng takes it as a prophetic truth and in return promises to give him the sword as a gift one day to actualize the promise. This actualization would guarantee a satisfying end for the theatrical couple by substituting a happy ending for their tragic deaths and also fulfill Cheng's wish to make his bond with Duan eternal. Even in his early adolescence, the power of theater has already permeated Cheng's life and mode of thinking. The proprietor's emphasis on the sword's reality reminds us of its substantiality and capacity to inflict real harm on people, emphasizing that this sword will never be a prop on stage and denying it entry into the theatrical world. Cheng, however, sees the sword only in its role as an emblem of Duan's promise. He sees only its theatricality. His point of view, in contrast with that of the proprietor, reveals the discrepancy between theater and life and foreshadows the failure of Duan's promise.

When Cheng re-encounters the sword in his adulthood, the promised future has already been destroyed by Duan's marriage. Cheng performs Yu's famous suicide scene in Yuan's backyard. Dressed in ordinary clothing, he sings the aria casually: "Since the King has lost his spirit, why should his humble concubine value her life?" (1:10:19-1:11:00) No doubt, Yu's rhetorical question echoes his current misery and mocks the King-Concubine analogy twisted by Duan's marriage. In the play, when Chu is on the verge of total defeat by Liu's forces, he commands Yu to leave, for he cherishes her too much to witness her dying, but Duan's lack of King Chu's dignity, responsibility, and noble demeanor highlights that he is only a "fake king" and leads to Cheng's real tragedy.

When Cheng pulls out the sword to perform Yu's suicide, Yuan's considerate interruption—"Don't! It's a real sword!" (1:11:04-1:11:11)—once again reminds Cheng of the failure of Duan's promise. Once the symbol of a promising future, the sword now penetrates Cheng's theatrical fantasy and illusory hope—even with this sword, they cannot retrieve their past.

5. All English translations in this paper are my own.

Although the sword does not do substantial harm to Cheng, it does shatter the promise sustaining his life by revealing the truth that theater is not to be confused with reality. The moment Cheng drops the sword detaches him from the operatic illusion and sends him back to his real life. Just as King Chu vanished with Duan's betrayal, so too the faithful concubine Yu dies when the split between reality and theater can no longer be denied.

Earlier in the film, Duan had wondered whether Cheng's morbid obsession with theater would eventually ruin his life: "It is true that theatrical performance needs actors' passionate devotion. But if we carry that over into our everyday life, how can we live as ordinary people?" (59:26-59:38). However, it is precisely because Cheng lives his theatrical role into his everyday life that his performance is uniquely exquisite. By inscribing personal tragedy into his theatrical performances, Cheng enriches not only his tragic female roles but also the depth of his own artistic life.

In *M. Butterfly*, as in *Farewell*, the crossing of theatrical traditions and of theater with reality, is demonstrated through a cross-dressing performance—in this case that of the female-impersonator Song—that blends Chinese and Euro-American theatrical aesthetics to delude and manipulate the French diplomat Gallimard. Song's deceptive acting as a powerless Chinese woman fulfills Gallimard's Orientalist fantasy and fabricates an illusion of his triumph over the East. Gallimard wishes to parallel Pinkerton in his "conquest" of Cio-Cio-San in Puccini's opera, and Song's deception could not have succeeded without Gallimard co-authoring it through his misreading of the Chinese theatrical aesthetics registered in Song's acting. Unable to decipher Chinese cultural codes, Gallimard misinterprets Song's over-exaggerated acting, especially her overly dramatized, unnatural reactions, as Orientalist truth. The Chinese actor makes strategic use of his French audience's assumption of the realistic and naturalized acting used in modern European theater to deceive him with a Chinese counterfeit. In the process, the once underestimated Asian heroine is revived to prevail over her Western male rival and subvert the assumed power dynamics between East and West.

When Gallimard pays his first visit to Song's apartment, the opera singer intentionally "reveals" her feminine, conservative interiority to convince him that she is—like the Western stereotype of a desirable Asian woman—shy, modest, and meek. To show a division between her audacious behavior (body) and conservative thought (mind), Song pretends to struggle with the irreconcilable tension between her Chinese interiority rooted in Chinese culture and ethics and the Western shell obtained from her operatic performance and exotic outfit. The self-contradiction revealed by the "accidental" display of her Chinese psyche is pre-planned to enhance her credibility.

Song begins by admitting her concern to Gallimard, saying, "I don't even know why I invited you up (...) There is an element of danger to your pres-

ence” (Hwang 29). Her doubt demonstrates that her bold invitation conflicts with her conservative ideals. Inviting a white man to her house is courageous, but her uncertainty and fear regarding her Western guest still linger. Since Chinese society prohibits unmarried women from dating men alone, Song acts as if she were anxious with Gallimard—as if deep inside her still lives a “traditional” Chinese woman forever incompatible with a “modern” Westerner. When Gallimard excitedly presses Song to admit her love for him, saying, “We both know why I’m here,” she replies, “I am slightly afraid of scandal” (29). Song’s concern for the potential damage to her public reputation implies that her thinking is still fundamentally dominated by the restrictions placed on women that make her internally Chinese. When pouring tea for Gallimard, she comments that “France is a country living in the modern era” whereas “China is a nation whose soul is firmly rooted (...) in the past” (30). By contrasting the ancient, underdeveloped China with the modern, advanced France, she purposefully highlights the East’s inferiority, in parallel to her mismatched actions and thoughts.

Song’s notably unnatural performance overemphasizes the flaws of Asian women “sartorially, gesturally and vocally” by degrading herself to Gallimard to enact the West’s superiority over the East. Dating back to the first night when Gallimard watches Song performing Butterfly’s operatic suicide in the German ambassador’s house, he comments on her feeble voice: “here was a Butterfly with little or no voice (...) [but] I believe her suffering. I wanted to take her in my arms—so delicate, even I could protect her” (15-16). While Song’s voice is unqualified compared to a Western soprano, Gallimard values it as the manifestation of Asian femininity and delicacy that makes her a more authentic Butterfly compared to those “huge [Western] women in bad make-up” (16). By contrast, the sexually aggressive French girl Isabelle—Gallimard’s first sexual partner—used to take the masculine lead during their sexual intercourse. He recollects how, during sex, “she was on [him]” and “[his] arms were pinned to the dirt” (33). Song’s fragility enables the womanish Frenchman to regain his virile confidence by convincing him that “even [he] could protect her.”

Besides exposing her backward Chinese mentality to set off the West’s superiority, Song further develops her fraud as she compares herself in a Western dress to the prettier European women, reaffirming her own inferiority.

*Song:* Even my own heart, strapped inside this Western dress (...)

*Gallimard:* This is a beautiful dress.

*Song:* Don’t.

*Gallimard:* What?

*Song:* I don’t even know if it looks right on me.

*Gallimard:* Believe me—

*Song:* You are from France. You see so many beautiful women

*Gallimard:* France? Since when are the European women—? (30)

What is “strapped inside this Western dress” is Song’s unchanged Chinese-ness. Her rhetorical question—“if it looks right on [her]”—reveals that to an Asian woman, wearing a Western dress would not necessarily Westernize her interiority, where there still lives a timid, modest Chinese woman. Feeling inadequate and diffident, Song denies Gallimard’s compliment and instead praises French women whose beauty undoubtedly exceeds hers. The Chinese actor’s parody reaches its climax, empowering Gallimard by simulating the tragic Asian heroine’s inescapable fate of being defeated by the superior West. At the same time, Song deliberately acknowledges the insurmountable gap between an Asian butterfly and a Western woman: “Hard as I try to be modern, to speak like a man, to hold a Western woman’s strong face up to my own (...) in the end, I fail (...) I’m a Chinese girl” (31). By confessing her failure—a parodic imitation of Western women—Song reassures Gallimard of the modern West’s triumph over the ancient East. Only through this fabricated victory can Gallimard regain his masculinity and realize his illusory dominance over women, a dominance which differentiates Song from the undesirable Western females and encourages him to trust her more. When the empowered Frenchman refuses to leave her apartment, Song pretends to be irritated, exclaiming, “You are a cad” (31). But Gallimard’s spontaneous response—“What do you expect? I’m a foreign devil” (31)—effectively transforms him into the womanizing Pinkerton, capable of pinning his Butterfly down with his Oriental fantasy fulfilled by prevailing over the East. Now able to regard himself as a “foreign devil,” Gallimard is fully convinced by Song’s exquisite performance. Beguiled by the false belief that “she feels inferior to ‘Western women’—and to me,” (31) he fails to realize that the actual victory goes to the Chinese actor and his counterfeit Butterfly.

#### Cultural and Historical Crossings in Individuals’ Real-life and Theatrical Tragedies

In the context of both Chinese history and the history of East-West relations in the 20th century, the male actor-characters’ cross-dressing performances reveal how individuals, as puppets of domestic and international politics, empathize with operatic heroines and their tragedies in culturally and historically significant ways. By revealing ironies in individuals’ responses to personal and national politics, their stories of suspected betrayals and deaths involve cultural translation and embody historical allegories. The cultural critic Rey Chow argues in her book, *Primitive Passions*, that contemporary Chinese cinema is not just “a kind of postmodern self-writing or autoethnography” but “a form of intercultural translation in the postcolonial age” (11). It neither enacts the presentational authenticity of classical Chinese drama nor simply caters to Western taste through self-exoticization. Rather, it is “a culture-collecting” (26) during which female characters serve as “the brilliant arcade, through which ‘China’ travels across cultures to unfamiliar audiences” (202). Chow’s concept of “culture-collecting” is realized as cultural and



historical crossings in Chen's Chinese film and Hwang's Western play. Such crossings are not applicable only to China—or "the East"—but also to France and America—"the West." While ordinary individuals caught in the sweep of historical moments are used as puppets by national interests, they also try to resist such external forces. By performing distinct types of operatic heroines, individuals like Cheng and Gallimard preserve their subjective desires while confronting collective pressures within domestic and global politics. The cultural connotations of tragic female roles, allegorized by personal and national history, serve as a device to channel East and West, facilitating the cultural traffic evoked by the male actor-characters' suspected betrayals and deaths.

As the virtuous woman in classical Chinese theater, Yu's figure is distinctively complex compared to her counterpart in the Italian opera. Unlike Butterfly, who transgresses social norms for her personal desires, Yu fulfills her duties as a wife and subject of King Chu, even to the point of sacrificing herself in the hope that her death can empower her master to turn the tables on his enemies. Although the historical play, *Bawang bieji*, is mostly known as a love tragedy, its theme lies in the Confucian fidelity valued by the five relationships—specifically, Yu's fidelity towards her master and husband. Yu's ability to multi-task—demanded by her roles as Chu's wife, subject, and friend—endows her with greater responsibilities. Fearing that it is worse than death to be captured and humiliated by Liu's forces, which would dishonor her King, Yu commits suicide to preserve her fidelity and dignity. But it is owing to the emphasis on her virtuous suicide that the play's tragic nature falls into relative public neglect. Audiences tend to ignore, on the political level, Yu's resistance to the new regime and attempt to halt the march of history through her own death.

Unlike the humble, altruistic Yu, Butterfly is selfish and egoistic, which eventually brings about her self-destruction. The French philosopher Catherine Clément refers to tragic female roles as decorative jewels of the 19th-century European romantic opera; they are doomed to be punished or to die for their "transgression of familial rules, political rules, the things at stake in sexual and authoritarian power" (10). Likewise, in Puccini's opera, Butterfly's love for Pinkerton ultimately costs her life. Alluding to the operatic love cliché, *Madama Butterfly* aestheticizes Orientalism by deliberately feminizing the East to cater to the taste of Western audiences. Cio-Cio-San's marriage to a white American and conversion to Christianity at the expense of betraying her family are examples of robust initiative and self-Westernization, though seen as transgressive and disparaged by her own society. While her failure is foredoomed, she nonetheless attempts to prioritize her personal interests and resists collective pressures from racism, sexism, and traditional Japanese society.

Although Chinese and European tragic heroines differ in their priorities, their resistance to collective demands and (inter)national histories is their



common ground. This resistance is empowered by individualistic love and subjective desires. Therefore, their figures serve as parallels to men like Cheng and Gallimard, who are manipulated by higher authorities but still resist in order to preserve their dignity. A close reading of Cheng's compelled performance for the Japanese to save Duan, and Gallimard's final transformation into Butterfly reveals cultural and historical crossings that highlight the inevitable tension between individuals and collectives, with theater and life unreconciled.

In *Farewell*, Cheng is convicted of treason for singing Peking opera for the Japanese during WWII. His performance, considered a betrayal of China, receives no clemency for its intention of saving Duan's life. In *M. Butterfly*, by removing his feminine disguise and betraying Gallimard's Orientalist vision during the trial in Paris, Song reveals the hidden political intention behind his successful parody. Despite the political purposes driving their performances, both Cheng and Song are also personally attached to their cross-dressing roles. Cheng would not have sung for the invaders if not for his unrequited yet faithful love for Duan. Likewise, Song considers Gallimard his "greatest acting challenge," one that has enriched his own artistic career (Hwang 63). To some degree, these men's self-sacrifice is not just for their essential "other" but also for self-fulfillment. Attempting to find a compromise between subjective desires and collective interests, the theatrical betrayals and deaths reshaped by the men's real-life experience function as a site of intercultural translation that addresses the tension between individuals and nations as well as the abstract "East" and "West," making both *Farewell* and *M. Butterfly* transcultural works.

Film as an artistic form of documentation gives space for creativity and flexibility to render and aestheticize history. The fifth-generation Chinese director Chen Kaige is noted for his use of semiotics and allegories in films to aid in his personal retrospection and interrogation of the new national and cultural identities that have been formed by modern Chinese history, art, and politics, yet remain irreconcilable with China's past.<sup>6</sup> In *Farewell*, he projects national chaos onto Cheng's progressive performances of disparate Chinese heroines to translate the multilevel tension within traditional Chinese culture in its transition to the modern era. When Cheng and his operatic heroines sacrifice themselves to cope with personal and national crises, they embody the ambivalent figure of a China that struggles to understand itself throughout the tumultuous course of modern Chinese history.

The most controversial betrayal in *Farewell* is Cheng's performance for the Japanese during WWII. When the Japanese army invades the theater

6. The term "fifth-generation Chinese directors" refers to those who resumed their film studies at the Beijing Film Academy in the 1980s after experiencing the historical turmoil of the Chinese Cultural Revolution. Members of this generation of directors were exposed to Western philosophy and novel cinematic techniques in college. Hence, they often struggled to balance old and new aesthetics in their films that constantly retraced, re-examined, and critiqued modern Chinese history and politics.

house, Duan witnesses a Chinese man attempting to put opera costumes on a Japanese general. Irritated by this treacherous act, Duan furiously attacks the Chinese man he perceives as a traitor and is therefore arrested by the Japanese.<sup>7</sup> To save his life, Cheng performs for the Japanese soldiers, but after his release, Duan condemns Cheng for betraying China and refuses to acknowledge Cheng's efforts on his behalf.

While Duan is fighting with the Japanese backstage, Cheng, onstage, performs the role of Lady Yang (*Yang guifei* 楊貴妃, 719-756)<sup>8</sup>—the favored concubine of Tang Emperor Xuanzong (r. 712-756)<sup>9</sup>—from the historical play “The Drunken Concubine.” The theatrical parallel is evident. Cheng shares with the character of Lady Yang a personal tension with national interests. Lady Yang and Emperor Xuanzong are fleeing a rebellion in the capital when they are captured by rebels. The rebels demand that Yang be executed because they see her as a dangerous beauty who has captivated the emperor and led him to neglect his duties and endanger the empire.<sup>10</sup> While the rebels appear to claim victory by forcing the emperor to execute Lady Yang, it is precisely her death that saves the nation from collapse. Similarly, Cheng's “treacherous” singing not only rescues his endangered partner but also the character King Chu, whose fall in the play *Bawang bieji* parallels the invasion China during WWII. Shocked by Duan's condemnation, Cheng nonetheless refuses to confess to treason for his erstwhile performance for the Japanese when he is later interrogated by the Communist Party. Like Lady Yang—the scapegoat of men's politics—Cheng also becomes a victim of the Chinese government's condemnation of feudal China and its old aesthetics. Lady Yang's sacrifice also involves her private love for the emperor, and so does Cheng's “treason.” But unlike their Western counterparts dying for their self-assertive “transgressions,” Chinese heroines like Lady Yang and Yu die to resolve national conflicts. Their so-called wrongdoings are contextualized in macro-histories and politics in ways that paradoxically depersonalize but also transcend them. By blending Eastern and Western heroines' motifs to balance varied interests, Cheng's understandable yet self-destructive performance constitutes the cultural crossings in *Farewell* as a process of remaking China's figure in modern history.

7. The term “Chinese traitor (*hanjian* 汉奸)” specifically refers to the Chinese who worked for the Japanese army and betrayed the interests of Chinese people, state, and nation during WWII.

8. In the Tang Dynasty, Lady Yang was the favorite concubine of the emperor Xuanzong of Tang. The emperor's excessive infatuation with her ultimately caused many revolts against his rule. In 755, a court official named An Lushan (安祿山, 703-757) launched a rebellion against his rule and soon took over the capital city of Chang'an. Meanwhile, Emperor Xuanzong and Yang fled the palace to Sichuan. When the rebel army caught up with them, they demanded to kill Yang in exchange for restoring the emperor's rule. Fearing for his life, the scared emperor was forced in humiliation to consent to Yang's death. She then bade him farewell and hung herself.

9. *The Drunken Concubine* is a famous Peking opera piece inspired by the tragedy of the emperor Xuanzong and his concubine Lady Yang. One night, Lady Yang arranges a banquet in the imperial garden, waiting for the emperor to come, but he never turns up. Later, she realizes that he has chosen to stay in the palace of Concubine Mei (*Mei fei* 梅妃) instead of hers. Feeling humiliated, furious, and depressed, Yang drinks alone in the garden and ultimately gets drunk.

10. An analogous English translation to the Chinese phrase “dangerous beauty” would be “Helen of Troy” as it refers to people attributing the fall of countries to beautiful women by whom kings or emperors are captivated.

In the afterword of *M. Butterfly*, the Asian-American playwright, Henry David Hwang, addresses the public's misinterpretation of the play's intent: "M. Butterfly has sometimes been regarded as an anti-American play, a diatribe against the stereotyping of the East by the West, of women by men" (100). Disagreeing with such a problematic generalization, Hwang views his play as "a plea to all sides to cut through our respective layers of cultural and sexual misperception, to deal with one another truthfully for our mutual good, from the common and equal ground we share as human beings" (100). *M. Butterfly* is, after all, an American play, but it meticulously showcases the flexibility and richness of Chinese culture that is unfamiliar to most American audiences, offering a novel reimagination of East-West relations. With unexpected twists such as Song's return as a man at the trial and Gallimard's transformation into Butterfly in the jail, Hwang neither intends to simply reverse the gendered power dynamics of East versus West nor to aggravate these dichotomies. Rather, it is only through such betrayal and death that East and West finally converse and exchange roles with each other.

The cultural translation in *M. Butterfly* is achieved by the characters' transformations from one role to another at the end of the play. Although Song's performance does cater to Western realist expectations, as represented by Gallimard, it also manifests the communal and patriotic spirit cherished by Confucian ethics. Recognition of this fact makes way for greater interpretive freedom in understanding Song's role as a cultural translator. Taking Song's double roles as a spy and an actor into account, his cross-dressing performance may have sacrificed his artistic goals for political purposes. Having lived with Gallimard for twenty years, has Song ever truly loved him? As the playwright purposefully keeps Song's private life out of the audience's reach, we are left pondering. We feel we have analyzed Song's figure, yet we still know so little of him as a person. It is certain, however, that Song saw his sacrifice as contributing to the collective good—of China and perhaps of the "East" as a whole in the Vietnam War. When Song shows up at the trial as a man wearing an Armani suit, Gallimard—unable to accept the brutal truth—turns to the theater to seek comfort from his Butterfly fantasy.

Song's betrayal and Gallimard's suicide both confirm and confound the tragedy of Euro-American operatic heroines. Song's parodic Butterfly vanishes when the actor reveals his real sex, but Gallimard's death in the role of Butterfly reaffirms Clément's notion of "tragic women dying for their transgressions." Throughout the play, the Frenchman attempts to transform his timid, shy, unpopular, white-woman-fearing self into the devil-like Pinkerton capable of pinning down his Asian Butterfly. However, like Puccini's Butterfly, Gallimard is fated to fail, be betrayed by a heartless man (Song, revealed as a man), and face a punitive death. Throughout the play, he is and has always been the real tragic heroine. In addition, the functions of Butterfly vary

among the two male characters. Given that Song ceases to perform once his mission is over, the absence of the necessity to act ironically amplifies the materialistic utility of Butterfly that determines her value. Like Lady Yang, Song's Butterfly is executed when she is no longer useful to men's politics, but by having Song transform into his male self, Hwang offers us a glance at the afterlife of a tragic heroine. Perhaps by becoming a man, the Asian woman can finally escape her pre-written tragedy in the European opera librettos, with the East subverting the West to regain its cultural and political agency in the postcolonial era. However, although Song appears to prevail in this East-West rivalry, he is nonetheless a puppet of the CCP forced to play the "Song Liling" character in order to survive. Otherwise, he would have faced persecution during the Cultural Revolution similar to that which Duan and Cheng encounter in *Farewell*.

Despite the East-West cultural crossing, both works also unravel historical allegories mirrored by the tensions between the actor-characters and their real-life ironies. Given its unprecedented success and popularity in the West, Chen's *Farewell* has received wide attention for its merciless depiction of modern Chinese history. Critiques within China primarily attack the film's intentional amplification of the negative aspects of old China, accusing Chen of tarnishing the national image as a way to enter the global film market. Indeed, *Farewell*'s dazzling colors, Hollywood-like cinematic style, and popularity among foreign audiences have opened it to criticism as a deliberate parody of "Orientalist aesthetics" through "self-exoticizing and commodifying Chinese identity" (Chiang 110). Although *Farewell* receives a lower valuation from Chinese audiences, many Euro-American critics regard it as an accurate "portrait of China in transition" given its brutal yet authentic depiction of the Chinese Cultural Revolution (McDougall 43-44). Finding the film's "presentation of modern Chinese history and society a large part of its appeal," many Western audiences tend to extract the film's political messages and neglect the cultural and aesthetic aspects that appeal to Chinese audiences (44). *Farewell* is not a historical documentary, but it generates historical allegories through the micro-lens of the artists' theatrical performances, which serve as responses to the changing of regimes and the reshuffling of power throughout their lives.

Documenting the rise and fall of political regimes in China from the late 1920s to the 1970s, the film is renowned for its sarcastic depiction of the PRC under Mao's rule. After the Communist Party rose to power in 1949, it launched a series of political movements destroying old Chinese aesthetics, culture, and ideology in the name of eliminating feudal corruption. The attack on traditional Chinese opera during the Chinese Cultural Revolution accelerated the demise of old China on both material and spiritual levels. The Chinese government considered traditional operas to be "ghost plays" and "demanded their removal from stage." Artists "who had excelled in the

traditional opera” were “humiliated, physically harmed, [or] persecuted by exuberant Red Guards” (Mackerras 19). In the film, actors like Duan and Cheng are forced to dress up in their dazzling costumes with full make-up and kneel before the zealous Red Guards to receive public denunciation. At such a moment, when theater and history overlap, it is as if they were not just humiliated artists but the defeated King Chu and Concubine Yu. To spare himself further interrogation, Duan publicly discloses Cheng’s “crime” of singing Peking opera for the Japanese and Nationalist forces, denouncing him as a traitor, and burns his costumes and props to demonstrate his loyalty to the Party and his determination to distance himself from the corrupt tradition of opera. Duan’s conformity to national politics is a spiritual betrayal of the figure of King Chu, as noted by Cheng’s revelation, “I have been despicable for a long time, but now even King Chu is on his knees begging for mercy, can Peking opera survive?” (2:33:57 – 2:34:08) Whereas the King upholds his dignity by refusing to give in till the last moment of life, Duan submissively yields to the Party, shattering Cheng’s idealization of him. The collapse of theatrical fantasy is fatal to Cheng, for Peking opera constitutes his life by providing him with a partner, lover, and artistic pursuit. Playing the role of Yu brings him not only fame but the illusory love and a momentary satisfaction that empower him to live on. However, even this fraudulent happiness is inevitably crushed by personal and national history.

The historical nature of the play, *Bawang bieji*, prevents its audiences from seeking any hope amid its tragedy. The “future” of the story depicted—the Han Dynasty—is itself a historical fact well-known to the audience. In light of this, Cheng’s insistence on Duan’s promise turns out to be the greatest irony in the film. The movie’s title, *Farewell My Concubine*, prefigures its plot. It is Duan who bids farewell to Cheng by embracing the PRC future, in which time flies, life continues, and the play ends. On the contrary, Cheng forever lingers in the world of theater to avoid the course of history that will actualize their pre-written tragedy. In *Farewell*’s final scene, Duan’s impatient correction of Cheng’s mis-recitation of operatic arias signals the collapse of his theatrical harbor. To make fun of Cheng, Duan purposefully misleads him by starting with the wrong line, reciting, “I am by nature a boy.” As Cheng spontaneously follows, “(...) not a girl,” Duan immediately interrupts him, “You got that wrong again!” (2:40:08-2:40:14) Cheng’s unconscious mistake reveals that he is, after all, a man who does not deserve the eternal, transcending love of King Chu that overcomes death. But if reviving Yu’s death can at least endow Cheng with a moment of solace to indulge in his fantasy, then even just one transient instant would be enough to eternalize his love for Duan.

Similarly, at the end of *M. Butterfly*, the desperate Gallimard also turns to the theater to restore his Orientalist fantasy. If Song’s parodic Butterfly makes

the diplomat relax his vigilance, then his later transformation into Madame Butterfly—as a Western parody of the East—allegorically mirrors the East-West power-reshuffling of his defeat by Song and the West’s unexpected loss in the Vietnam War. It is important to note that such transformation does not reshape Gallimard’s perception of Asian women but only consolidates his Orientalist fantasy. He continues to believe that Asian women “are born and raised to be the perfect women,” making them the perfect prey for “unworthy foreign devils” to love, cheat, and discard (91).

To restore his dignity and “prove that [his] love was not in vain,” Gallimard chooses to “return to the world of fantasy where [he] first met [Song]” (91). This time, he will act as Butterfly, though his appearance—a tall, slender, white man in a Butterfly wig and kimono with exaggerated makeup on his face—implies that this is mere self-deception. When Gallimard reclaims his identity, saying, “My name is Rene Gallimard—also known as Madame Butterfly,” the purposeful juxtaposition of his original name and “Butterfly” internalizes the Orientalist vision within himself to commemorate the operatic fantasy that Song initiates but never completes (93). During their first encounter in the play, Gallimard is the infatuated audience attracted to Song’s performance of Butterfly on stage. She starts “from the point where Butterfly uncovers the *hara-kiri* knife” but “proceeds to play out an abbreviated death scene,” leaving the opera’s end incomplete (15). Two decades later, history rewinds but is reversed. It is Song “who stands as a man, staring at the dead Gallimard” (93). Gallimard’s operatic suicide in jail in Paris completes the tragedy of Butterfly. Puccini’s Orientalist opera becomes an emblematic miniature of Gallimard’s life. He, like Butterfly, blindly falls in love with a man—Song—who deceives, betrays, and ultimately destroys him. By explaining to his audiences that “in imagination shall I remain” (91), Gallimard wishes for his operatic suicide to elevate him from the ocean of misery, unaware that fantasy and reality always co-exist. Finally, Song asks the air—“Butterfly? Butterfly?” (93)—after witnessing Gallimard’s suicide. Here, his wonder seems to be indecipherable for we have no clues whether he refers to Puccini’s Butterfly, his secret mission, or Gallimard’s death. Given that men’s cross-dressing performances always involve manipulation and fraudulence, can they ever be genuine? Compared to those who die in their theatrical fantasies, how do we understand the end of the survivors? We hardly know anything about Song outside of his Butterfly role. What kind of future waits for a spy who is bailed out of a foreign prison and sent back to his homeland by the national government? In opera, the Oriental is an illusion for the West. But even in fictionalized reality, we rarely know about the East. Song and his unpredictable destiny are filled with possible pathos. It is possible that Song’s survival is the greatest tragedy in the play because it fails to grant him even the slightest sense of control over his own life, and to live without freedom is worse than death.



## Conclusion

Both *Farewell* and *M. Butterfly* reimagine the power of theater to mediate given realities by, on the one hand, having characters live false lives in which they perform acts of betrayal, but on the other, refracting their actions through operatic fantasies, acts of fidelity that lead to more authentic lives. Reading through the lens of the crossings of Chinese and Euro-American theatrical traditions, cultures, and historical allegories enables us to notice previously ignored nuances and the potential genuineness of male crossdressers' performances. Whether it is the infatuated Cheng, the deceptive Song, or the beguiled Gallimard, their renderings of Chinese or Euro-American tragic heroines manifest the overlapping of theater and life. Although Cheng is not born as a woman, his marriage-bond to Duan, epitomized by the King-Concubine analogy, is total. Song fakes a stereotypical Butterfly role to cater to Western tastes, but by doing so he unintentionally pushes Gallimard to learn the truth and limitations of his Orientalist fantasies of conquering a feminine East that is not willing to be dominated. With characters' betrayals and deaths providing moments of epiphany and illuminating the falsity of the superficial illusions, the real conditions under which people live are revealed. Moreover, reading by the light of these crossings allows us to reread the dichotomous East-West tension as, in fact, a relationship of mutual inclusion.

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# TRANSLATIONS



TRANSLATION

## Lu Xun, a “Knot” that Pulls Together China’s Modernity

Yi Li

Sichuan University

**ABSTRACT:**

The impact of Lu Xun on modern Chinese literature is complex, permeating every branch of modern Chinese literature and connecting them with itself as a junction. Tracing the logical web of Lu Xun’s thoughts helps reveal a grand landscape of modern Chinese literature. Lu Xun’s ability to move us with his spiritual pursuit after more than half a century symbolizes his trans-epochal value as well as our own self-growth.

**KEYWORDS:** Lu Xun, modern Chinese culture, *Warnings and Road Signs*, encounter

China no longer wonders who Lu Xun (魯迅, 1881-1936) was, or what he means to our culture. What China asks, rather, is how Lu Xun’s iconicity develops in pursuit of a Chinese zeitgeist, or how he manages to inform social process or historicity. How is this literary figure so prominent throughout China’s modernity? How is Lu Xun such a fundamental figure of China’s intellectual paradigm?<sup>1</sup>

As early as September of 1927, Lu Xun related:

There is a scholar in Guangzhou who says, “Lu Xun is spent. He has nothing more to say, it’s unnecessary to read the *Yusi* (語絲, *Tattler*).” Indeed, I’ve already said all I came to say. I was right then, I’m right now, and I’ll be right next year. I sincerely hope, however, that what I say will not be true ten or twenty years from now. If it is, then we’re all finished, although I’ll have a clear conscience (*Complete Works* 3: ‘公理’之所在).

So how did Lu Xun come to play such a formative role in Chinese cultural consciousness? How has he come to vitalize modern Chinese history? In reading Lu Xun, how do we pull and stretch him? History since Lu Xun seems inseparable from the shadow he cast. Regardless of how we read or think about him today, history decided whether to make Lu Xun a modern hero or to plunge him into dark abyss. We behold the curious play of Chinese culture and history and see that Lu Xun pulls together Chinese modernity.

### Chinese Thought in the New Century

Individual social and philosophical values form the bulk of modern Enlightenment thinking. Lu Xun contributed to these values by structuring

1. Originally published as “Zuo wei xiandai Zhongguo wenhua zhi ‘jie’ de Lu Xun 作為現代中國文化之“結”的魯迅,” Shantou University Journal: Humanities and Social Sciences Monthly (*Shantou daxue xuebao*——*renwen shehui kexue bao* 汕頭大學學報——人文社會科學報), vol. 34, no. 12, pp. 9-13. Translated and published with permission.

individual subjectivity. While studying abroad in Japan, he began to emphasize individual existence, urging us toward the singular and divergent, and away from convergent multitudes. During the May Fourth Movement, Lu Xun advocated individualist non-governance and humanism. However, his thoughts do not inhere in Enlightenment thinking. Rather his meditations hover upon how Enlightenment thinking failed to take root in society. In the preface to *Outcry* (*Nahan* 呐喊), Lu Xun said:

I have since then felt a malaise unlike any before. I didn't know what to make of it then but thought if there were but one person to advocate for, who approved, then I would encourage him. If I met with objection, it would spur him on. The tragedy reveals itself when there is a call to arms, to which no one approves or objects, as if there were not a soul in the land, no horizon in sight, nor hand being lifted. I have been despondent ever since" (*Complete Works* 1: 417).

Also:

This gives one pause to reflect that the rallying cry calls a hero into being (ibid.).

Lu Xun's rationalist Enlightenment thinking integrated his stance on individuality. It has been written that, "Lu Xun was a pioneer of the New Culture movement. He was the only one to realize that Enlightenment intellectuals are destined to be tragic" (Wang F. and Zhao 46).

Today's scholars make distinctions between Lu Xun and other Enlightenment thinkers, preferring to explore his work through Existentialism or modern Vitalist philosophy. The "darkness" and "nothingness" of Lu Xun have been explored, such as in the passages, "My thinking is too dark, and as for whether I am correct right now, I have no way of knowing" (*Complete Works* 11:79), or "I often feel that 'darkness' and 'illusion' are the only reality" (11: 20), or even, "I am certain of only one thing, the grave" (1: 284). Parallels are made between Lu Xun's rebellious despair and the absurd hero of Albert Camus, but Lu Xun was in a class of his own. In Lu Xun, we find absurdity but no outsider. In his own milieu, he was not an outsider. He was, however, somewhat marginalized as an outlier (Wang F. and Zhao 78). Lu Xun was very sensitive to mortality, and his rebellion in despair had a strong sense of personal responsibility. This pursuit of reformation and personal feeling of responsibility formed his subjective structure. "The history of China is destined to follow the tragedy of Chinese Enlightenment intellectuals, building a dyke of modernization against the ignorance of past traditions" (ibid. 47). If Western Existentialism bore the banner of vitalist philosophy as it exited the 18<sup>th</sup> century, then Lu Xun carried the banner of vitalist philosophy as a Chinese Enlightenment thinker.

### Modern Chinese Political Revolutionary Thought

Lu Xun joined the anti-Manchurian movement whilst in Japan, in perpetual revolt against oppression. He was a leading member of the League of Left-Wing

Writers, developing his own unique take on revolution. He sympathized with the oppressed, and held revolution as an ideal, but was very realistic about the outcomes of revolution. “Rise and revolt, then revolt against the revolution, then form an anti-anti-revolution, and so on” (*Complete Works* 3:16), pointing to Chinese history as a long series of revolutions, seeing revolt as a discursive method. In speaking of the Xinhai Revolution, he stated, “Before the revolution, I was a slave. After the revolution, I was tricked by the former slaves, who made me into their slave.” He spoke fondly of the “golden world” awaiting the revolutionary, although at times sarcastically. He even said to Feng Xuefeng (馮雪峰, 1903-1976), “When I see you coming, I want to run for fear I’ll be the first you kill” (Li 115). In correspondence with a friend, he suggested that after the revolution triumphed, he would put on a red vest and sweep the streets, “After the collapse, if we’re still here, you’ll find me with a beggar’s red vest, sweeping up the streets of Shanghai” (*Complete Works* 12). Lu Xun had his own difficulties with China’s revolution and social reform.

### Conceptual Developments in Modern Chinese Literature

Lu Xun carried the banner of literature for the people, excavating the value of Enlightenment literature by advocating literature’s social function, and had done so since his time in Japan. “I devote my blood to the ancestors of the Chinese people, to taking on their illness so that I may bring on our cure.” The slideshow incident is a familiar example of where Lu Xun strived to give literature a realistic mission. People today who criticize his utilitarian view of literature still admit Lu Xun was distinct from opportunist literature. Lu Xun had his own sense of literature’s limitations.

In the Preface to *Outcry*, he expresses his doubts:

Take an iron room. There are no windows to break. There are many people sleeping inside, and they will all suffocate to death, but they feel no sorrow, merely passing from drowsiness into death. Now you holler at them, rousing a few unlucky souls who will now suffer to the very end. Do you feel you’ve done right by them? (*Complete Works* 12: 419)

This raises the question once again for us. Can literature take on this much responsibility? Might the experiment go badly, producing an opposite effect? In Lu Xun’s life, the writer spoke of using literature to make social reforms in boring ways. In *Literature of a Revolutionary Period* (*Geming shidai de wenxue* 革命時代的文學) there was the well-known saying, “One little poem won’t scare away Sun Chuanfang,<sup>2</sup> but a cannonball would.” The essay “In Answer to Mr. Youheng (*Da Youheng xiansheng* 答有恆先生)” in *And That’s That* (*Eryi ji* 而已集), gives the provocative case of the “drunken shrimp”:

I found I was a...a...? For a while there I couldn’t even articulate it. I’ve said

2. Translator’s Note: Sun Chuanfang (孫傳芳, 1885-1935) was a protégé of Yuan Shikai (袁世凱, 1859-1916) and later a warlord with his base in Nanjing.



that Chinese history is a cannibalistic feast. Some eat. Others get eaten. The eaten have eaten others before, and those eating now have once been bitten into. Only now do I discover the part I've played in this. Sir, you've read my works. Let me ask you a question. When you read it, did you feel numb, or did you feel clear-minded? Did you feel muddled and confused, or did you feel alive? If it were the latter each time, then from what I can see, my judgement confirms a lot. There is a kind of "drunken shrimp" always present at Chinese feasts. The livelier and fresher the shrimp, the happier the eaters. I help the shrimp. I understand the mind and honesty of the young, sensitizing them, so that they will experience double the pain in any disastrous case. I give rise to those who hate the young and enjoy their clever and exquisite pain, helping the eaters have extra pleasure in eating (*Complete Works* 3: 454).

Mr. Qian Liqun reminds us in his writings on Lu Xun to revisit Feng Xuefeng's remarks. It was said that Lu Xun's will in *Death* had seven items. Item number five said, "If my son has no talent by the time he's come of age, he can take up a trade or some other small matter for his livelihood. Under no condition may he become an emptyheaded writer or artist." Feng Xuefeng recalled that the word "empty-headed" was not originally written (Feng).

Of course, Lu Xun's doubts about literature and the role it could play did not mean he had given up. He made no excuses for his escapism or powerlessness. Many Western intellectuals concern themselves with death, parsing out the limitations of human life, viewing life through the lens of death. In these times, people treasure life more than ever, cherishing its meaning and value. In discussing the limitations of literature, we see more clearly the efficacy of intellectuals, understanding just what lies within or outside of their grasp. Mr. Wang Dehou addresses Qian Liqun by reminding us that when reading Lu Xun, we should examine gestalts, returning his words to the complexity and richness befitting the writer, rather than dwelling on isolated words and phrases (Wang D.).

## Ethics of Modern China

Whether talking about those who studied in the UK and US in the 1920s and 30s, overseas Sinologists, or cutting-edge mainland Chinese scholars today, we see that critique of Lu Xun focuses on his extremism and intolerance. The usual problem with this is an extension of attitude to character. Critics of Lu Xun's personality think they can gauge his inner character through his actions and behaviors. The spirit of a person is very different from the spirit of a text. As such, critics find themselves looking down from a lofty castle of their own ethical norms. When we judge Lu Xun, we find that our judgement has superseded that of which we have any certainty. In these days of opportunism, we see people judging rather than thinking, as if toppling

a figure such as Lu Xun could bring us any ultimate or personal profit. Thus, we refrain from discussing the personality of Lu Xun, leaving off discussion of ethics and virtue when it comes to the writer's life. Looking at the matter in a balanced way, we can admit that there were those Lu Xun hurt, but we admit that Lu Xun's ethical choices tended to be more stable and consistent than most in China. Even now, we also find it difficult to completely unite individualism and humanitarianism. Being for oneself and also being for others has always posed an insurmountable moral conundrum for people. Moreover, when relinquishing "being for oneself" still offers no method for genuinely "being for others," Lu Xun's choices have an undeniable ethical value. By causing as little harm to others as possible, he won many friends—and particularly earned the esteem of the innocent, weak, and unimportant. Yes, Lu Xun scolded and reprimanded, but the subjects of his scorn were often powerful and righteous. His intolerance was aimed at a deformed social system concealing cracks and fissures with the objective and just. The crux of the problem here is that dictatorial regimes (and their helpers) retain all the discursive power, defining what is objective as opposed to subjective, and just as opposed to unjust. In the end, objectivity and justice are a means to consolidate legitimacy of the system. Lu Xun was extreme, and he did curse people. However, what motivated him to be so extreme was his vitriolic anger towards a deformed social system. Lu Xun wanted to turn the tables on the absurdities of reality, expanding real justice to society. Advocating tolerance had degenerated into a fancy excuse for safeguarding the system and its vested interests in China. Lu Xun soberly understood and accepted this cruel nature of life early on. In the essay "I Suddenly Thought of It (*Huran xiangdao* 忽然想到)" from *The Canopy Collection* (*Huagai ji* 華蓋集), Lu Xun describes this survivalist aspect of Chinese society.

However, before the arrival of the golden world, people will be rife with these contradictions. Just look at the situation in times of discovery. No small difference arises between bravery and cowardice. It is a pity that the Chinese people show the appearance of beasts to sheep, and that of sheep to beasts. Even beasts are cowardly citizens. We have to resolve this if we are to go on.

I think, that in order to save China, there is no need to bring anything external to it. The youth only need study hard these contradictory forces, and how history has dealt with them. When facing the beasts, act like a beast; and when dealing with sheep be a sheep (*Complete Works* 3:25).

In order to prevent China from ending in chaos, Lu Xun was a beast in the face of beasts, a sheep before sheep, and intolerant towards intolerance, always working to construct a new ethics.

### Complicated Intertwining of Lu Xun and Modern Chinese Literary Circles

Lu Xun's rich contributions to modern Chinese literature rely not only on his activities as a left-wing writer but extend also to speak for the consistency

of his actions and words. He was able to face life directly and to discern value in human lives. Lu Xun's humanism outshone many academic intellectuals. He never failed to face real connection between one's spirituality and Chinese aesthetic development. In this sense, he made, perhaps, the largest contribution to modern Chinese art and literature. His broad view of literature as well as integrated approach to understanding the spirit of the times allowed him to relate more closely to changes in modern Chinese literature than many other Chinese writers could at the time.

When it came to the League of Left-wing Writers, Lu Xun directly intervened, supporting young writers such as Rou Shi, the writer from Northeast China. He also maintained relations with various directors and leaders, such as Feng Xuefeng and Hu Feng (胡風, 1902-1985), while distancing himself from others due to strained relations, such as Zhou Yang (周揚, 1908-1989) and Xu Maoyong (徐懋庸, 1911-1977).

Lu Xun maintained a critical stance towards the Right-wing Writers; but with the Freedom School (*ziyou pai* 自由派), he collaborated closely (the May Fourth Movement), while having very public schisms with the group. These schisms had to do with Lu Xun's journey of subjective discovery and structuring, a process of accreting his own independent thinking, seeking other literary ideals and characteristics for his writing practice.

Looking at these fields of Lu Xun's activities, we see that his intervention took forms and trajectories, embracing, supporting, and refusing. This warp and weft created a tapestry that incorporated many aspects of China's modernity. This is his crucial importance to modern Chinese literature. It is true that during the Cultural Revolution, there were those who took advantage of Lu Xun's crack-downs upon political dissidents. However, as soon as the Revolution ended and Chinese people's thought returned to a more normal state, when we once again needed the flourishing prosperity of modern Chinese literature, the people of that time could, by following the web of logic formed by the complex interweavings of Lu Xun thought, restore to the highest degree the integral structure of literature.

Many modern writers, especially the Freedom School writers, seem to talk only to themselves, avoiding ideological confrontations. They exclude themselves in this way from the greater historical importance we give to Lu Xun. They fail to incorporate many other threads into their own "knots." Not only are their knots ineffective at holding together the fabric of the times, they are also unable to discern or open up essential cores of history. Nowadays, almost all thinkers and literary critics begin with Lu Xun. Li Zehou (李澤厚, 1930-2021), Liu Zaifu (劉再復, b. 1941), Wang Furen (王富仁, 1941-2017), Qian Liqun (錢理群, b. 1939), and Wang Hui (汪暉, b. 1959) are good examples of how combing through Lu Xun forces one to comb just as closely through all of modern Chinese history and literature, restoring the richness

of the Chinese literary ethos. "We can say without exaggeration that Lu Xun saved Chinese culture for the second time" (Wang F. 174).

In pulling modern Chinese literature together, Lu Xun makes a great contribution to letters today. Li Jinlong's (李金龍) treatment of Lu Xun, the editor, gives us an informed sense of Lu Xun's gifts for us today, mining the treasures of Mr. Li's work and experience with Lu Xun's literary activities. Li is a doctoral student majoring in modern and contemporary Chinese literature, engaged for some time now in journal editing. Through his research on Lu Xun's editorial activities, Li has met Lu Xun on another level. In addition to views in his own writing, I was particularly moved by his life experience. Academic writing and research that correspond with one's life is moving and worth reading. After more than half a century of wind, frost, rain, and snow, we are still moved by Lu Xun's spiritual pursuit and existential choices. Lu Xun's value spans generations and eras, guiding our self-growth. We are most fortunate to have in Lu Xun a 'knot' that pulls together China's literary modernity.

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TRANSLATION

## Late Qing Feminist Discourse and Nationalism

Lianfen Yang

Renmin University of China

**ABSTRACT:**

Chinese feminist discourse began its development embedded within late Qing period nationalist discourse in the form of proscriptions against foot-binding and advocacy for women's education. Specific rhetorical terms conflating feminist and nationalist discourse include "mothers of citizens (*guomin zhi mu*)" and "women citizens (*nü guomin*)."<sup>1</sup> This paper analyzes ways in which feminism was embedded in nationalist discourse and the legitimacy this established for the women's movement. Such an inquiry uncovers the dependence of feminist discourse upon nationalist discourse, contributing to the unique development of feminism in China. This paper also looks at gender anxiety in Qiu Jin (1875-1907) in an attempt to describe how male subjectivity influenced late Qing feminist discourse.

**KEYWORDS:** late Qing, feminist discourse, nationalism, Qiu Jin 秋瑾

### Introduction

The two discourses of feminism and nationalism have developed in a relatively harmonious manner in China. This trend deviates from that seen in Western feminist and nationalist discourse where, like oil and water, the two refuse to mix with one another. While there are critical views taken of this covalence between feminism and nationalism in China, it is important that this is not done from an essentialist position. Rather, it is rewarding to study how this covalency developed in China. Feminist discourse developed through male representations, a process which naturally precluded divergent historical paths for feminism. The women's movement gained momentum through its contribution to Chinese populism, with its critique of patriarchy being aimed at established first-world Western patriarchies. It remains to be studied how these parameters of being constantly represented by male-run cultural producers may have limited the development of feminist discourse in China.

Western feminist theory and practice provide ample reference for the Chinese women's movement. The connection stops there. China's discovery and journey of women's rights diverge from similar movements in American and Western Europe. Not only is it not a movement initiated and led by independent women, but it also tends to refrain from seeking the right to independence. From its inception, Chinese feminism took part in a more generalized search for social reform which fought for national independence. Chinese feminism has always been integral to revolutionary twentieth-century Enlightenment thinking in China. Thus, it's important to look at the relationship between

feminism and nationalism as one of part to whole, wherein one is contained and delimited by the other.

Notions of nation and gender are inscribed within power structures. There is a parallel between China's relationship to a Western-led world, including China's emotional experience of this relationship, and the relationship of women as inferior and subject to men. This reified positioning of the women's movement as a nationalist proponent is then blended with Marxist-Leninist class theory. Meanwhile, although nationalist discourse has been important for twentieth-century China, complexities between this patriarchal discourse and feminism invite us to look more closely at the late Qing women's movement in China. We will look at relationships between gender and politics, with our first inquiry examining how feminism borrowed the wings of nationalist discourse in its late Qing inception and early development.

### "Mothers of Citizens" and "Women Citizens": Nationalist Political Rhetoric

Turn of the century feminist discourse found itself issuing largely through male voices in the late-Qing period.<sup>1</sup> Reformists held high the banner of Enlightenment, advocating consciousness of nationality, with revolutionaries inciting national as well as racial conflicts. It was in this milieu that feminism gained its first visibility, in a discourse building the modern nation state. At the end of the nineteenth-century, Liang Qichao (梁啟超, 1873-1929), Kang Youwei (康有為, 1858-1927), and others of the Enlightenment movement overturned the ancient imperial power structure. Without the "heaven" in "all under heaven (*tianxia* 天下)," they established the modern nation-state. Adopting an increasingly linear view of history, China's relationship with the world revealed itself in crisis. Late Qing novels often depict the world, globe, and nation to show that "all under heaven" was not, indeed, controlled by the Chinese emperor. China was just one nation in an eastern temperate zone of Asia, just like the small village in *Yellow Hydrangea* (*Huang xiuqiu* 黄绣球). China faced its ruin and the genocide of its people depicted in vivid images such as the submergence of land in *Flower in the Sea of Evil* (*Nie haihua* 孽海花) and shipwreck in *The Travels of Lao Can* (*Lao Can youji* 老殘遊記). As a few Western scholars have pointed out, nationalism replaced the classical political model of monarchy, in part due to its cultural conception of modernity. Although the notion of nationalism has an illusory nature, it is an illusion shared by nations the world over.<sup>2</sup> Thus, China transformed from a semi-colony into a sovereign nation-state. Parallels exist between nationalist narratives of the citizen as subject and feminist theory advocating for saving

1. Scholars such as Liu He argue against this statement (Wang and Chen 15). We argue here that female voices can only represent male subjectivity within male dominated discourse and power structures. Alternative voices could never represent mainstream public opinion; therefore, they are hard-pressed to act upon power structures. This was the case with the late Qing feminist movement. We seek to describe how the expression of women's voices was thus limited.

2. Benedict Anderson defined a nation as an imagined community, believing that the nation was a cultural artificiality constructed through the imagination, i.e., a political community enjoying limited sovereignty in nature.



the country and Chinese people.

Late Qing nationalists called for a sovereign nation-state. “A nation is accumulated by people, and there would be no nation without its people,” and, “a citizen is a person who regards their nation as belonging them.”<sup>3</sup> Fierce critique put forward by Liang Qichao during the Hundred Days’ Reform of 1898 attacked Chinese people for their lack of consciousness when it came to constituting the new modern nation, labeling them as having slave consciousness with no national subjectivity and labelling these negative qualities as feminine traits. Liang’s New Citizen theory called for the birth of citizens. He believed that the fall of China was due at least in part to a dearth of masculine heroic spirit among the Chinese people. He depicted the physical and spiritual states of Chinese men with adjectives such as “lethargic,” “overcast,” and “slender,” calling for a young and masculine China which would rid itself of its oppressors with its heroic spirit (Liang, *Collected Works* 6:29). Men took up martial arts, and revolutionaries resorted to violence. Women were then moved up on the Enlightenment agenda as “mothers of citizens” who deserved not to have their feet bound, but to have schools built for them.

Liang Qichao stated that, “There are two main parts to managing world affairs. First, bring order to people’s hearts, and second, teach them skills. Both start with women. Teaching women, therefore, is fundamental to the prosperity of a nation.” “Thus, we see that in nations such as the U.S., a highly educated female population contributes to a nation’s power. Nations such as UK, France, Germany, and Japan prosper less, which is in line with their relatively uneducated female population. Nations that don’t educate their women lack in intellectual development. India, Middle Eastern nations, and Turkey are examples of this” (Liang, *Collected Works* 1:40-41, 43). Replacing family with nation reinforced the model of women as nurturers of the nation-state. Nationalist rhetoric played a key role in the rapid spread of support for banning foot-binding, as well as in setting up schools for women at the turn of the twentieth century.

In 1904, Jin Songcen (金松岑, 1874-1947) wrote the forward for the first issue of *Women’s World* (*Nüzi shijie* 女子世界). Jin had formerly published *Women’s Bell* (*Nüjie Zhong* 女界鐘), a manifesto which proposed equal rights for men and women by emphasizing responsibilities of women as “mothers of citizens”:

Women are mothers of citizens. There is no doubt that to establish a new China, we need a new kind of woman. If we want to make China strong, we must first strengthen women. To civilize China, we must first civilize women. The salvation of China will follow the salvation of its women.

In that same year, Ying Lianzhi (英斂之, 1867-1926), editor-in-chief of

3. Originally published in the 30th volume (October 15th, 1899) of the *Journal of Pure Righteousness* (Qingyi bao 清議報) (Liang 1:56).

*Ta Kung Pao* (*Da gongbao* 大公報), wrote a preface for the collected poetic works of Lü Bicheng (呂碧城, 1883-1943) and her sisters. In this preface, he speaks of women's independence as well as equality between men and women in terms of nation-building:

I say independence is the basis of equal rights and the basis of national strength. Strength will preserve the nation and protect our sovereignty as citizens from being slaves to foreign powers (10).

Women followed their enlightened fathers and brothers in a declaration of national independence: "As the mothers of citizens, women have a responsibility to propagate and improve the nation" (Xia, *Late Qing* 92).<sup>4</sup> A newly formed "Common Love Society (*Gong'ai hui* 共愛會)" aimed to "rescue two hundred million women, recovering their original rights and imbuing them with national thoughts, fulfilling their duty as female citizens" (Xia, *Late Qing* 47).<sup>5</sup> Women were shamed into saving the nation:

Women give birth to the nation. Our nation perished two hundred and sixty years ago, but what is shameful is that everyone sits around calmly and doesn't marvel at this. Where are those who are truly citizens? It pains me that our country's women cannot raise them (...) Therefore, it is not necessary to resent foreigners for the perishing of the nation. One need only blame ourselves, the four hundred million descendants of the Yellow Emperor. If the Yellow Emperor's descendants are sufficiently reliable, we can only blame women for their inability to give birth to citizens (Hou 4).

Late Qing Enlightenment discourse was cultivated through media representations. Broadcasts and headlines reiterated certain concepts and talking points. Various articles and textual narratives reproduced these representations in a concerted effort to shape social and public discourse.<sup>6</sup> Benedict Andersen has spoken of this as a modern material condition needed for nationalism to overtake imperialism and religious authoritarianism.<sup>7</sup> The women's movement contributed to these efforts.

Late-Qing nationalism is complex. Its adversaries were Western powers, while there was also a social division in China between Han and Manchu ethnicities. Nationalist reform worked along two main trajectories. The first was the self-strengthening campaign of the Chinese nation, and the second was an internal racial revolution to expel the Manchu and restore governance

4. Originally published as "The Significance of Promoting Women's Education (*Xingnuxue yi* 興女學義)" in *Ta Kung Pao*, Feb. 26th, 1906.

5. Originally published as "Constitution of the Common Love Union for Women Students Studying in Japan (*Riben liuxuesheng nüzi gong'ai hui zhangcheng* 日本留學生女子共愛會章程)," in *Zhejiang Trends* (*Zhejiang chao* 浙江潮), vol. 3.

6. Public opinion influenced official discourse. For example, the late Qing *Memorial Establishing a Constitution for Women's Normal Schools* in 1907 contains the idea that "Women's education is the foundation of the education of the country's citizens."

7. In *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Benedict Anderson views the creation of printing technology and press agencies as a precondition of breaking down a united imperial ideology.

to the Han people. On both trajectories, women were there to strengthen the nation as mothers of citizens.

According to Chen Dongyuan, the custom of binding women's feet began in the early Northern Song. It gained in popularity throughout the Yuan and Ming. In the Qing, Kangxi and Qianlong forbade Manchurian women from binding their feet. The custom grew popular among Han women, and small feet were idolized (125-128, 232-233). In addition to the male fetishization of small bound feet, Qing nationalism created male pride for men whose wives had bound feet. Han scholar officials saw this as a symbol of the refusal to surrender to Manchu imperialism, a moral compensation for maintaining the dignity of the Han people. Women's bodies were the mortgage for men's sense of national integrity. In the Daoguang reign period (1831-1851), Li Ruzhen (李汝珍, 1763-1830) wrote *Flowers in the Mirror* (*Jinghua yuan* 鏡花緣), sharply satirizing the absurd cruelty of foot-binding. Feng Guifen (馮桂芬, 1809-1874) also provided critique in *Xiaobin Cottage Rebellion* (*Xiaobin lu kangyi* 校邠廬抗議). In the Hundred Days' Reform of 1898, Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao advocated for rational equality of men and women.<sup>8</sup> They did so by recalling the compassion and proper etiquette of Chinese sages. These discourses were convincing, but they failed to reach the public. Nationalism gained traction with the technological advent of machine printing and press agencies, which served as tools of disseminating nationalism as a means to Enlightenment. One the eve of the Hundred Days' Reform, Kang Youwei wrote in his memorial to the Guangxu Emperor (r. 1875-1908):

These days all nations are communicating and exchanging political ideologies, unlike the days of old when borders were closed and insulating. Once again, as when we were riddled with opium addiction, China is mocked as an uncivilized nation by foreigners who take photos of our run-down housing and poor beggars on the streets. Among the objects of ridicule, the most mocked are the bound feet of women (65).

Liang Qichao also said that the corrupt custom of binding women's feet, "departs from the regulations of the sages internally and offers us up to the derision of other nations externally, manifestly causes cruel suffering and secretly bequeaths harm to our race" (Liang, *Collected Works* 1:44). Departing from the rites, departing from humanity, departing from the regulations of the sages—in seeking grounds for this argument in the orthodox tradition of Confucianism, it was hard to avoid suspicion of cherry-picking the classics to justify one's own standpoint. Only the global scope of the "derision of other nations" was a fresh argument and truly pricked the self-esteem of the literati elite.

An article that came out in 1904, under the name "Liu Ruiping, Lady of

8. See Kang Youwei's *Book of the Great Fellowship* (*Datong shu* 大通書) and Tan Sitong's (譚嗣同, 1865-1898) *Study of Benevolence* (*Renxue* 仁學). In his *Modern Chinese Arguments for Women's Rights: Nation, Translation, and Gender Politics*, the Taiwanese scholar Liu Renpeng discusses how Kang, Liang, and Tan advocated feminism through the application of Confucianism.

the Fragrant Hills (*Xiangshan liu ruiping* 香山劉瑞平),” also points to this mockery of foreign nations:

I read in a newspaper report that there was “a Fujian customs official named Ying who represented the goods of his province at the Pan-American Exposition.”<sup>9</sup> Among the exhibits Ying brought along were three women, depicting the vulgar customs of Fujian. One was a married woman with bound feet; one, a barefoot virgin; and one, a newly-married bride. They were displayed in the Ethnology Building in order to humiliate Chinese people.” How terrible! For a long time now, the national strength of China has fallen below the passing mark, and Chinese women have been ethnological exhibits for a long time as well. This is the second time that women with bound feet have been put on display as exhibits. Previously, the Osaka Exposition put women with bound feet on display. This is now the second instance. Are the women of China not worthy of respect? Are they not of great value? (250)

It’s interesting to note that foot-binding and the suffering it caused women was not as influential as the shame of a tarnished national image. In the more than one hundred years of feminism in China, only when the issues women face can be re-spun as talking points for nationalist discourse do they become acceptable. However, with the intervention of mainstream political will and power, nationalism was able to step up the pace of achievements in the women’s movement.

Jin Songcen’s *Women’s Bell* first advocated for women’s rights to education, arguing for equal rights between men and women. This line of argumentation deviated from the values of nationalism, and Jin was heralded as the most influential figure in the Chinese women’s movement (Hou).<sup>10</sup> Readers had difficulty, however, following the argument for equal rights between men and women, glossing over this part and harkening enthusiastically to arguments for women to join in the nationalist movement for independence, nationhood, and sovereignty.<sup>11</sup> Is this a case of overlooking or of misunderstanding? Perhaps neither. The first part of the text clearly followed John Stuart Mill’s use of the liberal theory of human rights to justify women’s rights.<sup>12</sup> In the second part, however, and especially in the conclusion, the proportion of nationalist ideas increased, gradually leading to the conclusion that, on the basis of liberty and equality, upholding the rights of women was a goal of a nationalist revolutionary government: “Creating new citizens by loving freedom, respecting equal rights, and uniting men and women is the starting

9. Translator’s Note: Held in Buffalo, New York, in 1901.

10. As is pointed out by many scholars, late Qing feminists didn’t understand the male subjectivity of Rousseau’s theory of human rights. Rousseau’s disgust towards women was left unexamined by late Qing feminists.

11. This can be seen in the response of readers to *Women’s Bell*. Chen Dongyuan said that *Women’s Bell* was a manifesto which incited women to further the cause of revolution (328).

12. *Women’s Bell* mentioned John Stuart Mill and Spencer several times. *Women’s Bell* was influenced by both, borrowing narrative approaches from Mill’s *The Subjection of Women*, which analyzed the problem of inequality between men and women by detecting its root in the social system of a male-dominated society.

point, and the formation of a new government will be the outcome" (Jin 82). This effectively replaced the theory of free and equal rights for all human beings with the theory and rhetoric of nationalism. Although Liang Qichao and Jin Songcen differed from each other in terms of political opinions (constitutionalism versus republicanism, respectively) and modes of expression (Liang depended more on Confucian discourses while Jin applied Western human rights theory), they were completely consistent in their understanding of women's influence upon the prosperity of the country's people. The role of women as "female citizens" came to replace their role as "mothers of citizens," elevating the position of women in the late Qing.

Incendiary remarks in Jin Songcen's *Women's Bell* included, "Men and women comprise equal halves of the number of national citizens," "women are as responsible as men for saving the country," and "the rise and fall of China falls on the shoulders not only of men, but women as well" (4, 5, 37). It seemed that once one talked about shared responsibility, then shared rights would naturally follow. Chinese women could obtain equal rights by acknowledging equal responsibility. However, equality did not affect substantial changes in gender relationships in China, remaining confined to the political right to improve oneself, then one's family, then one's country, and at last, the world. Women were able, however, to move out of a space of nameless anonymity to gain name and awareness for women, who could now share in the profits of a newly developed nation-state. The meta-narrative of nationalism was the only legal and acceptable path allowed for women's advancement in a patriarchal society. While serving as head instructor of the Beiyang Women's Public School (*Beiyang nüzi gongxue* 北洋女子公學), Lü Bicheng (呂碧城, 1883-1943), inadvertently exposed tensions at the heart of the women's education debate in a piece advocating women's education and refuting mistaken points of view:

These days, we see the news that women's schools and rights are being advocated for, along with the news that women are breaking away from the rules of their husbands. There are those who are stupid, absurd, and shallow, who frown and say that women are growing dissolute, casting off their husband's control, even competing for the same rights as their husbands (135).

Indeed, the women's movement challenged traditional Chinese culture. However, once people understood the movement as a nationalist one, then women's advocacy grew by leaps and bounds throughout the twentieth-century. Thus, seemingly errant behaviors—such as women violating etiquette, ethics, and social norms by pursuing education and revolution or escaping marriage and running away—were granted clemency, tolerance, and the understanding of family and society, as in such cases as Qiu Jin (秋瑾, 1875-1907) and Xie Bingying (謝冰瑩, 1906-2000). It was in this manner that the nationalist movement stewarded the women's movement.

The value of Chinese women lay in the sincerity of their ideals. On the one hand, late Qing women urged one another to “seriously study the method of being a citizen.” On the other hand, they saw the totality of the nation and country as what was important, strenuously fulfilling their role as “female citizens.”<sup>13</sup> In this period, there arose a group of model female citizens including Chen Xiefen (陳擷芬, 1883-1923), Kang Tongwei (康同薇, 1878-1974), Qiu Meilü (裘梅侶, 1871-1904)—who ran newspapers—Lü Bicheng—who ran both a newspaper and a school—and also Zhang Zhujun (張竹君, 1876-1964)—who returned from overseas and practiced medicine. However, men in possession of both political and discursive power at this time managed to dispose of this type of model female citizen, in favor of more politically focused and advantageous heroines, who were willing to sacrifice their life for political revolution.

### Heroines: Feminist and Nationalist Discourses Unite as One

Late Qing feminist discourse recognized Chinese and foreign talented women (*cainü* 才女) such as Ban Zhao (班昭, ca. 49-120), Chunyu Tiying (淳于堤萦, fl. Early 2<sup>nd</sup> c. BCE), Xie Daoyun (謝道韞, fl. 4<sup>th</sup> c.), Joan of Arc (ca. 1412-1431), and Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811-1896), as well as female martial heroes such as Hua Mulan 花木蘭, Liang Hongyu (梁紅玉 1102-1135), Qin Liangyu (秦良玉, 1574-1648), and Madame Roland (Marie Jeanne “Manon” Roland de la Platière, 1754-1793). The beautiful Xi Shi 西施 was occasionally also on this list. The morality, talent, courage, beauty, and virtue of these women won them honor as well as a place next to men in society, serving as models for a new femininity in the early twentieth-century. There was at that time a song of encouragement sung at women’s schools:

What beautiful new citizens we female students are in the twentieth-century (...)

(...) with the lofty purpose of loving our country and saving the world.

Tiying and Mulan are filial towards their fathers, and I learn from Ban Zhao as from a role model. I dream to be Madame Roland or Joan of Arc and yearn to meet Harriet Beecher Stowe. Foreign and domestic heroines are leading the way. We must fulfil our role as women and be equal with men (A Ying, 34).

When we look closely, however, at late Qing feminist discourse, we see that role models such as the filial Chunyu Tiying, talented Xie Daoyun, and

13. Specifically, “First, that which is not dependent, shall be known as independent. Second, social morality is defined as being willing to work for the public. Third, the behavior of never engaging in behaviors that corrupt public morals is called self-government. Fourth, one should be gregarious and work with people of like minds. Fifth, freedom is realized through neither invading others nor being invaded by others. Sixth, no matter what, one should never give up that which belongs to one or that which one is entitled to. Seventh, one should devote oneself to fulfilling important tasks, and this is called duty. Apart from the above seven items, there is one more urgent and indispensable item: participation in politics. As for the responsibilities of paying taxes and levies, as well as educating children, these are all responsibilities of being a citizen.” (Xia, *Late Qing* 97).



beautiful Xi Shi all made way in the end for the teleological culmination of women's development—the heroine. Xia Xioahong in *Late Qing Literati Views on Women* (*Wan Qing wenren funüguan* 晚晴文人婦女觀) quotes two poems by Lü Yunqing (呂筠青, dates unclear) a teacher at the Civilized Women's School (*Mingnü shu* 明女塾) in Shimen, Zhejiang:

Each day I embrace anxiety and worry without due cause.  
I fear I'll see the day on which the rivers and mountains are crushed.  
Oh, how hard it is for beauties to take up a soldier's arms!  
In vain, against the wind of fate, we read Mulan's Song.

Qin Liangyu and Liang Hongyu, heroines of whom history tells,  
believed that in the army, their spirits would prevail.  
How I resent in these dark times that I have no place to die;  
I'd rather be wrapped in a shroud, on the battlefield left to lie.

She points out that these reveal the changing form of the models of women's rights: "From vainly imitating Hua Mulan, she moves to following the example of Liang Hongyu and Qin Liangyu. This truly reveals the transformation of late Qing women from refined and delicate to staunch and strong" (104). Late Qing femininity's adulation of being "staunch and strong" was a product of a masculine Enlightenment with its will for revolution. With the turn of the twentieth-century, there was a mounting call for the downfall of autocratic rule and construction of democracy in the political field. Amidst this cry and revolutionary spirit, advocates unearthed various domestic and foreign heroines throughout history. For instance, female citizens in *Folk Songs from the Women's Country* (*Nüguo minge* 女國民歌) are heroines with warrior mettle:

Wind, wind, wind. Our great civilization blows throughout East Asia. The spirit of independence is like a red rising sun, and freedom swells like the tide. The world of women's rights treats all fairly and all heroes with equality. Old memories of women who were merely depraved decorations are too bitter to recall.

Light, light, light. The great strong China of twentieth-century women. We enthusiastically push forward with the soul of freedom in our chest. Our spirit is iron-willed, chivalrous, and full of love and affection. Generative and majestic, rising and swelling, we are full of inspiration (All-China Women's Union 209-210).

The women in this song model a femininity which shunned powders and blush, possessing masculine traits of being bold and generous. In *Women's Bell*, Jin Songcen directly advocated that women sacrifice themselves for building a new and democratic country.



Destroy the old and build the new democracy. This is the responsibility of both men and women in China. We are called upon to utilize the knowledge we have, to think and to write down our thoughts and words on paper. Once our brains are drained, our tongues exhausted, and our sense is as wasted as our tears, we shall rise again with our blood, and thus fight fiercely our foes (64).

At this time, the revolutionary faction was modeling itself after Russian anarchic populism (the Nihilists), who assassinated autocrats and traitors in a slew of violent actions. Thus, the story of Sophia Perovskaya's assassination of the Russian Czar provided an insightful example for men possessing discursive power of how a heroic woman should act.

In 1902, *New Fiction* (*Xin xiaoshuo* 新小說) commenced publication and began serializing the novel *Heroine of Eastern Europe* (*Dong'ou nü haojie* 東歐女豪傑), based on the story of Sophia Perovskaya's assassination of the Russian Czar Alexander II in 1881. *Heroine of Eastern Europe* recounted the story of the Russian heroine Perovskaya from the vantage point of a Chinese young woman named Ming Qing 明卿. Ming Qing had been adopted by a Western missionary and received her education in the West. At the onset of this novel, a women's voice begins the narration:

Look at the history of our world, both ancient and modern, East and West, and see how all the heroes have been men. You may count some ten to twenty heroines in total. People talk of the virtues of husbands and men. Is there no place left over for anyone else? This is most unfair to women (Lady 33).

The author, who used the pseudonym "Lingnan Lady of the Feathered Robe (*Lingnan yuyi nüshi* 嶺南羽衣女士)," was actually a man.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, the narrative voice of Ming Qing and all the other characters in *Heroine of Eastern Europe* are best viewed through the lens of male Enlightenment revolutionary thinking. This male subjectivity highly praises the girl who overthrew the most powerful and influential figure in the world (the Russian czar), while the heroine in this novel constantly writes poetry questioning who the rightful ruler of her country is, seeking the company of other passionate revolutionaries. The construction of such a figure and image helped shape the ideal for Chinese women. In the same year, Liang Qichao published his famous *Biography of Madame Roland* (*Luolan furen zhuan* 羅蘭夫人傳) in the serial *Renewing the People* (*Xinmin congbao* 新民叢報). In this text, Liang praises the famous French female revolutionary, Madame Roland, admired by men for her extraordinary beauty and talent. Madame Roland became known as a thought leader for the radical revolutionary faction and moderate Girondins due to her intelligence and courage. Liang's poetic bent saw him writing about this woman as the "mother of all people" in nineteenth-century Europe, jokingly suggesting that Napoleon and Bismarck were born of the same

14. The author, Luo Pu (羅普 1876-1949), was a member of the reformist faction of the Hundred Days' Reform movement and student of Kang Youwei.

mother. Liang advocated for a warrior spirit in women but stopped short of advocating revolution. His pacifist views can be seen in the *Biography of Madame Roland* in, “Oh, freedom, freedom! Here under heaven, how many crimes have borrowed your name to gain currency!”<sup>15</sup> In spite of this, his use of European female revolutionaries to inspire Chinese women was, nevertheless, in accord with the methods of the early twentieth century revolutionary faction.

Upon the publication of *Heroine of Eastern Europe*, many poems responding to the Lady of the Feathered Robe appeared in revolutionary periodicals such as *Awakening the People* (*Jue min* 覺民), *Jiangsu* 江蘇, *Citizens Newspaper* (*Guomin bao* 國民報) and *Citizens Daily* (*Guomin riri bao* 國民日日報). Male Enlightenment thinkers went so far as to oppose the attitude of male dominance, using terms like “great men (*da zhangfu* 大丈夫)” and “heroes (*yingxiong* 英雄)” to criticize the tradition of patriarchy in the world.

For generations, the world honored historical figures who were great men rather than great women (*danüzi* 大女子). There were heroes rather than heroines (*yingci* 英雌), and this was a short-sighted and judgmental blemish on our history (Hero 135-136).

In a country with a long history of patriarchal domination, only men with the power of discourse could make these challenges. It was men who constructed these heroines as role models, urging women to mold their own feminine subjectivity accordingly. Men declared they wanted to marry women like the revolutionary Sophia, and women shaped and molded themselves according to the representations of Sophia put forward by men (Xia, *Late Qing* 112). Men adored Madame Roland’s spirit of sacrifice, and women sought opportunities to sacrifice themselves. Hence, we have Qiu Jin facing death without a flinch (Xia, *Late Qing* 108). I am not suggesting that Qiu Jin did what she did just to satisfy men, but it’s worth arguing whether Qiu Jin would exist in an era that didn’t valorize women’s sacrifice to violent revolution.

### The Problem of Female Subjectivity, Construction, and Narrative

Late Qing Reform texts on women’s rights were imbued with intense nationalism. The *Song of Female Citizens* (*Nü guomin ge* 女國民歌) is a good example of this trend, where we see women’s rights conflated with nationalist and Party rhetoric.

Hatred, hatred, hatred! The Chinese nation is forever fallen in disgrace. The whole world over we see nothing worse than hypocritical men serving the court whilst calling for reform. Only women are sincere and righteous, able to act without relying upon others.

Strength, strength, strength! Siblings and sisters, together we are full of

15. In *Interpreting of Revolution* (*Shige* 釋革), Liang Qichao advocates for revolution in China; however he translated revolution as *biange* 變革 (transformative change) and reform as *gaige* 改革 (reform).

high spirits, recovering the traditions of old as easily as rolling a log. Don't think we are boasting. Enemies will be driven out of China. While we hear songs of men's surrender, women never will never surrender. The beauty of the Yangzi River and Kunlun Mountains will increase in splendor.

Lofty, lofty, lofty! The work of great twentieth-century scholars is like a light breeze and a clear moon. The officials Qu Yuan (屈原, 340-278 BCE) and Song Yu (宋玉, 298-263 BCE) can be looked at relative to Wang and Tao, their spirit and verse are left at Hangao Mountain. Look at the Northern tribal chieftains, let alone new American and European thinking. Burn incense, and sweep the floor, use the Classics as your pillow, keep your house in order, and brandish the sword in military strategies (All-China 209-210).

We see in this song not so much a feminist message as a nationalist one. The "hypocritical men serving the court" were meant to signify Han officials who served the Manchurian Qing government while "calling for reform." Rhetoric suggesting that while men surrender, women never will seems to be far-fetched, as does the consideration of new American and European intellectual trends as a guarantor for China's recovery of the new Han nation-state.

The novel *Marriage of Freedom* (*Ziyou jiehun* 自由結婚) was published in 1903 under the penname "Jewish Immigrant Wan Guhen 萬古恨, translated by the Chinese lady, Freedom Flower 自由花." This text resonates ideologically with the *Song of Female Citizens*. Huang Huo 黃禍 and Guan Guan 關關 are a pair of lovers living in a nation called "Patriotism," governed by a group of foreign pirates. All the citizens are enslaved by the foreigners. Huang Huo and Guan Guan set out to avenge their nation against three enemies: foreign government, foreigners, and Han slaves who serve foreigners. The novel's title includes the word "marriage," but it emphasizes heroes and says little about romance between young men and women. Even in regard to gender differences and marriage, it preaches abstract principles that resemble contemporary lectures on women's rights and marriage. The main female character takes widows preserving their chastity as a principle guiding her behavior. The details of her call for women to "preserve their chastity" for their nation are worth examining:

I used to think it was meaningless for a woman to preserve her chastity after her husband's death. Now I see how well this custom reflects strong love and aspiration, unlike the changeability and shamelessness of men. If we can love our country in this way, driving foreign suitors away and restoring our nation, then there is nothing we can't do. Every sister is pure and chaste. If one can be this faithful to a single man, then one can do the same for our country. ...

What a pity that we women possess such a pure and chaste nature, that we

can only devote ourselves to one person! Being penny-wise and pound-foolish, persisting in ignorance, this is regrettable (Wan Li ch. 14).

Preservation of chastity for one's nation and linking the nation's reputation with that of its women failed to consider the experience of women upon which these expectations were placed. This is a similar logic to that which demanded women bind their feet to demonstrate subservience to their husbands. The metaphor of preserving chastity inadvertently exposed the fact that nationalist discourse as a patriarchal one, representing women as secondary in a patriarchal nation-state. Women's liberation amounted to abandonment of one's family for another patriarchal order. Nationalism was a male-centered discourse constructed by men. Integration of feminism into revolution and formation of a new nation-state reflected Enlightenment discourse while at the same time foregrounding discourse developing amongst independent women who advocated for and even took part in nationalist revolution.

Qiu Jin serves as a perfect example. In 1903, she left her family for Japan, never to return. Qiu Jin's identity was based in what amounts to a relinquishing of her female subjectivity, which she exchanged for a male subjectivity. She did this in order to accomplish her life's mission. Qiu Jin's straightforward nature, open mind, and strong ambition met with social realities which she sought to overcome in a way seldom seen in women. In her complaints about marriage in early works, expressions such as, "no one understands me in my home" and "pitifully few people share my tastes and aspirations" (104), as well as "take pity on Xie Daoyun and never marry Bao Canjun (鮑參軍, given name 鮑照, ca. 416-466)" (98), we sense a need to participate in social change in extraordinary ways. Patriarchal societies see few women of this kind. In *Qiu Jin and Xie Daoyun* (*Qiu Jin yu Xie Daoyun* 秋瑾與謝道韞), Xia Xiaohong states that if "Qiu Jin had never left Xiangtan, she would have been known forever as a talented beauty by future generations" (Xia, "Qiu Jin" 91). Here, I must add another dimension to our discussion of Qiu Jin—that of gender anxiety. In those unsettled times of agitating for revolution, she was doomed to live as no other talented and beautiful woman had lived before.

We see constant anguish and regret as regards her sexual identity in Qiu Jin's poetry. In these early stages of feminism in China, women such as Xie Daoyun and Hua Mulan from throughout Chinese history represented the cause. Qiu Jin was unsatisfied, pitying even these figures in saying that no matter how delicate and fragrant Daoyun had been, she was always only a woman, and no matter how courageous and heroic Mulan had been, she was never a man (Qiu 113). It has been suggested that Qiu Jin's loneliness while living in Hunan (c.1896-1902) was caused by a lack of spiritual resonance in her new marriage. What we see in her literary works, however, is a sadness and lack of companionship even outside of her marriage. There are lines like, "If

there had been no Ziqi, who would have understood Boya?” (113),<sup>16</sup> “There is no one at home to understand me, the more people there are around me, the lonelier I feel” (103), and “What a pity no one has the same inclinations as I do; this is sad to think of” (104). Even after moving to Beijing in 1903, where she came to know Wu Zhiying (吴芝瑛, 1867-1933) and made friends with other famous reformists, her loneliness did not fade. We see, rather, that it intensified, as in, “Who will continue my singing of ‘White Snow?’ I am ashamed to imitate ‘Warm Spring,’” and “What use is it to lament my lack of understanding companionship? If only I encountered one bosom friend, I could die happy (103).” If one looks closely, one notices that Qiu Jin’s desire for a bosom friend is not a desire for female, but for male companionship. Indeed, Qiu Jin had a number of women friends, such as Wu Zhiying, Xu Zihua (徐自华, 1873-1935), Lü Bicheng, and her student Xu Xiaoshu (徐小淑, 1875-1907). Qiu had much in common with these women, with whom she shared close sympathy. Although she shared close relationships with outstanding women whose intelligence and education were on a par with their male contemporaries, each and all were prevented from any power of social discourse. Despite active participation in the sphere of women, Qiu Jin felt constantly deprived of that which she really sought for in life. What she wanted was to exchange her gender for that of a man, and to enter society with no constraints, as men do. She encouraged her female friends to stop wearing women’s dress and to enter the world of men, even dressing as men do, “I would that you traded your dresses for swords.”<sup>17</sup>

“Physically, I cannot be a man; Spiritually, I am stronger than a man” (Qiu 279). We see gender anxiety throughout Qiu Jin’s work. She would complain, “Do not say there have been no heroines, the sword hanging on the wall voices its discontent nightly” (333). At times, she would express outrage at inequality between the sexes, “In this dusty and chaotic world, how many outstanding men are there? You will find excellence only among women” (324). In order for women to shine in this patriarchal milieu, they had to emerge from the sphere of women. Qiu Jin authored a poem responding to her protégé Xu Xiaoshu, praising her by comparing her to talented women like Xie Daoyun and Ban Zhao. She criticized Xu, however, for conforming to expectations that women be devoted to family and love (212). Qiu Jin wished that Xu and her sisters would abandon their way of life as talented beauties, adopting instead the masculine way and becoming heroines who were the match of any man:

I receive an austere letter out of the blue,  
every word as handsome as a flower.  
Fresh and beautiful like the poems of Xie Daoyun,  
simple and concise as Ban Zhao.

16. Translator’s Note: Zhong Ziqi 鍾子期 and Yu Boya 俞伯牙 are legendary figures from the Spring and Autumn period (770-476) who are regarded as paragons of friendship. In the quoted text, Boya’s name is written 伯亞.

17. “To My Friend,” a letter written by Qiu Jin to her good friend Xu Qichen in the autumn of 1906.

What a pity I do not possess the courage of Qin and Nie,  
 shadowed by the beauty of your magnificent lines in “Warm Spring.”  
 I would that you become a mighty heroine,  
 do not waste your life and energy reciting poems (192).<sup>18</sup>

In the extraordinarily strict Confucian family ethics of early twentieth-century China, if women wanted to abandon their responsibilities as mothers and wives, their only choice was to devote themselves to the revolution. Thus, Qiu Jin chose the life of a revolutionary for lack of other choices. As an individual, Qiu Jin’s gender anxiety can be seen as a kind of Freudian castration complex. On a social level, however, this anxiety can be attributed to a clear lack of options available to women in a patriarchal society.

We see Qiu Jin hunger for a role in society to gain some affirmation from her male contemporaries. We see in such patriarchal structures that in order to gain approval women are forced into the public sphere, where they are doomed to fail, as the public sphere is an exclusively male sphere. Qiu Jin’s sense of loneliness would most likely have been resolved if she could have gained the affirmation she sought. This is the deepest psychological reason for Qiu Jin’s choice to study abroad in Japan, whereupon she set upon the road of revolution. Her deliberate imitation of men in both dress and behavior saw her wearing men’s clothes, practicing martial arts, and drinking, all of which reveal her sense of emancipation from a lifetime of oppression. However, her anti-gender behaviors were well received by men, and her authority amongst male revolutionaries came to be established in just this way—and it was this that Lu Xun (魯迅, 1881-1936) took exception to. He always had reservations about sacrificing one’s life for the revolution and was even less content with the idea of encouraging others to sacrifice themselves—particularly in the case of women. He sarcastically observed that Qiu Jin had been applauded to death by her (male) comrades.<sup>19</sup> Lu Xun’s sharp critique reflected his reservations about violent revolution, as well as his dissatisfaction with the male desires and power within that had shaped the “heroine.” There was an interesting contrast between Lu Xun’s way of referring to Qiu Jin as, “Qiu Jin, the girl from my hometown (*bi tongxiang Qiu Jin guniang* 敝同鄉秋瑾姑娘),” and late Qing revolutionary discourse’s references to her by de-feminizing tropes, such as “Heroine of Jianhu Lake (*Jianhu nüxia* 鑒湖女俠).”

Of course, Qiu Jin was, in the end, a woman. Although she developed a masculine persona to take part in the revolution, she engaged with women of

18. Guo Changhai notes “‘Warm Spring (*Yangchun* 陽春)’ is ‘Warm Spring, White Snow (*Yangchun baixue* 陽春白雪),’ a poem by Xu Xiaoshu, who compared Qiu Jin to ancient women warriors like Qin Liangyu and Nie Yinniang 聂隱娘. Thus, Qiu Jin modestly said, ‘What a pity I do not possess the heroic manner of Qin and Nie’” (Qiu 192).

19. In a 1927 letter from Lu Xun to Li Xiaofeng (李小峰, 1897-1971), editor of the *Tattler* (*Yusi*, 語絲) Lu Xun expresses his sense of helplessness and self-mockery at being promoted as a revolutionary in Guangdong, “After the clapping throughout the great hall, it was settled that I was now a warrior. After the applause, the audience left, so from whom should I resign? I had to pull myself together to walk into rooms in the name of a warrior. Then, I thought of Qiu Jin, the girl from my hometown. She was murdered by just such clapping. Would I die on the battlefield, too?” (3: 446).



the feminist Enlightenment in ways that restored her original femininity. She started the *Women's Times of China* (*Zhongguo nübao* 中國女報) in Shanghai in 1906. It reached print by early 1907, and in volumes one and two, she wrote an article for each, one in classical Chinese and the other in vernacular, each of which presented unique gender characteristics. Her editor's forward to volume one was written in classical style, while "To My Sisters (*Jinggao zimeimen* 警告姊妹們)" of volume two was in vernacular. In the editorial forward we read:

In the sphere of women today we see a sliver of light for the first time in four thousand years' darkness. However, the journey is still long, what shall we do? I've heard that things start as tiny details and develop well into the future. If we do not set forth in the right direction, tiny differences in the beginning will lead to giant mistakes in the future. We have the lessons of our forefathers before us, and we witness the tough experiences of Chinese students during the last decade. When Western schools were still not popular and imperial exams occupied the mainstream, those who abandoned classical Confucianism and learned foreign languages were called new juvenile. Right principles were not taught, nor was truth clarified. There was no purpose or meaning in the pursuit of learning foreign languages, thus most clever students became translators or businessmen. What a pity! In the following ten years, this trend has subsided, and such thinking has faded. However, it is seen that many students are seeking a shortcut through learning in Japan and trying to reform the imperial examination system with Western education...

Such a mad tendency mustn't penetrate the world of women. What I dare to say is that the future of the world of Chinese women need not go through these two phases. It was disturbing for women to see the entire nation still unsober once morning had arrived, going back to sleep in the light of the rising sun, as the hearts of our people are so weak, that while one side was strong, the other side fell. If no encouragement or correction is provided, such aimless development will eventually lead the country into darkness and ruin. Thus, the power to guide public opinion, along with the responsibility of supervising national citizens should be shouldered by this newspaper (373).

The elegant authoritativeness of classical Chinese made it the ideal form of asexual discourse. The excerpt above displays rationality and concision, demonstrating an authoritative discourse. Potential readers were male intellectuals engaged in thinking about and discoursing on the state of the nation. Qiu Jin adopted a male voice to speak about limits of the late Qing Enlightenment movement, while at the same time raising concerns about the women's movement. Her narrative took on an asexual component adopted usually by men. Meanwhile, "To My Sisters" was written in vernacular for volume two.



The audiences of vernacular texts tended to be female. Qiu Jin commences her narrative with an intimate and amiable tone used among women, “My dearest sisters (...),” followed by other similar utterances:

Ah! Two hundred million men have entered a new and civilized world, while we two hundred million women are still surrounded by darkness and drowning in hell with no hope of escape. Our feet are so small and hair so smooth. We wear all kinds of ornaments and various textures of clothing. Our faces are powdered; our fingernails painted. Throughout our lives, all we have known is to depend on men for what we wear and eat. Our voices must flatter them as our hearts endure in silent anger. Tears stream down our faces constantly, as our lives are spent pleasing men. We have been prisoners and slaves throughout our lives. Sisters, have any of you enjoyed freedom or happiness in your life? Noble and wealthy women are splendid, surrounded and served by many servants while outside of the home, but who knows the sufferings they endure within households dominated by their husbands? (377-378)

Qiu Jin addresses her fellow women in a language of understanding and sympathy. She does not hide her female identity, which is so apparent as to imbue the entire text with strong emotions. Qiu Jin’s strummed lyrical text,<sup>20</sup> *Jingwei’s Stone* (*Jingwei shi* 精卫石) is also narrated in this manner. Strummed lyrical texts constituted a subgenre of folk literature, using popular and easy to understand language, with women as intended audience. In this unfinished text, the gently sincere language used by Qiu Jin presents the image of a female narrator who deeply sympathizes with the lives and predicaments of women. The aim of the text was to arouse women to the cause of revolution, an essentially male movement. Thus, the femininity of the narrative voice fails to ring true, appearing rhetorical. As Liu Na has commented, Qiu Jin’s life and words “are an echo of the spirit of her era.”

Qiu Jin was persecuted for her part in the revolution but after her death was honored by the public for her role in promoting women’s rights.<sup>21</sup> We see how other outstanding feminists of her time, such as Chen Xiefen (陳撝芬, 1883-1923), Lü Bicheng, He Zhen (何震, 1884-1920), and Tang Qunying (唐群英, 1871-1937) were relatively marginalized in comparison with Qiu Jin, who has maintained a much stronger reputation through today.

Chen Xiefen and these others were firm in their refusal to conform to male expectations and remained on guard against patriarchal ideology within the discourse on women’s rights. While approving of democracy, they resolutely maintained the need for women’s independence. Chen once wrote that if

20. Translator’s Note: “Strummed lyrical texts (*tanci* 彈詞)” were a form of musical storytelling originating in Suzhou.

21. After Qiu Jin’s execution, newspapers and journals were in an uproar. The public view emphasized that she was a feminist, wrongly accused for her promotion of women’s rights. People called for the government to punish the killers. Because of the predominance of such views, two officials who dealt with this case were dismissed or demoted (Xia, *Late Qing*).

women did not have independent hearts and minds, then education for the uplifting of women “will, I fear, become nothing more than women’s education for the benefit of men,” and women’s rights “will remain nothing more than women’s rights for the benefit of men. It is not certain that they will set women free.” The essentials of women’s rights were “Nothing less than independence!” and “What is independence? Casting off oppression and fighting against that which thwarts us is not enough. What is critical is that we accept neither the support nor the interference of men” (All-China 245). This was an extraordinary conception of women’s rights, and to this day, it has not yet come to fruition. He Zhen was directly opposed to the thought of using women as tools to liberate the nation, arguing that the goal of the women’s rights movement was equality of the sexes (He 959-968). These women opposed not only the mutual enemies of the male and female citizens of China—a culture of despotism and foreign imperialism—but also opposed their own comrades vis-à-vis the need for equal rights.<sup>22</sup> The conflict of the sexes could not be avoided any longer.

From the beginning of the Republican Period (1911-1949), Tang Qunying and other feminists insisted on the right of women to vote, but after the marginalization of the movement for women’s suffrage,<sup>23</sup> we can see that, in the context of the overwhelming strength of modern Chinese nationalism, the space for the independent development of feminism was correspondingly limited. What was called “harmony” was, in fact, often a form of one-sided compromise.

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22. As in the women’s suffrage movement.

23. The Communist Party, which most actively developed women’s liberation, rejected the women’s suffrage movement from its inception. Within the Communist camp, the consensus became that women’s suffrage was just a struggle for government power between women and feudal, male government officials.

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# REVIEWS



REVIEW

**Book Review of Yi Li's *Republican China as Method***

Ruirui Zhang

Chengdu University

**ABSTRACT:**

Li Yi's book *The Republic of China as Method* (*Zuowei fangfa de minguo*) serves as an innovative research method to deeply understand modern Chinese literature. It emphasizes the interaction between the materialistic social and cultural mechanism and the spiritual and personal creativity of literary creation. Although it only provides a start for this new theoretical paradigm, it presents a brave attempt by Mainland Chinese scholars to pursue subjective research.

**KEYWORDS:** *Republic of China as Method*, mechanism, Yi Li, research paradigm, interaction

Few people outside China know or understand the tremendous efforts Mainland intellectuals such as Li Yi have made to jump out of the Western discursive paradigm to gradually establish a self-hewn subjectivity of research. What Li tries to do in this book is to provide a new research paradigm for modern Chinese literary history. His subversive brilliance shines in debate regarding "localization" and "nationalization" of modern Chinese literature, taking the "mechanism of the Republic of China" as research methodology.

What Li calls the "Republic of China as method" is actually a paradigm through which to rediscover the occurrence and development of modern Chinese literature, from the last years of the Qing dynasty, through the years of the Republic founded by Sun Yat-sen 孫中山 in 1911, and up through the 1950s. The early twentieth century in China was a significant period for the production and the study of modern Chinese literature. Intellectuals produced works from both the ancient Chinese tradition and Western cultures and tried to uncover the uniqueness of "Chinese modernity." It is difficult to break away from dominant modes of thought trapped in colonial structures of academic institutions. Thus, Li Yi has written an important and timely book that does just this.

Li Yi is an outstanding thinker and critic of modern Chinese literature in China. He has long studied the 100-year development of modern Chinese literature. His reflection and exploration of academic traditions of modern Chinese literature focus mainly on the following three aspects: studies on modern Chinese poetry and literary trends; studies on the methodology of comparative literature research in modern Chinese literature; and reflections on "modernity" and other terminology used in study of modern Chinese literature. Based on all these studies, he proposes a novel methodology with



which to explain the occurrence and development of modern Chinese literature throughout historical vicissitudes defined by specific national and social conditions of the Republic of China.

He first raised the concept of the “mechanism (*jizhi* 機制)” of Republican China in the West Sichuan Forum (*Xichuan luntan* 西川論壇) in 2012 and further developed this paradigm in *Republican China as Method*.

### Subjective Research

Li's concept of subjective research is his most important contribution to solving the problem of how Chinese Studies define the Chinese voice. Takeuchi Yoshimi 竹内好 and Yuzo Mizoguchi 溝口雄三, two leading thinkers in postwar Japan, proposed the method of “returning to China” and “taking China as method and the world as goal” to emphasize a cultural consciousness equal to European and American civilizations in their books *Overcoming Modernity* and *Asia as Method*.<sup>1</sup> While the Chinese voice is still silenced, Sinology and Chinese Studies remain confined to a marginal status in Western civilization.

As the development of Chinese modern literature is so different from Western modern literature, Li calls for attention to the specific socio-historical forces which produce uniquely subjective research. Take, for instance, the concepts of “anti-feudalism (*fan fengjian* 反封建)” and “modernism (*xiandai guaannian* 現代觀念).” Unlike medieval European feudalism, Chinese feudalism formed 2000 years ago in the Qin Dynasty, continuing through the late Qing Dynasty. In the Republican Period, feudalism still made a profound impact on autocratic, centralized rule and thinking in modern China. Li argues that if we talk about “anti-feudalism” in China, we should definitely take Sun Yat-sen's Three Principles and Constitutional Ideals into account, as well as struggles against dictatorship and oppression of the Kuomintang. The content of “anti-feudalism” does not map accurately to the same word in English.

“Modernism” is another example of the importance of Li's pursuit of subjectivity. The abstract concept of modernity, used by Western critics, might conceal information regarding the social situation in China's Republican Period. One element of modernism which had a great impact on the spirit of modern China is Yu Dafu's (郁達夫, 1896-1945) discovery of individuals. While modern Western writers base their spiritual identity on transcendence of secular culture, modern Chinese writers reconstruct their secular culture through individual experience in an attempt to reflect spiritual identity. Thus, using China's own modern experience and ideas to show changes within the Chinese national spirit serves as a powerful way to uncover unique feelings within the history of modern Chinese literature. Since value, cultural ideas, and resources cannot be provided by Western concepts and theories, it is

1. Yuasa, Yasuo, Shigenori Nagatomo, and John W. M. Krummel. *Overcoming modernity: Synchronicity and Image-Thinking*. State University of New York Press, Albany, 2008. Mizoguchi, Yuzo. “China as Method.” *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, vol. 17, no. 4, 2016, pp. 513-518.

necessary for Chinese scholars to develop a cultural subjectivity-based research methodology. How is it possible to jump out of traditional discourses of literary criticism and cultural colonization of Western discourse? This cannot be done through classical percepts of literary reading, mainstream ideological criticism of Westernization, Western postmodernism, or even Western Marxism. Li sets out to build a rational framework for studies in modern Chinese literature. That is to say, scholars should follow and refine their research findings according to the social history of Republican China. Their ideas and methods must be tested by historical facts. Only theories and methods corresponding to historical facts of Republican China serve to authentically inform research paths for Chinese scholars.

### Integrated Platform

Li intends that by using his method, historical details and human experience described in literature can be integrated into a rational platform. While a great many concepts are too narrow to summarize and integrate the characteristics of the development of modern Chinese literature over the past 100 years, *Republican China as Method* might provide a more effective comprehensive historical platform.

Chinese literature in the 20th Century (二十世紀中國文學) is a natural outcome of Chinese scholars' efforts to get rid of Soviet revolutionary influence in views of history, seeking to find their own pattern of literary development. The new style of writing in late-Qing has already been questioned by American scholars, such as David Der-wei Wang, who tries to explore other literary sources suppressed by the May Fourth Movement.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, New Literature (*Xin wenxue* 新文學), a conventional term for vernacular literature in the past century, is unable to convey rich literary patterns, such as popular literature and traditional rhyme poetry. Hence, the advantage of Li's paradigm is its broad inclusiveness.

*Republican China as a Method* points not only to a time period, but also to literary patterns that appear within this time frame. Within this paradigm, May Fourth New Literature can exist in context with the literature of Japanese-occupied areas such as we see in the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School (*Yuanyang hudie pai* 鴛鴦蝴蝶派). *Republican China as Method* aims at not only constructing a complete and systematic literary history of Republican China, but also carries out cross-strait dialogue between Mainland China and Taiwan on modern Chinese literature research. At present, the depth and breadth of discourse and exchange between scholars on both sides are inadequate. If we use this new paradigm, it can help us avoid nonacademic, ideological biases, establishing effective modes of communication. Scholars will be able to carry out research on contemporary memories of literature in

2. David Der-wei Wang, *Fin-de-Siècle Splendor: Repressed Modernities of Late Qing Fiction, 1849-1911*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997.

Republican China, providing insights to analyze and explain the survival of contemporary Chinese cultural circles.

In addition, this paradigm includes a variety of cultural and political perspectives. It opens the possibility of observing literature from different disciplines. Firstly, it requires the understanding of national political structures in Republican China. Political structures affect living environments, providing important context for works of literature. Secondly, we can explore various forms of social and historical development, re-constituting sites of literary activity as basis and driving force of literary creation. In short, *Republican China as Method* asks Chinese scholars to use a multidisciplinary approach to form a Chinese discourse system, gradually implementing it as a way of self-expression in writing and study.

### The Interaction Mechanism

In Li's view, this paradigm contains two parts, namely the external sociocultural system; as well as internal, individual, and spiritual pursuit. These two parts interact with each other. This novel perspective looks at the interaction between structuring forces of society and culture. It helps carry out investigations of spiritual interaction between modern writers and different social patterns within the period of the Republic of China. If we treat Republican China as a static historical time and space, the paradigm then focuses more on the order formed by the interaction between cultural participants and historical time and space. As a system, we might call it a "literary production mechanism." This mechanism is a flexible one, reducing the barrier between literature and literary interpretation.

From the perspective discussed above, we observe how an intricate system in intellectual development continues to exert strong and positive effects on the history of modern Chinese culture and literature. This discursive system divulges internal tensions manifesting in interesting social phenomena. For example, even though material conditions for survival in Republican China were at times extremely harsh, literature maintained a fairly stable creativity. This mechanism is composed of various factors such as modern laws and decrees that guaranteed some civil rights, as well as market demand leading to a private publishing sector. As well, three educational institutions of state, private, and religious schools constituted an effective restriction on the autocratic dictatorship of the KMT. After the KMT's terrorist-cleansing campaign, left-wing culture remained on the rise through the late 1920s. It developed in unprecedented ways and struggled to expand to the majority of society, showing tenacious vitality and resisting the rule of autocratic dictatorship. Additionally, during World War II, different literary ideological divisions appeared between KMT-controlled areas and areas controlled by the Communists. These cases give us examples of a positive mechanism of interaction.

It helps to broaden social and cultural tolerance, allowing opposing literary thoughts to survive and develop in continual communication and dialogue. The ideal of cultural enlightenment (*qimeng* 啟蒙) shared by Chinese intellectuals from the Late Qing Dynasty to the May Fourth Movement was very important. Within this mechanism, although communist writers had their own political pursuit and beliefs, they shared with other writers the same ideal of cultural enlightenment. During World War II, even in Communist-controlled areas, enlightenment was a driving engine for national salvation, thriving as the “New Enlightenment Movement (*Xin qimeng yundong* 新啟動運動)” in the latter part of the war.

There are, however, potential drawbacks. This mechanism had a negative impact on the development of literature. Specific social structures allowed rule-by-people to remain at the center of society, sacrificing rule-by-law. The ruling ideology of the KMT distorted and suppressed the natural development of literature. Rights and interests of writers were not guaranteed. Therefore, there arose phenomena such as “twisted writing (*qubi* 曲筆)” in modern Chinese literature. As well, the continuous confrontation between revolution and counter-revolution has strengthened dualistic thinking in literature, hindering the multi-dimensional development of modern Chinese thought.

## Conclusion

At a time when studies of modern Chinese literature are increasingly relevant worldwide, this book contributes to ongoing critical reflections on previous research, particularly in terms of methodology, and also to a renewed understanding of the productive interactions between objective conditions—such as political and economic situations—and a writer’s creativity. This serves to re-open dialogue and search for a new cross-strait understanding between the Mainland and Taiwan.

Li Yi’s paradigm of “taking Republican China as method” plans to create a foundation for future academic patterns of research on modern Chinese literature. It insists on the study of the socio-historical conditions of literature, the discovery of a large amount of original material, and the analysis of details of deep cultural history. Additionally, within this paradigm we must recognize that the significances of literature as national history and as individual creation are interrelated but different. The spiritual temperament of an individual writer can be explained by historical mechanisms, but an explanation based on historical mechanism cannot give complete insight into the mystery of individual creativity. Hence, the interpretation of literature serves to both transcend and return to the individual. That is to say, when using this paradigm to study literature, we must be wary of the limitations of this perspective.

On the whole, Li Yi’s attempt to establish a platform for future research still does not escape the anxiety of modern Chinese scholars and, as such,

appears to play with concepts. However, his attempt is full of humanistic feeling, emphasizing interactions between vivid individual experience and the socio-cultural mechanisms. This reflects the maturity of research into modern Chinese literature on the Mainland, scholars' sincere reflection, and the spirit of respecting history. In short, this book shows Mainland scholars' tremendous effort to develop an academic space for their own voice, and their ambition to build a community with a shared future for humanity across the Taiwan Strait. One must admire Li's courage and applaud his endeavor, which at present marks the initial phases of a new research paradigm. Scholars and students looking to undertake work on modern Chinese literature would do well to start with Li's book and to carefully explore the interaction between socio-historical mechanisms of literature and the human spirit.

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