

**MYTHIC, FOLK AND ETHNOLOGICAL ELEMENTS IN THE  
WORKS OF SIX MODERN CHINESE WRITERS**

**NINGYI LI**

**SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF PHD  
SCHOOL OF LITERATURES, LANGUAGES AND CULTURES  
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCE  
THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH**

2007



## Table of Contents

<i>Declaration</i>	<i>page</i> iv
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	v
<i>Abstract</i>	vi
<i>Abbreviations</i>	vii

### Chapters

1. Introduction	<i>page</i> 1
-Topic and Sources	2
-Terminology, Concepts and Methods	3
-Review of Previous Scholarship in Modern Chinese Literature	13
-Overview of the Main Contents	17
-Connections between the Study of Modern Chinese Literature and Cultural Anthropology	20
2. Adaptations of Chinese Myths	24
Section 1 Studies of Chinese Mythology	24
Section 2 Mythic Consciousness in Xu Dishan's Early Writings (1921-1930)	42
Section 3 Adaptation of Chinese Mythology in the Poetry of Mao Zedong	60
Section 4 Different Understandings of Myth; Different Attitudes toward Myth: Xu Dishan's Early Writings and Mao Zedong's Poetry	73
3. Fiction with Folk Elements	82
Section 1 Review of the May Fourth Folklore Movement	82
Section 2 Fei Ming's Short Stories: A Poetry of Folk Elements	97
Section 3 The Grey Countryside: Eastern Zhejiang in Lu Yan's Short Stories	115
Section 4 Portrayals of Rural Life Compared: Fei Ming vs Lu Yan	131

4. Pastoral Fiction with Local Colour	<i>page</i> 138
Section 1 Developments in Cultural Ethnology	138
Section 2 West Hunan in the Regional Fiction of Shen Congwen	152
Section 3 Memories of the Homeland: Short Stories by Wang Zengqi	167
Section 4 Descriptions of the “Homeland” Concept	185
5. Conclusion	194
-Achievements and Functional Considerations	194
-Literary History and Genres	199
-Influences and Future Trends	201
<b>Glossary</b>	207
<b>Bibliography</b>	213

## Declaration

All works, unless otherwise acknowledged, is my own. No part of this thesis has been submitted for any other degree or professional qualifications.

**Signature:**

**Date:**

12 July 2007

## **Acknowledgements**

In the course of doing this research and writing up the thesis, I have received help from a great number of people. Above all, I am very grateful to my two principal supervisors Professor Bonnie S. McDougall and Dr. Tommy McClellan. I am greatly indebted to Professor McDougall for her pertinent comments on the fundamental parts of my thesis and for her generous encouragement. I am also deeply indebted to Dr. McClellan for his invaluable expert guidance throughout this project. I am very thankful to my second supervisor Professor Natascha Gentz for her perceptive comments on my thesis. I owe special thanks to my parents for their unfailing faith in me.

I would like to express my gratitude to Miss Lisa Ballantyne for her help with some editorial amendments. My gratitude also goes to my fellow PGs and colleagues at the Scottish Centre for Chinese Studies, Shim Tae-Shik, Meng Pei, Dr. Julian Ward and Mrs Margaret Gall, for their encouragement and help. I also wish to thank the participants of The 2005 Association of Chinese and Comparative Literature Biennial Conference at Nanjing University for their criticism and suggestions on the Xu Dishan section, and Professor Linda Cooke Johnson, the editor of *Studies on Asia*, and the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on the Fei Ming section.

My PhD study at the University of Edinburgh was made possible by a three-year bursarship from the Universities' China Committee in London. I am also thankful to Professor McDougall for her help with the application. I am greatly grateful to the Great Britain-China Educational Trust and the Sino-British Fellowship Trust for supporting me with the fourth year of study.

Finally, I would like to express my thankfulness to Dr. Margaret A. Mackay and Dr. John Shaw at the department of Celtic and Scottish Studies for their guidance through the basic knowledge of studies on mythology and folklore and for their generosity of allowing me to use the Scottish Studies Library. My thankfulness also goes to the University of Edinburgh's Main Library at George Square.

## **Abstract**

I aim to define the functions of mythology, folklore and cultural ethnology in the literary works of six modern Chinese writers and to summarize their influences on contemporary Chinese literature. In addition, their writings exhibit three new literary trends besides varieties of realism and romanticism.

The materials for this research project are fiction, prose, poetry and biography by the six writers: Xu Dishan, Fei Ming, Wang Luyan, Shen Congwen, Mao Zedong and Wang Zengqi. My research scope goes beyond the many studies which have focussed on works characterised by one or other of the many variations of realism in the twentieth century, taking into account Western theories of mythological, folkloristic and ethnological studies and their influences on modern Chinese literature.

I have analysed three tendencies during and after the May Fourth era: modern interpretations of mythological events and traditions, the May Fourth folklore movement; and the use of ethnology to explain the regional or local colour in modern writers' works. The ideological investment of the three tendencies carries within itself the seeds of new writing directions. In the case of mythology, Xu Dishan's early writings and Mao Zedong's poetry are examples. In the case of folklore, short stories by Fei Ming and Wang Luyan are examples. In the case of ethnology, Shen Congwen's fiction and Wang Zengqi's short stories are examples. Each case launches new writing styles and reveals political and social orientations in different times. The most important discovery of this research may be that different varieties of realism or romanticism do not dominate literary writing in modern China. Studies and attention in the anthropological field, such as mythology, folklore and ethnology, have been connected to literary creation as early as the first two decades of the twentieth century. The definition of the mainstream and assumptions of iconoclasm in modern Chinese literature are not beyond doubt.

## Abbreviations

- CCP The Chinese Communist Party [Zhongguo Gongchandang 中国共产党]
- FWXJ *Feng Wenbing xuanji* 冯文炳选集 [Selected Works of Feng Wenbing] – quote bibliography entry
- JZQ *Jiangnan zuojia qun* 江南作家群 [a group of writers from the Jiangnan region which included Zhejiang]
- KMT *Kuomintang* [Zhongguo Guomindang 中国国民党 The Chinese Nationalist Party]
- LYXJ *Lu Yan xuanji* 鲁彦选集 [Selected Works of Lu Yan] (1936 and 1937 versions) – quote bibliography entry
- PMT *Poems of Mao Tse-tung* – quote bibliography entry
- PRC People's Republic of China [Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo 中华人民共和国]
- KSLY *Kong shan ling yu* 空山灵雨 [The Rain of the Soul in the Empty Mountain] – quote bibliography entry
- Reverberations *Reverberations: A New Translation of Complete Poems of Mao Tse-tung with Notes by Nancy T. Lin* – quote bibliography entry
- SCWWJ *Shen Congwen wenji xiaoshuo juan* 沈从文文集·小说卷 [Literary Works of Shen Congwen: Fiction] – quote bibliography entry
- WZQJ *Wang Zengqi quanji* 汪曾祺全集 [The Complete Works of Wang Zengqi] – quote bibliography entry
- XDWJ *Xu Dishan wenji* 许地山文集 [Literary Works of Xu Dishan] – quote bibliography entry
- XDXX *Xu Dishan xuanji* 许地山选集 [Selected Works of Xu Dishan] – quote bibliography entry

# Mythic, Folk and Ethnological Elements in the Works of Six Modern Chinese Writers

## Chapter 1: Introduction

The fact that the modern canon of May Fourth New Literature is the most studied body of literature in twentieth-century China is now widely acknowledged; in Bonnie S. McDougall and Kam Louie's book *The Literature of China in the Twentieth Century* (1997), the authors provided a broad discussion of different literary genres, including fiction, poetry and drama, in three chronological periods. When exploring different literary trends during the first half of the twentieth century, Leo Ou-fan Lee pointed out three hallmarks of modern Chinese literature: a revolt against tradition and an intellectual quest for modernity, the loose connection between the anti-traditional attitude and artistic considerations and a subjective critical vision.<sup>1</sup> Modern Chinese writers have hoped to create a new Chinese literature, but the questions about how to define the concept of a new literature; what is the relationship between tradition and modernity in literary works; and what kind of stance modern Chinese writers hold toward Chinese tradition remain unresolved. The basis of my investigation will be some literary trends from the New Culture Movement to the late 1980s and the early 1990s, which have not been well studied or have even been neglected. These trends go beyond the many variations of realism, various branches of romanticism and other literary revolutions in language, style, structure and subject. This thesis is in debate with the extant literary history of twentieth-century China written by Chinese and Western scholars.

In this introduction, I start by proceeding to treat in some detail the theories and methods I have borrowed from cultural anthropology as my approach to study the six writers' literary works. I then present an overview of earlier academic achievements in the study of modern Chinese literature and outline the main contents and organisation of this

---

<sup>1</sup> Leo Ou-fan Lee, "Literary Trends: The Quest for Modernity, 1895-1927", in *An Intellectual History of Modern China*, ed. Merle Goldman and Leo Ou-fan Lee (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 142.



study, through which I hope to emphasise where my contribution will lie. Linked to these critical overviews are indications of the connections between the study of modern Chinese literature and cultural anthropology.

### **Topic and Sources**

My research scope surpasses studies which focussed on works characterised by the mainstream quest for modernity and revolution in the twentieth century, and takes into account Western anthropological theories and their influences on modern Chinese literature. For this reason, the three core chapters of this thesis are arranged according to three anthropological aspects: the development of studies in Chinese mythology, May Fourth folklorists' translation and introduction of the European and Japanese folklore movement to China and the development of studies on cultural ethnology. The crucial part lies in Chinese writers' adaptation of mythic, folk and ethnological elements into their literary works. In each chapter two writers form a group and their writings present one literary trend.

Through studying the six writers' works, I wish to emphasise that an attention to anthropological fields has been connected to modern Chinese literature as early as the first two decades of the twentieth century; meanwhile, readers of modern Chinese literature may find that there are actually many different genres and modes of writing and that New Literature contains many different branches without a mainstream. The connections between the development of studies in cultural anthropology in China and the growth of New Literature form the central theme of my survey of the six writers' works in the main body of this study.

The materials for this research project include fiction, prose, poetry and biography by six writers: Xu Dishan, Mao Zedong, Fei Ming, Wang Luyan, Shen Congwen and Wang Zengqi. They are put into three groups of two for individual analysis and comparative studies, reflecting three literary tendencies: modern interpretations of mythological events and traditions, reshaping folk elements in fiction and use of theories in cultural ethnology to

explain the regional or local colour of a “homeland”. The ideological investment of the three literary tendencies carries within itself the seeds of new writing directions. Xu Dishan’s early writings (fiction and prose) and Mao Zedong’s poetry are studied in the mythological field. In the folkloristic case short stories by Fei Ming and Wang Luyan are discussed. Shen Congwen’s fiction and Wang Zengqi’s short stories are analysed with ethnological emphasis. Each case launches new writing styles and reveals the social and cultural orientation of different periods. I will examine the six writers’ places in literary history and try to draw links from them toward contemporary Chinese literature.

In this study I choose these six writers as the representatives for successful writings of Chinese tradition in the modern canon, partly because they have not been fully studied and partly because their writings are good cases of accepting Western influence but keeping Chinese essence. To explain my views on this in more detail, below I provide a critical survey of previous scholarship, before presenting an outline of the contents and organisation of this thesis.

### **Terminology, Concepts and Methods**

The development of studies on cultural anthropology in China date from the beginning of the twentieth century, concurrent with modern Chinese literature. Those Chinese pioneers in the field of social science were also advocates of New Literature, for example Lu Xun, Zheng Zhenduo, Zhou Zuoren and Liu Bannong. Some scholars who did research in folklore and mythology also created literary writings, such as Shen Congwen and Xu Dishan. As the Chinese experience of anthropology is influenced by Western scholarship, I will first define some terms used in this thesis with reference to Western theories and then explain some concepts and methods that have inspired my approach to my subject.

Studying anthropological concerns in literature, we first identify the term “culture”, as anthropology is the scientific study of man and cultural development. “Culture” refers both to a group of people and to their way of life; it includes everything that a group of people

thinks, says, does and makes.<sup>2</sup> The way of life of a particular group of people is the keynote and this theme is especially noticeable in Shen Congwen and Wang Zengqi's evocation of their hometowns, discussed in Chapter Four. At present, there are different ways to define anthropological science, combining narrow anthropology itself with some other cultural and social fields like linguistics and minority studies. For the purpose of this thesis, three branches of anthropological studies: mythology, folklore and ethnology are particularly important.

K. K. Ruthven gave readers a broad and ambiguous description of mythology. He believed it lies within a variety of disciplines, such as classics, anthropology, folklore, history of religion, linguistics, psychology and art history.<sup>3</sup> We simply assume mythology as a collection of myths associated with a people and addressing their origin, history, deities, ancestors and heroes. In this case, Chinese myths and legends can be used in analysing Xu Dishan's essays and stories and Mao Zedong's poems.

Alan Dundes defined folklore as the cultural materials including the oral traditions of a society (the Anglo-American narrow definition of folklore) plus folk costumes, folk dance, folk art, folk belief (or superstitions), folk songs and folk speech, etc.<sup>4</sup> To identify and interpret different literary themes in Fei Ming's and Wang Luyan's short stories, I use the term "folk elements", since it is an open concept including other areas such as folk belief, folk songs and folk speech.

Ethnology is the comparative study of the different cultures of different local groups,<sup>5</sup> especially different racial groups within a culture. In this thesis, the culture of a region or a local area of China and the descriptions of local colour in Shen Congwen's fiction and Wang Zengqi's short stories are emphasised.

As for the scope of modern Chinese literature, I discuss three forms: fiction, poetry and prose; other forms like drama, diaries and letters are not included. Fiction, in the Chinese

---

<sup>2</sup> Keith F. Otterbein, *Comparative Cultural Analysis: An Introduction to Anthropology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1977), p. 243.

<sup>3</sup> K. K. Ruthven, *Myth* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1976), p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Alan Dundes, ed., *The Study of Folklore* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1965), p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Keith F. Otterbein, *Comparative Cultural Analysis: An Introduction to Anthropology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1977), p. 243.

form of *xiaoshuo* 小说 [small talk], did not receive much importance in traditional Chinese literature. However, it acquired legitimacy and prestige as a mode of expression from the beginning of the twentieth century. The advocates of the New Culture Movement regarded fiction as a good medium for experiments in language reform. They believed that the use of vernacular language and Western technique in fictional writings would reach wide audiences, allowing it to play a role in changing Chinese society. Fiction, especially in the form of short stories, is the main topic of this thesis. Poetry in China had enjoyed an illustrious reputation for over two millennia, which was hard to live up to during the New Culture Movement. Poets began to use the new vernacular to write in ways which were different from classical poetry in language, form, rhetoric and rhymes. I will not discuss the New Poetry below. My focus is on the special case of classical poetry, which continued to be written and read in modern China, enjoyed special recognition and acquired some new functions, as in the case of Mao Zedong's poetry. The essay is in a similar situation in modern China. It was an important form of literary expression in traditional times. It also became a medium for extending the use of vernacular in the twentieth century. However, there was considerable influence from modernist Western writing in stylistic innovations in Chinese essay writing.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, the six writers in this thesis straddle several generations in modern China from the 1910s to the 1980s. Some of them were members of the major literary organisation of the first half of the twentieth century: *Wenxue yanjiu hui* 文学研究会 [The Association for Literary Studies], such as Xu Dishan (1893-1941) and Wang Luyan (1902-1944). Regardless of his special status in China, Mao Zedong (1893-1976) in this thesis is more a poet than a political leader. Shen Congwen's (1902-1988) fiction has been well analysed by both Chinese and Western scholars; while short stories of Fei Ming (1901-1967) and Wang Zengqi (1920-1997) require further study. The questions of why modern Chinese writers used resources from their traditional heritage in their literary works and how they connected literary writings with anthropological concerns will be considered.

Three branches of anthropological studies, mythology, folklore and ethnology, and their

---

<sup>6</sup> Edward Gunn, *Rewriting Chinese: Style and Innovation in Twentieth-century Chinese Prose* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), p. 45.

individual relationships to literature are the main focus of the methods. I will discuss two points in the Introduction below from the point of view of narrative systems and archetypes. Firstly, I discuss the characteristics of narrative among myths, legends and folktales, all of which have close relations to modern literary creation. Then I will address some theories in mythological, folkloristic and ethnological studies which will appear in this thesis and examine how these theories can be adapted in the present study.

### ● Similarities among Myth, Folklore and Ethnology: Narrative Forms

The narrative or expressive form of heritage in mythology, folklore and ethnology accounts for important similarities among the three disciplines. Since there is always overlap in the use of the terms “myth”, “legend”, “folktale”, “fable” and even “story”, I will first examine the similarities in these narrative forms and their common cultural and social concerns.

There is no standard definition of “myth”.<sup>7</sup> Nowadays, scholars agree only that myth basically means “account”, “tale”, “story” or “narrative”,<sup>8</sup> but there is a general consensus that it includes other fantastical elements like imagination, symbol and primitive religion. Folklore includes myths, legends, folktales, jokes, proverbs, riddles, curses, greetings and other oral traditions. It also includes folk customs and other folk arts.<sup>9</sup> Many arguments about this discipline can be found, we simply list a few keywords that appear frequently in different definitions: oral, transmission, tradition, survival and communal. Ethnology is the study of a local culture. The local area can be defined as a nation, a race, a tribe or even a community. It is a broad field of study, which includes myths and other narratives about the history and the spiritual world of the region.<sup>10</sup> The emphasis lies in local and comparative studies. The common characteristic of narrative or expression of the three fields is applicable

---

<sup>7</sup> To explore the different definitions of “myth”, we can check the following books or articles: K. K. Ruthven, *Myth* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1976); William Righter, *Myth and Literature* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975); and John Holloway, “The Concept of Myth in Literature”, in *Metaphor and Symbol*, ed. L. C. Knights and Basil Cottle (London: Butterworths Scientific Publications, 1960).

<sup>8</sup> Anne Birrell, *Chinese Mythology: An Introduction* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> To see the different descriptions of the term “folklore”, we can refer to *The Study of Folklore* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1965), ed. by Alan Dundes, and Robert A. Georges and Michael Owen Jones’s jointly written book *Folkloristic: An Introduction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).

<sup>10</sup> Keith F. Otterbein, *Comparative Cultural Analysis: An Introduction to Anthropology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1977), p. 244.

to the present study of literary texts. I shall apply aspects of narratology methods and some social and literary functions of mythology, folklore and ethnology to the present literary study. Local and comparative studies are another important tool for my analysis of the writers.

Myths, legends and folktales are all narratives containing typical elements of entertainment, description or validation. For example, the pattern career for a hero in these stories is generally known for its exaggerated qualities. Perhaps arising from a genuine belief that the career of a hero must conform to type, mythical incidents are introduced into the story of genuinely historical heroes.<sup>11</sup> Prince Oedipus in Greek myth and Prince Chong'er 公子重耳<sup>12</sup> are two examples. Tales with the hero tradition bear a kind of wish-fulfilment fantasy. Furthermore, legends grow with the telling, and often a great heroic past evolves to gratify vanity and tribal pride. Through the above descriptions, we notice that the hero tradition and wish-fulfilment fantasy are two important themes in myth, legend and folktale narratives. These two themes are used frequently in modern Chinese literature; or in other words, modern writers bring out the romantic fantasy of heroism in their works by referring to the national tradition carried in myth, folktale, etc. My study of Mao Zedong's poetry in Chapter Two leads this part of the argument, i.e. his use of mythic images and stories as an aesthetic background to his poems, not to achieve a romantic flavour, but to promote individual ambition.

Northrop Frye believed that myth, legend and folktale are similar in their structure and have two common characteristics. The first is that it is impossible to trace their origins. The second is that they are not obviously credible.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, he argued that the three forms all belong to fiction, while "tale" is the lowest common denominator of narrative content and "myth" is a rather specialised extension. The characters, their words and deeds in these stories give a society an imaginative sense of man's relation with the gods, with the order of

---

<sup>11</sup> Lord Raglan, "The Hero of Tradition", in *The Study of Folklore*, ed. Alan Dundes (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1965), p. 157.

<sup>12</sup> Prince Chong'er, later known as the Duke Wen of Jin 晋文公 (697BC-628BC), led the state of Jin in the Spring and Autumn Period of Chinese history from 636 BC to 628 BC.

<sup>13</sup> Northrop Frye, "Literature and Myth", in *Relations of Literary Study: Essays on Interdisciplinary Contributions*, ed. James Thorpe (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1967), p. 30.

nature and within themselves.<sup>14</sup> Frye's belief also reveals a kind of social function of myth, legend and folktale: that they provide an explanation of the relationship between man and nature, man and religion, or human relationship itself. In Chapter Two, unlike Frye, I will not emphasise the social function of the mythic elements in Xu Dishan's works. I have assumed that Xu Dishan's literary creation was non-functional, but rather that his elaboration of imaginary plots and mythic characters was for his personal exploration of a philosophy of life.

Since narrative is such a distinguishing feature in myth, legend and folktale, modern writers may be inspired by "mythic" methods of narration, for instance, the feature of oral transmission in folk literature. Everyone participates in the tribe or nation's oral heritage, so that the meaning of each narrative is effectively and concisely conveyed to all members and the storytelling event maintains a link between authors and readers. This can be regarded as the literary function of the narrative feature shared by myth, legend and folktale. I will use this assumption to analyse the legendary or storytelling style in Fei Ming and Lu Yan's fiction in Chapter Three. Their legendary style, on the one hand, lies in their depiction of some popular religious beliefs in the local community with reference to local folktales. On the other hand, they imitate the method of narration in legend and folktale: the older generation orally passing down stories to the younger.

To assess the local colour in Shen Congwen and Wang Zengqi's stories in Chapter Four, I conduct a further survey of narrative in oral tradition. Sometimes a piece of oral tradition introduced by a modern writer into a work can participate in the plot and allow the importance of allusions included in the narrative to be assessed. A good case is Shen Congwen's use of Miao mountain songs in his stories. The aim is to use the traditional heritage to create a whole new mythology. Therefore, the traditional heritage offers writers a

---

<sup>14</sup> Northrop Frye, "Literature and Myth", in *Relations of Literary Study: Essays on Interdisciplinary Contributions*, ed. James Thorpe (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1967), p. 87.

system of reference for comments on modern events.<sup>15</sup> Modern writers tend not to use a myth, a folktale or a legend straightforwardly in its traditional settings nor as norms against which people in the contemporary world may measure themselves. On the contrary, writers may wish to impart verisimilitude to their depiction of a regional setting. A traditional narrative is absorbed and recomposed in writing for a modern audience. Therefore, the retelling process has a literary function: a message from authors to readers.<sup>16</sup> Mythologists and folklorists may find that the more a traditional narrative is told and rewritten, the more fictionalised it becomes. Literary critics and writers may find in mythology, folklore and ethnology what they hope to find, and are able to use mythological, folkloristic and ethnological illustrations to demonstrate whatever they wish. To some extent, that is why Shen's depiction of the non-Han life in West Hunan sounds idealised and imaginary.

### ● Theories and Functions

My choice of subject was inspired by Myron L. Cohen's suggestions for studying traditionalism in literature. He remarked that:

Traditionalism in [the] literature is more than nostalgia for the past, but rather an appeal to traditional verities in the context of modern projects of cultural construction, such as projects being responses to and engagements with contemporary political, economic and other forces.<sup>17</sup>

To assess the traditional elements in the following six writers' literary works, "an appeal to traditional verities" is an interesting starting point for analysis. Writers used Chinese traditional heritage (here indicating mythic, folk and ethnological tradition, in other words

---

<sup>15</sup> John J. White described the relationship between oral tradition and modern literature as "prefiguration", since it suggests "coming before", hence providing a comparison with a whole configuration of actions and figures. The main criticism includes the view that some alternative forms of a myth or a folktale as a prefiguration discourage the necessary further examination of aesthetic function, since "prefigurations are a kind of message". See John J. White, *Mythology in the Modern Novel: A Study of Prefigurative Techniques* (New Jersey: Princeton University, 1971), pp. 12, 21. I agree that the narrative in oral tradition does not simply serve as a kind of message, so I will not use the ideas of symbols or metaphors to study the folk and local elements in Shen and Wang's works.

<sup>16</sup> Bruce A. Rosenberg, *Folklore and Literature: Rival Siblings* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1991), pp. 56-57, 184.

<sup>17</sup> A short comment delivered by Prof. Cohen in Xin Liu's edited book *New Reflections on Anthropological Studies of (Greater) China* (Berkeley, CA: Institute of East Asian Studies, 2004), pp. 3-6.



cultural anthropology) either as an isolated cultural setting for their protagonists in their stories (Xu Dishan, Lu Yan and Shen Congwen) or as a psychological comfort to explain their outlook on life (Mao Zedong, Fei Ming and Wang Zengqi). Both groups had an inclination toward using traditional elements as a proof in their writings to explore contemporary problems. Since anthropology in China has only been received as a discipline in the last twenty years, I did some basic research in relevant Western theory where I found that the link between anthropology and literary criticism has been studied fruitfully.

William Righter summarised four main theories of myth: functionalist, psychoanalytic, religious, and theories of symbolic form.<sup>18</sup> When explaining the psychological approach, he tried to link it with literary studies. Psychological theories of mythology are based on the supposition of some universal characteristics of the human psyche which may be revealed through myth, as expressed in the Jungian theory of archetypes. The term “archetypes”, which originally means the patterns or models from which all things of the same kind are copied or on which they are based, will be used in my Chapter Two to study the mythic images in Mao Zedong’s poetry and in Chapter Four to reveal the primitive psychology and folk archetype in Shen Congwen’s fiction. Righter further proposed that for Jung the archetypes are transcendental symbolic forms found universally in the psychic life of man, embodied in a collective unconsciousness in which the individual psyche unknowingly participates.<sup>19</sup> An archetype is a collectively inherited unconscious idea, a pattern of thought, images, etc., and it is universally present in individual psyches. The bulk of narratives in myth, legend and folktale encourage people to join in collective work for the common good. They dictate people’s beliefs and define their acting as the chart of their social order and the pattern of their moral behaviour.<sup>20</sup> Myths and folk stories also convince the audience of their relevance and lead him/her to participate in them. They contain some political or moral values and embody the hope that people may be influenced by the models in the stories to solve personal or social dilemmas. This functional consideration of mythic archetypes appeared in Mao Zedong’s poems as a tool to expound his political and social views. The

---

<sup>18</sup> William Righter, *Myth and Literature* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), p. 15.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>20</sup> Bronislaw Malinowski, *Sex, Culture and Myth* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1963), p. 249.

collectively unconscious ideas of a group of people were elaborated by Shen Congwen in his fiction to display the minorities' way of living and their understandings of life.

As myth, folklore and ethnic characteristics may set up behavioural responses in given situations, hence connecting the past with the present, they are important materials for analysing a nation's culture. According to Keith F. Otterbein's suggestions, although we should distinguish between ideal and real behaviour, since much of the data collected in mythological, folk or ethnological studies comes from the verbal accounts of individuals,<sup>21</sup> myths and other forms of folk literature are the major expressive medium for studying the connection between belief in superstition and its persistence in daily life. Every isolated ethnic pattern may have its own mythic or folk tradition, but similar beliefs may be found: setting people on the right way to reach personal salvation and the good of the community.<sup>22</sup> Cultural aspects of myth, folklore and ethnology are used to injure people, and also are employed to protect the tradition. This function of anthropological theories is useful not only for analysing a nation's culture but also the culture of a local area. The psychological need to respect life and protecting local tradition were ultimately what led Shen Congwen to describe West Hunan as an ideal independent realm.

To interpret the hidden meaning behind the psychological approach, Righter created a new term in mythology: the effectiveness of myth itself.

The effectiveness of myth itself is largely a desire to create out of an unknown body of folklore a coherent myth and indirectly a national continuity of feeling and a sense of national identity in depth.

The very unfamiliarity of a body of myth or legend may of course be exploited precisely because its distance seems imaginatively useful, when the claim of the exotic may be part of the shock tactics of a writer who consciously uses his mythical material for the effect of contrast.<sup>23</sup>

To seek a sense of national identity or local identity is one of the most important themes in

---

<sup>21</sup> Keith F. Otterbein, *Comparative Cultural Analysis: An Introduction to Anthropology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1977), p. 75.

<sup>22</sup> Bronislaw Malinowski, *Sex, Culture and Myth* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1963), p. 190.

<sup>23</sup> William Righter, *Myth and Literature* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), p. 30.

my six chosen writers' works. Mythical and folk materials were used consciously by Mao Zedong and Shen Congwen in their literary creation for the effect of contrast. As I will discuss traditionalism in modern Chinese literature to debate that Chinese tradition did not lose popularity in New Literature, Righter's explanation of psychological theories offers support for my analysis of the six writers' attitudes and understandings of the traditional heritage and their reasons for using mythic, folk and ethnological elements in their works. By reading the descriptions of a nation or a region's past in a contemporary setting, readers may find that its customs and habitual practices can help them get a sense of identification. By writing the culture of a local area or rewriting a mythical story, these writers may also build up a sense of identification in society.

Two points about the creation or maintenance of identity and the validation of experience should be highlighted here, for in modern Chinese literature the two functions have a close relationship with writers' expression of nostalgia for the past. First, these mythic, folk and ethnological elements can function as a paradigm for understanding the community and for determining and developing individual behaviour and personality in that community. This was a hot topic in May Fourth fictional writing at a time when national, social and political concerns were central. Secondly, mythology, folklore and ethnology determine the place of art forms in the consciousness of marginal or emergent groups; therefore, sometimes they may relieve social tensions within the group and alleviate writers' restlessness and overwhelming sorrow.<sup>24</sup> Writers may use their imagination to overcome not only their surroundings in the present, but also those of the past in their memories.<sup>25</sup> This may be why some writers have preferred to adapt some mythic, folk or local elements in their fiction to back up their descriptions.

Going deeper to discuss the psychological function of anthropological theories, first is the impulse to escape in fantasy from repressions imposed upon them by society. Secondly, psychology plays a role in validating culture, in justifying its rituals and institutions to those who perform and observe them. Thirdly, it can serve as a means of education. Finally, it

---

<sup>24</sup> William Righter, *Myth and Literature* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), p. 128.

<sup>25</sup> G. R. Manton, "The Making of Myth", in *Myth and the Modern Imagination*, ed. Margaret Dalziel (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 1967), p. 13.

fulfils the important but often overlooked function of maintaining conformity to the accepted patterns of behaviour.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, the nature of humour and other psychological implications in myths and folktales may be shocking in daily life and thus amuse their readers.<sup>27</sup> I will address details of this psychological function in the study of Xu Dishan's writings in Chapter Two and Lu Yan's short stories in Chapter Three.

Because of ethnological studies, the culture of some remote districts and minority areas of China has become a popular topic in academic circles and subsequently in literary creation. For instance, Maurice Freedman's study of relations among lineages between the 1950s and the 1970s inspired his students' interest in exploring local customs and religions in rural China. Concepts of ethnicity delineate cultural and linguistic differences among ethnic groups. This also elucidates the processes whereby ethnic difference is construed in dialogue with the state. Governments may use ethnological studies as a reference to strengthen the unity of a nation, as with Mao Zedong's advocacy of visiting the nation's minority areas in the 1950s. They may also hope to help people in those remote areas develop their economic and social structures, although the feasibility and desirability of this aim remain arguable. Through ethnological studies, especially those of ethnologists who belong to minorities themselves, minority peoples can find their identities in society and introduce their cultural heritage to the world outside their own areas. This function can also be traced in Shen Congwen's adaptation of his native Miao/Tujia culture in his fiction. In Chapter Four I will use Wang Zengqi's writings evoking small-town Han culture to display the process of seeking identity without reference to minority culture.

### **Review of Previous Scholarship in Modern Chinese Literature**

The study of Chinese literature of the first half of the twentieth century has gone through great changes since the end of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). Tang Tao's systematic work *Zhongguo xiandai wenxue shi* 中国现代文学史 [A History of Modern Chinese Literature] (three vols., 1979-85) provided a chronological overview of literary history,

---

<sup>26</sup> Alan Dundes, *The Study of Folklore* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1965), pp. 284-94.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 295.

literary societies, writers and their important works of the whole century.<sup>28</sup> Because of its prominent influence, “May Fourth” or “New” Literature, being the vernacular writing introduced during the New Culture Movement, has been considered as the mainstream. The idea of New Literature as a mainstream has been radically questioned recently. Some scholars have brought popular fiction, which had been marginalised, into the scope of academic discussion, for example, several studies on the so-called “Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies School” following E. Perry Link.<sup>29</sup> Others have discovered those writers who, often for political reasons, had been neglected for a long time in mainland, for example, C. T. Hsia’s pioneering study on Zhang Ailing (Eileen Chang) (1961) and Leo Ou-fan Lee’s study of the “romantic generation” (1973). Meanwhile, the study of the literature of the late Qing period and its achievements in both fictional writing and literary theory is also emerging.<sup>30</sup> New approaches for the study of modern Chinese literature are developing at the same time inside China. A new version of *A History of Modern Chinese Literature* (2 vols.) has been completed by Zhu Donglin, Ding Fan and Zhu Xiaojin (2002) which includes some writers neglected in Tang Tao’s work and draws a clearer picture of literary developments from 1917 to 1997. Chinese scholars have also paid attention to previously “marginalised” areas, for example Wei Shaochang and Fan Boqun’s works on popular literature (1980; 2000). The work of Yang Yi on fiction (1986-98) and the work of Wen Rumin on different branches of realism (1988) have made contributions in opening up new angles.

The inclusion of alternative literary modes and traditions, formerly excluded from the canon, into the study of modern Chinese literature and the reassessment of the relationship between tradition and modernity have made scholars rethink the “iconoclastic” and “Westernising” spirit of the May Fourth era. In recent years, scholars have moved into a pattern of connecting literary studies with other disciplines, such as cultural theories of colonial power as well as postcolonialism and globalisation, media studies, cosmopolitan

---

<sup>28</sup> In the PRC this work has long been regarded as the authoritative history of modern Chinese literature. Many universities in China still use it as the textbook for courses in Modern and Contemporary Chinese Literature.

<sup>29</sup> See E. Perry Link’s book (1981) about the popular Chinese literature. The most recently published study is T. M. McClellan’s book *Zhang Henshui and Popular Chinese Fiction, 1919-1949* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 2005).

<sup>30</sup> See a systematic study of the Late Qing fiction by David Der-wei Wang, *Fin-de-siècle Splendor: Repressed Modernities of Late Qing Fiction, 1848-1911* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

culture and marketing and censorship in publication. Lydia H. Liu's work on "translingual practice" (1995), for instance, has joined translation theory with the analysis of literary discourses. Leo Ou-fan Lee's *Shanghai Modern* (1999) has focused on the urban literary circle of the 1930s in a cosmopolitan city, highlighting the popular elements and a modern lifestyle in literature. Michel Hockx's *Questions of Style* (2003) has provided a comprehensive survey of literary organisations and their journals of the Republican period, and shows that the modern features of New Literature of the Republican era involved not only language, but also lifestyle, style of organisation of literary activity and production, and style of publication.

What all these studies have in common is that they try to describe literary creation and analyse literary discourses from either a historical perspective or in a social comparative mode. They do not take any kind of mainstream or dominant sphere for granted. However, the questions of in what kind of mode could traditional elements and modern techniques and thinking be connected in modern Chinese literature; and how modern Chinese writers adapted traditional elements in their works have not been thoroughly solved. As we can see in the above mentioned studies, although scholars have re-evaluated different branches of New Literature, applying theories in sociology, cultural and historical studies into their methodology, to broaden the vision of literary developments and activities and to debate the concept of New Literature itself, their works are mostly Western orientated. In their research they have used Western literary theories, such as realism, romanticism, translation studies and modernity, and general cultural theories about the nature of global power settings in urban market economics and the mechanics of literary organisation and publishing. I view these methods as significant contributions to knowledge, but I try to study the relation of tradition and modernity in relative academic isolation, which means connecting earlier scholarship with later literary creation within the continuum of Chinese tradition, rather than trying to place China's modern writing within the organic growth of cultural globalisation.

I have in fact used Western theories from the cultural anthropological field, but my own emphasis is the interaction between the contemporaneous development of studies on Chinese

mythology, folklore and ethnology and of literary creation. I will consider the development of academic studies on Chinese traditional heritage during the Republican period as background for analysis of the traditional elements in New Literature. That is why I first conduct a critical review of studies in the three fields of anthropology in China as the opening section of each main chapter. Going back to my main argument of the relationship between tradition and modernity in modern Chinese literature, I do not hold any preference for either of the two notions, nor do I intend to separate them when assessing their expression in literary discourse. What I would like to display is their harmonious or simultaneous existence. Many modern Chinese writers have tried to maintain “national essence” when accepting Western influence in their experimental creation of New Literature. The six writers in this thesis are among the pioneers of this approach. In this thesis, Chinese tradition or national essence refers to Chinese mythology, folklore and ethnology. How these six writers adapted traditional elements in their literary works is my focus in studying the relationship between tradition and modernity in New Literature.

Some recent achievements in author studies of Xu Dishan, Fei Ming, Lu Yan and Shen Congwen have been made; meanwhile, a gap still needs to be filled in studies on Mao Zedong’s poetry and Wang Zengqi’s fiction. Up until now, there is no monograph on Xu Dishan’s literary creation, let alone specialist research on his expression of mythic and folk elements. He is mentioned briefly as one of the writers in the Association for Literary Studies in Zhu Donglin, Ding Fan and Zhu Xiaojin’s history of modern Chinese literature (2002). Bonnie S. McDougall and Kam Louie (1997) provide an introductory description of his career, and also Lu Yan’s. Yang Yi devotes a section to Lu Yan’s short stories in his *History of Modern Chinese Fiction* (Vol. 1, 1986) but gives his writings the label: *xiangtu xieshi* 乡土写实 [native soil realism]. I will use my study on the folk elements in Lu Yan’s stories to debate the label “realism”. Mao Zedong’s poetry has been generally introduced and examined for insights on his philosophical views and political career, as in Frederic Wakeman’s *History and Will: Philosophical Perspectives of Mao Tse-tung’s Thought* (1973) and the official Chinese journal *Mao Zedong sixiang yanjiu* 毛泽东思想研究 [Studies of

Mao Zedong Thought] (1983-). Wang Zengqi has been regarded as a disciple of Shen Congwen, expounding the theme of native soil.<sup>31</sup>

Shen Congwen and Fei Ming have become known to the West and their writings have finally found a status of significance in modern Chinese literature, thanks to David Der-wei Wang, Jeffrey Kinkley and Shu-mei Shih's contributions. To display a new branch of realism in modern Chinese literature, Wang studied three writers: Mao Dun, Lao She and Shen Congwen in his *Fictional Realism* (1992) with Shen Congwen as the native soil representative. He first used the term *xiangtu* 乡土 in its English equivalence, native soil, to analyse Shen's fiction and adapted Western literary theories to discuss the boundaries of a "realist mode" in Shen's fiction. He regarded Shen's writings as "fictional realism" or "critical lyricism".<sup>32</sup> Kinkley conducted a survey of Shen Congwen's literary career and his native place West Hunan in his *The Odyssey of Shen Congwen* (1987), but the inspiration I got from him was his 1985 article "Shen Congwen and the Use of Regionalism in Modern Chinese Literature". I will discuss regional characteristics in Shen's fiction and use the term "regional fiction" to analyse its mixture of folk elements and "local colour" in Chapter Four. Shih also used Western literary theories to study modernist features of Fei Ming's stories.<sup>33</sup> As I mentioned above, I wish to return to the Chinese heritage itself. I will focus more on Shen and Fei Ming's adaptation of local essence and folk elements under the influence of the folklore movement in the 1920s' China and use some literary and aesthetic theories in traditional Chinese culture as the main methods.

## Overview of the Main Contents

Raymond Williams first coined three meanings of the word "culture": culture as history, culture as aesthetic or intellectual culture and culture as ordinary or everyday culture.<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> See Jeffrey C. Kinkley, "Shen Congwen's Legacy in Literature of the 1980s", in *From May Fourth to June Fourth: Fiction and Film in Twentieth-century China*, ed. Ellen Widmer and David Der-wei Wang (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993).

<sup>32</sup> Wang delivered a further discussion of Shen's "critical lyricism" in *Politics, Ideology, and Literary Discourse in Modern China: Theoretical Interventions and Cultural Critique* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993).

<sup>33</sup> See Shu-mei Shih's "Writing English with a Chinese Brush: The Work of Fei Ming", in *The Lure of the Modern: Writing Modernism in Semicolonial China, 1917-1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

<sup>34</sup> Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 80.



When Keith Otterbein defined what it is that is studied by anthropology, he further highlighted the notion of a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period, or a group.<sup>35</sup> For this study which mainly discusses the anthropological elements in modern Chinese literature, I will focus on one of Williams' dimensions of culture: the way of life of a particular group of people. I consider this dimension of culture as one aspect of Chinese traditional heritage. It appears as mythic, folk and ethnological elements in the six writers' literary works. Mythic elements in this study either ascribe to the images or the figures and events in Chinese myths and legends or to a kind of mythic thought or mythic consciousness expressed by writers in their works. Folk elements include both oral tradition, such as folksongs, and the arts of people's daily life and pleasure, such as music, dance, participation in communal ceremonies and popular religious beliefs. Ethnological elements refer to subsets of the above areas which display particular prominence of folk features, i.e. the culture of a racial group, of a region or even of a local town is the main analysis. Although most of the ideas in the anthropological field mentioned above come from Western scholarship, Western theories or themes are not the key point. The six writers have found an alternative to simply imitating Western culture in their literary creation: returning to China's traditional heritage. Contemporaneous studies and developments in cultural anthropology in China offered these writers a theoretical foundation to establish a literature of national identity or of local identity.

In Chapter Two, I describe how the discipline of mythological studies was formed in China during the first half of the twentieth century, focusing on contributions made by both Chinese and Western scholars. An early link between mythological studies and literary creation is also demonstrated through discussion of Lu Xun, Zheng Zhenduo and Wen Yiduo's experimental writings. The rest of Chapter Two consists of two detailed case studies of Xu Dishan's stories and essays and Mao Zedong's poems. A comparative analysis of the two writers' adaptation of mythic elements in their works follows as the fourth section, with Xu Dishan's work seen as employing an unconscious and positive mode and Mao Zedong's

---

<sup>35</sup> Keith F. Otterbein, *Comparative Cultural Analysis: An Introduction to Anthropology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1977), p. 3.

poetry representing a conscious and ambiguous mode. In Chapter Three, I conduct a critical review of the folklore movement in Republican China, pointing out the shortcomings in the Chinese development of folklore with reference to two previous studies: Hung Chang-tai's *Going to the People* (1985) and Laurence A. Schneider's *Ku Chieh-kang and China's New History* (1971). Since the main weakness of the Chinese folklore movement is related to the lack of professional folklorists (many scholars were mainly literary reformers and none saw themselves as social scientists) and the obscure boundary between academic research and literature, I also discuss the debate on various meanings of "folk literature" among Zhou Zuoren, Tan Zhengbi and Hu Shi. The debate in literary circles aroused two types of writing with folk elements: Fei Ming's positive type and Lu Yan's negative and critical type. Chapter Four addresses an overview of the development of ethnological studies in China with Fei Xiaotong and Lin Yaohua as two pioneers. The first section of Chapter Four ends with the observation that a new direction of studying literature emerged in the 1990s under the influence of ethnological studies, which was known as *wenxue renleixue* 文学人类学 [literary anthropology] based on Ye Shuxian's early contribution.<sup>36</sup> Following in Ye's footsteps, I study two local cultures displayed in literature: the Miao/Tujia culture in Shen Congwen's fiction and the Han culture of a small town in Jiangsu in Wang Zengqi's short stories.

In the Conclusion, I sum up the main achievements of this thesis and some functional implications in the six writers' works, casting a short glance at three literary trends: adaptation or reuse of Chinese myths, allusion to folkloric materials and building up the "homeland" concept. I also suggest links with some recent writers whose works contain similar themes. Chinese writers since the Cultural Revolution (i.e. since 1976) have not created or developed as many new themes as most people have believed, because we can find identical models in the New Literature of the Republican era. Some research on "Roots-seeking" literature, for example, needs to be reassessed in this light.

---

<sup>36</sup> See Ye's book *Wenxue renleixue tansuo* 文学人类学探索 [Explorations in Literary Anthropology] (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 1998). I will discuss this book in more detail in Chapter Four Section One.

## **Connections between the Study of Modern Chinese Literature and Cultural Anthropology**

The use of mythic, folk and ethnological elements in twentieth century Chinese literature has certain characteristics: their traditional meanings are often ignored and they are used because they are believed to embody deep insights into man's nature; they are no longer thought to convey insight into the supernatural. Since the main methods of this study come from William Righter's explanation of traditional sources of archetypal patterns and the effectiveness of myth, I will make some further discussion of this new way for analysing literary works, trying to explain the suitability of my application of the methods. I will clarify the development from psychological archetypes to literary archetypes and connect "the effectiveness of myth" with some functional implications in mythology, folklore and ethnology.

### **● Myth Criticism**

The meaning of "myth" in the term "myth criticism" contains two aspects. One refers to some primitive or typical patterns of human behaviours which can be found both in literature and life. The other indicates a more specific form, linked with a particular culture and dealing with named characters and locations, and transmitted to us nowadays primarily through the medium of literature.<sup>37</sup> I borrow the latter meaning of myth and expand it as "mythic, folk and ethnological elements in literature" to form the central theme of this study. My corpus for investigation of anthropological elements from traditional sources is the New Literary texts by the six writers. Myth criticism, according to John J. White's interpretation, has two modes: archetype and illustration.<sup>38</sup> The archetypal mode will be used in this thesis. For the purpose of literary studies, Jung's psychological theory of archetype was later developed into literary archetypes, thanks to Northrop Frye's annotation of myth and archetype. Frye gave a useful distinction between myth and archetype in the glossary to his

---

<sup>37</sup> John J. White, *Mythology in the Modern Novel: A Study of Prefigurative Techniques* (New Jersey: Princeton University, 1971), p. 38.

<sup>38</sup> In his 1971 book, White provided a complete study of the connections between literary criticism and mythology and explained Northrop Frye's theories in detail. Later William Righter developed the theories of myth and literature in his 1975 book *Myth and Literature* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul).

*Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (1957).<sup>39</sup> In his eyes, an archetype is a symbol, usually an image, which recurs often enough in literature to be recognisable as an element of one's literary experience as a whole; a myth is a narrative in which some characters are superhuman beings who do things that "happen only in stories".<sup>40</sup> He first identified myth as the source of all literary genres. His ideas form an important tool for my study of Xu Dishan's mythic consciousness in Chapter Two. Archetypal theories are also applicable to my studies of the folkloristic writers in Chapter Three and Chapter Four, especially the study of Shen Congwen.

John J. White divided those literary works with mythic and folk elements into four categories. The first type is the complete re-narration of a classical myth. A prominent example in China's New Literature is Lu Xun's *Gushi xinbian* 故事新编 [Old Tales Retold] (1936). I will introduce this type in the first section of Chapter Two to observe the link between mythological studies and New Literature. The second type is a juxtaposition of sections narrating a myth and others concerned with the contemporary world. Shen Congwen was fond of beginning a story with a legend and then narrating a present event in contemporary life, as in many of his stories about Miao/Tujia heroes. But my focus is on the third and the fourth types. The former is usually formed by works set in the modern world, which contain a pattern of references to mythology running through them. The latter type is composed of works in which a mythological motif, such as a single event, a character or a limited group of people, prefigures a part of the narrative but does not run through the whole narrative.<sup>41</sup> White further stated that many of the prefigurations chosen by modern writers in the twentieth century appear as loose parallels or contrasts, rather than as ennobling analogies.<sup>42</sup> If a writer chooses a given subject or a group of motifs from the traditional heritage, there will be an inevitable result in the content of his or her work. Therefore,

---

<sup>39</sup> Ye Shuxian's theories of literary anthropology mentioned above were influenced greatly by Northrop Frye's myth criticism. He carried an explanatory note of Frye's archetypes in his introduction to *Wenxue renleixue tansuo* [Explorations in Literary Anthropology] (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 1998).

<sup>40</sup> John J. White, quoting Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*, in *Mythology in the Modern Novel: A Study of Prefigurative Techniques* (New Jersey: Princeton University, 1971), p. 42.

<sup>41</sup> John J. White, *Mythology in the Modern Novel: A Study of Prefigurative Techniques* (New Jersey: Princeton University, 1971), pp. 52-54.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.

borrowing themes and motifs from oral traditions to symbolise contemporary figures or events is not enough to compose a modern literary text. Themes, motifs and figures in mythology may be distorted in modern literature to establish a simple connection between myths and modern literary works because writers need some traditional elements which are closely attached to the contemporary imagery. This point is attached to the effectiveness of myth and contains the functional consideration of myth and folklore in modern literary works. The target of the six writers, no matter that some reused mythic images and archetypes while some introduced folk customs and the influence of popular religious beliefs, lies in their descriptions of contemporary life and references to contemporary problems. The traditional customs and values expressed in their works serve to some extent as an attractive varnish for a more reasonable presentation of modern world.

### ● The Six Writers and the Anthropological Elements

As early as 1971, John J. White raised the question as to why modern novels should have resource to mythology.<sup>43</sup> Our question, then, should be why the six Chinese writers appear so fond of mythic, folk and ethnological elements and how should we comprehend their writings? First, through exploitation and familiarisation an old myth may become viable again in a modern poem or story. Mao Zedong's poetry and Xu Dishan's early stories belong to this pattern. Secondly, modern writers often express nostalgia for a lost mythology, a "golden era". Shen Congwen and Fei Ming's expression of longing for a pastoral realm full of rustic beauty and earthy humanity are two cases. Finally, mythological and legendary figures and stories have remained current in some popular literary works and performance art forms.<sup>44</sup> Believing that such audience preferences show that a coherent myth, a local legend or a folk custom may indirectly embody continuity of national feeling and a profound sense of national identity, Lu Yan and Wang Zengqi have both tried to create attractive and joyful legendary stories embodying local customs. The six writers' use of mythical

---

<sup>43</sup> John J. White, *Mythology in the Modern Novel: A Study of Prefigurative Techniques* (New Jersey: Princeton University, 1971), p. 17.

<sup>44</sup> K. K. Ruthven, *Myth* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1976), pp. 44-51, 63-71. I have made some modifications for Ruthven's different patterns of adaptation of myth concerning with my own application of the theories.

fragments suggests a common sense of subjectivity rather than the elaboration of a romantic or exotic flavour. They introduced mythic stories with the intention of arousing reader's sympathy. They embellished their homelands to a greater or lesser extent and tried to bring local culture centre stage.

Generally, modern writers adapt folk elements into their literary writings in two ways: the identification and interpretation of popular elements in a piece of literature and the intentional literary imitation of folk genres.<sup>45</sup> The first way can be traced in the four writers' works in Chapter Three and Chapter Four. Since popular culture is one of the most important settings for modern literature, folklore which contains different aspects of popular and local culture becomes a major medium linking modernity with tradition. Readers in many modern industrial societies often find the folktale being supplanted by a kind of story that masquerades as a personal experience narrative.<sup>46</sup> By using folk elements in modern literary works, writers can validate their life and experiences and maintain their identities in marginal or emergent groups.

Anthropological theories have been connected to literary studies as early as the 1950s in the West. The Western scholarship not only influences the Chinese development of anthropology but also offers a way for us to view modern Chinese literature. Ye Shuxian began the discipline of research in traditional Chinese literature with reference to anthropological studies, which is the basis of my attempt here to investigate the connections between modern Chinese literature and cultural anthropology. Exploring the mythic, folk and ethnological elements in the six writer's works is my experiment in filling the gap in studies on the relationship between tradition and modernity in the modern canon of Chinese literature.

---

<sup>45</sup> Archer Taylor, "Folklore and the Student of Literature", in *The Study of Folklore*, ed. Alan Dundes (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1965), p. 39.

<sup>46</sup> Bruce A. Rosenberg, *Folklore and Literature: Rival Siblings* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1991), p. 199.

## Chapter 2: Adaptations of Chinese Myths

### Section 1, Studies of Chinese Mythology

There is no one definition of myth. As G. S. Kirk has pointed out, myths differ enormously in their morphology and their social function.<sup>47</sup> In both scholarly and popular usage myth has included a variety of elements, including traditional tales, religious beliefs, superstition, literary images and symbols and social ideals, which are put into a common pot called “the mixture of mythology”.<sup>48</sup> In her book *Chinese Mythology: An Introduction*, Anne Birrell summarised eight definitions of myth. However, two basic propositions are commonly accepted. The first is that all myths tell of gods or are derived from rituals; the second is that all myths are either distinct or indistinguishable from folktales.<sup>49</sup> In 1922, E. T. C. Werner provided us with an ambiguous definition of mythology: it is the science of the unscientific man’s explanation of the “Otherworld”, containing mysterious habits and surprising actions and often concerning the creation of “this world” also.<sup>50</sup> K. K. Ruthven acknowledged mythology as the combination of a variety of disciplines, such as classics, anthropology, folklore, history of religion, linguistics, psychology and art history.<sup>51</sup> The above definitions are broad and some of them confuse myths with folktales. Here I use the minimum definition of myth by Stith Thompson to discuss the development of studies in Chinese mythology: any literary devices concerning the gods and their actions, creation and/or the general nature of the universe and of the earth.<sup>52</sup> The Chinese word *shenhua* 神话 [myth], literally meaning script for story-telling about gods and deities, is not found in traditional Chinese literature. In Song and Yuan folk literature, short pieces of stories about the supernatural, ghosts and goblins were popular, but writers and storytellers used the words *zhiguai* 志怪 [records of

---

<sup>47</sup> G. S. Kirk, *Myth: Its Meaning and Functions in Ancient and Other Cultures* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 7.

<sup>48</sup> Joseph Fontenrose, *The Ritual Theory of Myth* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), p. 53.

<sup>49</sup> G. S. Kirk, *Myth: Its Meaning and Functions in Ancient and Other Cultures* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 9.

<sup>50</sup> E. T. C. Werner, *Myths and Legends of China* (London: G. G. Harrap, 1922), p. 60.

<sup>51</sup> K. K. Ruthven, *Myth* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1976), p. 3.

<sup>52</sup> S. N. Kramer, ed., *Mythologies of the Ancient World* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1961), p. 370.

the supernatural], *xie* 邪 [demons] and *yi* 异 [the abnormal] to define these stories. Many scholars believe that the word *shenhua* is imported from Japanese, because a number of Chinese students in Japan during the first decade of the twentieth century, such as Liang Qichao, Xia Zengyou, Zhou Zuoren and Lu Xun, first adopted this word in their writings to promote the New Culture Movement.<sup>53</sup> Liang Qichao first used the word *shenhua* formally in his article “Lishi yu renzhong zhi guanxi” 历史与人种之关系 [The Relationship between History and Race], which was published in 1902 in *Xinmin congbao* 新民从报 [New People] (a newspaper edited by Liang in Tokyo, 1902-1907).

William Bascom tried to clarify the meaning of myths, legends and folktales in the essay “The Form of Folklore” in 1965. But his conclusions are not persuasive. In *Myth: Its Meaning and Functions in Ancient and Other Cultures*, Kirk used a whole chapter to explain the differences between myths and folktales, displaying a systematic study. His main argument is that folktales are of no firmly established form and they are not primarily concerned with “serious” subjects or the reflection of deep problems and preoccupations, while myths tend to possess the element of “seriousness” in establishing and confirming rights and institutions or exploring and reflecting problems or preoccupations. He also considered that the main characters of myths are always superhuman, gods or semi-deities.<sup>54</sup> There have been three major developments in the modern study of mythology. The first was Tylor and Frazer’s works on the myths of primitive societies. The second was Freud’s discovery of the unconsciousness and its relation to myths and dreams. The third was the structural theory of myth propounded by Lévi-Strauss. All three influenced the development of studies in Chinese mythology. Moreover, the myth criticism that flourished during the 1950s had an impact on literary works in modern China.

Scholars both from home and abroad believe that Chinese myths remain separated fragments, meaning by this a body of mythological materials not forming a coherent

---

<sup>53</sup> Ma Changyi, “Zhongguo shenhua xue fazhan de yige lunkuo” 中国神话学发展的一个轮廓 [An Outline of the Development of Mythological Studies in China], in *Zhongguo shenhua xue wenlun xuancui* 中国神话学文论选萃 [Selected Works of Studies on Chinese Mythology] (Beijing: Zhongguo guangbo dianshi chubanshe, 1994), pp. 1-5.

<sup>54</sup> G. S. Kirk, *Myth: Its Meaning and Functions in Ancient and Other Cultures* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 37, 40.



system.<sup>55</sup> Lu Xun gave three reasons for the unsystematic characteristic of Chinese myths in the chapter “Myths and Legends” of *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction*. The first reason is that the early dwellers in the Yellow River Valley led a hard life and devoted most of their energy to practical matters without indulging in flights of fancy; they did not combine all the old legends into one great epic. Secondly, the old myths were not quoted by Confucian scholars, since Confucius disapproved of talk of the supernatural. Thirdly, there was an absence of a strict division between gods and ghosts in the records of ancient history.<sup>56</sup> Mao Dun attributed the fragmentation to two causes: the scattering of records in different resources, such as the ancient histories and classics, and the mixing up of myths with primitive religions, Buddhism and Daoism.<sup>57</sup>

Although scholars find it very difficult to study every individual myth in an unsystematic system, they have tried to list the themes in Chinese myths and draw out different categories according to the themes. By Birrell’s analysis, there are nine general themes in Chinese myths. Werner listed six categories of Chinese myths with six different themes. Mao Dun also divided Chinese myths into six categories. Among their conclusions, the common themes they used are cosmogenic myths, such as the story of Pan’gu 盘古; creation myths, such as the story of the Goddess Nüwa creating human beings; myths of natural phenomena, such as the stars, thunder, lightning, wind and rain; myths of mythical figures and semi-divine heroes, such as the battle between the Yellow Emperor 黄帝 and the Flame Emperor 炎帝; and mythic metamorphoses, such as the silkworm horse. According to Zhao Xiaohuan, the categories of Chinese myths include myths of floods, miraculous signs of the (natural and human) world, conflicts between gods and legendary heroes and among gods themselves, and myths of the creation of mankind and the universe.<sup>58</sup>

Another characteristic of Chinese myths lies in its aesthetic standards. First, it seems that Chinese people hold a practical judgment on the gods; they care more about different

---

<sup>55</sup> Lu Xun, “Myths and Legends”, in *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction*, trans. Yang Hsien-Yi and Gladys Yang (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1959), p. 19.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Mao Dun, “Shenhua zalun” 神话杂论 [On Myths], in *Shenhua yanjiu* 神话研究 [Studies on Myths] (Tianjin: Baihua wenyi chubanshe, 1981), pp. 88-89.

<sup>58</sup> Zhao Xiaohuan, “From Shanhai jing to Liaozhai zhiyi: Towards a Morphology of Classical Chinese Supernatural Fiction” (PhD thesis, The University of Edinburgh, 2003), p. 23.

gods and goddesses' functions and contributions to human beings than their appearance or "romantic" activities. For example, there are many records about the Goddess Nüwa as the mother of human beings, but few of them emphasize her feminine beauty. Secondly, unlike the gods and goddesses in Greek myths, Chinese gods and goddesses often lack human emotions. This may relate to the practical attitude toward life of the early people of the Yellow River Valley which Lu Xun has mentioned. On the other hand, blood relationships and ethical codes, especially the paternal line of a community, has been highlighted early in Chinese myths, such as the story of the ancient kings Yao 尧, Shun 舜 and Yu 禹 (2400BC-2200BC). They ascended the throne by their virtues and merits, and not by heritage. King Yu was also the founder of the Xia dynasty (2000BC-1600BC).

In this chapter I will briefly review studies on Chinese mythology by Chinese and Western scholars, tracing the development of mythological studies in modern China. The relationship between scholarly studies on Chinese mythology and literary adaptation of mythic elements is the core section. According to Lu Xun's comments, although mythology gave birth to literature, poets were its greatest enemies; myths and legends only left their mark on later fiction.<sup>59</sup> In Lu Xun's eyes, when poets made songs they naturally touched things up till very little of the original myth was left.<sup>60</sup> I will use Xu Dishan's early writings and Mao Zedong's poetry as materials to debate these comments.

### ● Studies by Chinese Scholars

In 1903 *Xinmin congbao* [New People] published the article "Shenhua lishi yangcheng zhi renwu" 神话历史养成之人物 [Characters as Developed in Myth and History] by a Chinese student in Japan, Jiang Guanyun. This article was the first piece of academic writing on Chinese myth in the twentieth century. After that, Chinese scholars' studies of myth and legend reached a first peak during the early Republican period (1911-1937). Research and fieldwork continued to develop during the Sino-Japanese War before being rejuvenated into a more professional system from the late 1970s. Below, I present a review of Chinese

---

<sup>59</sup> Lu Xun, "Myths and Legends", in *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction*, trans. Yang Hsien-Yi and Gladys Yang (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1959), pp. 10, 19.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

scholars' studies and contributions in the mythological field during the three periods.

During the folklore movement of the May Fourth era, besides the project of collecting folksongs, students and teachers at Beijing University compiled and studied ancient Chinese stories, including myths. Due to the fact that examples of Chinese myths and legends are scattered through different ancient historical records and classics, they first chose to compile stories from ancient history. Early in 1905, the historian Xia Zengyou mentioned that the stories about the mythical emperors recorded in ancient history could be regarded as myths.<sup>61</sup> Later contributors, such as Gu Jiegang and Xu Xusheng, believed that mythological features survived in the ancient history of China. Through textual research, they tried to trace the origins of different historical figures and their stories and used the method *yi jin zheng gu* 以今证古 [authenticating ancient history with modern thinking] to examine the authenticity of the historical records. To some extent, some myths are historicized by Gu and Xu. These modern historians' research propelled early studies in Chinese myths. However, there is no obvious discrimination between myths and folktales in their studies.

During the 1920s, many Western anthropological studies came into China, such as Andrew Lang's *Custom and Myth* (1884), James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (1923-1935) and E. B. Tylor's *Anthropology: An Introduction to the Study of Man and Civilisation* (1881). Lang's theories of mythology had a strong impact on the study of ancient Chinese myths; for example, Mao Dun's work *Zhongguo shenhua yanjiu ABC* 中国神话研究 ABC [An ABC of Chinese Mythology] (1928). In this book Mao Dun attempted to systematise Chinese myth. He classified Chinese myths into six categories and summarised the characteristics of each group. In his eyes, materials for the studies of Chinese myths generally came from North part, Central and South China. Among them myths from the South were the most valuable. He also tried to present the psychology and the world view of primitive people through myths.<sup>62</sup> Mao Dun's work is the first experiment in arranging fragmentary myths into an academic system.

---

<sup>61</sup> Xia Zengyou, ed., *Zhongguo lishi jiaokeshu* 中国历史教科书 [Textbook: The History of China] (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1905), p. 27.

<sup>62</sup> Mao Dun, *Shenhua yanjiu* 神话研究 [Studies on Myths] (Tianjin: Baihua wenyi chubanshe, 1981), pp. 130, 139, 163.

Another two scholars who were influenced by Western anthropology at that time were Zheng Zhenduo (1898-1958) and Wen Yiduo (1899-1946). They both used the theory and methodology of anthropology to analyse the cultural background of Chinese myths and to rehabilitate the origins of different individual myths or archetypes. Zheng Zhenduo analysed the mythical story of “emperor” Tang literally casting himself as a sacrificial vessel to the gods to rescue his people from drought (“Tang zhu pian” 汤铸篇 [How Tang Cast Himself]) and published it in *Dongfang zazhi* 东方杂志 [The Oriental Magazine] in 1932. In this article, Zheng first assessed different literary records that mentioned this story. He compared the story of Tang with those stories in Greek myths with a similar motif: using human beings as a sacrifice to deities. He also referred to the volume *Magic and Religion* in Frazer’s *The Golden Bough* to study the two functions of ancient kings in primitive society as both political leaders and wizards in sacrificial rites. His conclusion was that mythical religion in ancient times continued and could regenerate itself in modern society.<sup>63</sup> The same method of analysing an individual piece of myth to research its cultural origin can also be seen in Zheng’s 1935 article “Xuan niao pian” 玄鸟篇 [The Story of the Xuan Bird].

If we check the volume *Myths of The Complete Works of Wen Yiduo*, many articles present analysis or textual research of individual archetypes in Chinese myths, such as “Gaotang shennü chuanshuo zhi fenxi” 高唐神女传说之分析 [Analysis of the Legends of the Goddesses in Gaotang] (1935), “Zhaoyun kao” 朝云考 [Research on the Story Zhaoyun] (1935), “Shenxian kao” 神仙考 [Research on the Immortals] and “Fuxi kao” 伏羲考 [Research on the Deity Fuxi] (1942). Especially in the article “Fuxi kao”, Wen Yiduo not only analysed how the deity Fuxi with the body of a snake developed into the Chinese dragon totem, but also tried to trace the origins of the Han people and the Miao people through studying the two nations’ mythical stories with the same motif: the flood.

Besides doing textual research in ancient Chinese history to analyse Chinese myths and to see the impact from the anthropological studies, Chinese scholars have also regarded

---

<sup>63</sup> Zheng Zhenduo, “Tang zhu pian” 汤铸篇 [How Tang Cast Himself], in *Zheng Zhenduo gudian wenxue lunwen ji* 郑振铎古典文学论文集 [Works of Zheng Zhenduo on Traditional Literature] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1984), p. 132.

myths as a tool to enlighten their compatriots in studying literary history. Two representatives are Lu Xun (1881-1936) and Zhou Zuoren (1885-1967). Lu Xun believed that primitive people made up stories to explain natural phenomena and changes which could not be accomplished by any human power, thus these explanations became myths. As myths developed, the central figures became increasingly human until the myths turned into legends. The chief figures of legends had semi-divine attributes or were ancient heroes and were recorded in ancient history. The historical records were elaborated by intellectuals and became fiction.<sup>64</sup> We can find Lu Xun's opinion that myths are the original source of fiction both in the chapter "Myths and Legends" of *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction* and in his 1924 lecture materials "Cong shenhua dao shenxian zhuan" 从神话到神仙传 [From Myths to the Legendary Stories of Immortals] in *Zhongguo xiaoshuo de lishi bianxi* 中国小说的历史变迁 [Historical Changes in Chinese Fiction]. Zhou Zuoren shared similar ideas to those of Lu Xun. After he finished translating *Aesop's Fables* and returned to his translation of *The Greek Myths* again in 1937, he said that myths were not only the sources for different national cultures but also for literary creations.<sup>65</sup>

Chinese scholars' studies in myths before the Sino-Japanese War have three features. First, the historical school made many efforts in examining, compiling and collating different ancient history records to check the stories of mythical figures. Their aim was to debate the authenticity of the ancient history of China. Another important impact was from the anthropological school. They focused on studying cultural and religious phenomena in primitive society through myths. The third trend regarded myths as a source for literary criticism.

During the War, many universities and research institutions in Beijing moved to the unoccupied Southwest of China. Scholars gained a chance to learn the culture and life of different minorities living in that area amidst government efforts to unite and galvanize

---

<sup>64</sup> Lu Xun, "Myths and Legends", in *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction*, trans. Yang Hsien-Yi and Gladys Yang (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1959), pp. 11-17.

<sup>65</sup> Zhou Zuoren, *Zhitang shu hua (xia)* 知堂书话 (下) [Zhitang Literary Talks], Vol.2 (Changsha: Yuelu shuyuan, 1986), pp. 916-20.

public support for the war cause.<sup>66</sup> Mythological studies changed their direction from textual research and cultural analysis towards investigations and fieldwork. Scholars focused their energies on recording mythical stories through their interviews and conversations with minority people. They also completed a large number of investigations on the social conditions of those minorities and collected and edited the data into many reports. A good case is Rui Yifu's *Miaozu de hongshui gushi he Fuxi Nüwa de chuanshuo* 苗族的洪水故事和伏羲女娲的传说 [The Flood Myth of the Miao People and the Legend of Fuxi and Nüwa] (1938), which was mentioned by Wen Yiduo in his research work on the deity Fuxi. Ma Changshou's *Miao Yao zhi qiyuan shenhua* 苗瑶之起源神话 [Origin Myths of the Miao and Yao Peoples] (1940) and Ling Chunsheng's *Shemin tuteng wenhua de yanjiu* 畲民图腾文化的研究 [Studies on the She People's Totem Culture] (1947) also provide explorations of the myths and primitive religions of the minorities.

Because of these scholars' fieldwork and the reports of their investigations, mythological studies became more professional and the research scope opened up to include the myths of the minorities, which were largely ignored during the early Republican period. Investigations of the myths, legends, epics and other oral traditions of the minorities influenced studies in the ethnological field from the 1950s onwards. Chinese scholars' studies of myths have shown more concern with and interest in anthropological aspects since then.

Chinese scholars' studies in mythology during the War period also cast a new trend in popular culture: going back to the countryside, which was used by the Communists in their efforts to construct socialism and create a new China. The urge of scholars to communicate, indeed, interact with local people to collect mythical stories marked a shift in the intellectuals' consciousness: conducting fieldwork in rural areas grew in importance and textual studies of the metropolitan literary canon lost favour. The repeated emphasis on villages and the minority areas indicated that "the ruralisation of Chinese culture had

---

<sup>66</sup> Hung Chang-tai, *War and Popular Culture: Resistance in Modern China 1937-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), p. 270.

commenced”.<sup>67</sup> Mythological studies were formed with a more academic outlook, but the discriminations among the different lines of myth, folklore and ethnology were blurred. Scholarly studies in Chinese mythology were popularised and myths became a kind of popular culture.

From the 1950s to the 1970s, scholars conducted a general census in the non-Han peoples' areas according to the government's policy of studying the social and cultural conditions of the minorities and helping them develop economically. Many legendary stories of the minorities were collected but mythological studies in China moved forward slowly during these three decades. Since the end of the 1970s, Chinese scholars' studies in mythology have developed in an all-round way and reached a second peak. Two scholars, Yuan Ke and Ma Xueliang, have made great contributions.

Yuan Ke (1916-2001), born in Xinfan, Sichuan, was educated at West China University 华西大学 during the first developing period of Chinese mythological studies. He devoted himself to collecting, editing and collating Chinese myths all his life. His research shares respective features of the three periods of mythological studies in China, including the historical school, the anthropological concern and literary criticism. Important publications of his include *Zhongguo gudai shenhua* 中国古代神话 [Ancient Myths of China] (1950), *Zhongguo shenhua chuanshuo cidian* 中国神话传说辞典 [Dictionary of Chinese Myths and Legends] (1986), *Zhongguo shenhua shi* 中国神话史 [A History of Chinese Mythology] (1982) and *Shanghai jing jiaozhu* 山海经校注 [An Annotated and Collated Edition of the Classics of Mountains and Seas] (1980). In his first book *Ancient Myths of China*, readers can see the influence of the historical school: the symposium of ancient history through mythical stories. Moreover, Yuan also proposed a new theory in this book: that ancient myths highlight the antithesis between human beings and nature, expressing a principle that humans are a product of nature. Therefore, those ancient heroes or rebels who challenge the authority of nature or the gods who are praised in legendary stories are criticised in the official historical records or mythical classics, as they go against the

---

<sup>67</sup> Hung Chang-tai, *War and Popular Culture: Resistance in Modern China 1937-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), p. 279.

Confucian ethical code. Yuan tried to divide ancient myths and legends into two types: popular stories among people and myths for the official canon.

Ma Xueliang (1913-1999), born in Rongcheng, Shandong, graduated from Beijing University majoring in Chinese language and literature. He co-edited the book *Zhongguo shaoshu minzu wenxue shi* 中国少数民族文学史 [A History of the Literature of China's Minorities] (1985), which provides a systematic introduction to myths and legends of twenty-one of the non-Han peoples of China. Ma analysed many epics of different minorities to examine their origins and summarised some common characteristics of their myths, such as the assimilation of animals and humans and the common origin of all things on the earth. From the late 1970s to the 1980s, different schools of mythological studies in China developed rapidly, especially in theory and methodology. Besides the ethnological concerns of the anthropological field, scholars began to connect their studies in myth with studies in archaeology.

#### ● Studies by Western Scholars

Western scholars' interest in Chinese mythology first appeared during the nineteenth century. At that time, many pieces from the popular literature of China, such as *Qiannü youhun* 倩女幽魂 [The Ghost of a Beauty], *Baishejing ji* 白蛇精记 [Story of the White Snake], *Liaozhai zhiyi* 聊斋志异 [Strange Stories from A Scholar's Studio] and *Xiyouji* 西游记 [The Journey to the West] were translated. Later on legends and folktales which contain mythical and supernatural elements were translated and edited into different systematic collections. Three important works are R. Morrison's *Horae Sinica: Translations from the Popular Literature of the Chinese* (1812), in which *Sou shen ji* 搜神记 [In Search of the Supernatural: The Written Record] was introduced, S. Julien's *Contes et Apologues Indiens Inconnus Jusqu'à ce Jour: Suivis de Fables et de Poésies Chinoises* [Unknown Tales and Indian Apologues until This Day: Follow-ups of Chinese Fables and Poems] (1860) and B. Vitale di Pontaggio's *Legendary Stories of China* (1896).

Western scholars' academic studies of Chinese mythology started at the beginning of



the twentieth century. There are mainly two directions. On the one hand, they continued to collect, translate and introduce Chinese myths, and tried to place the stories into different categories according to their motifs. On the other hand, they began to analyse the gods and ghosts in Chinese myths and to compare Chinese myths with myths of their own nations. Important works are R. Wilhelm's German translation of *Liezi* 列子 [The Book of Master Lie] (1912) and his *Collection of Chinese Mythical Stories* (1914), E. T. C. Werner's *Myths and Legends of China* (1922) and the English version of *Huainanzi* 淮南子 [The Writings of the Prince of Huainan] by E. Morgan (1934).

The research scope of Western studies included general definitions of Chinese myths, analysis of individual stories and collection of mythical elements in ancient classics. For example, Werner tried to give a brief definition of Chinese mythology and an introduction to the ancient society of China. He also analysed the characteristics of Chinese myths, sources of Chinese myths, phases of Chinese myths and short stories of the supernatural during the Tang and Song dynasties. But his arguments may be criticised for the use of improper examples and lack of reference. His concept of a standard mythology is based on the Greek, Roman and Egyptian tradition. As Chinese myths and legends are fragmentary and appear practical without any romantic elements, in his eyes, there is no system of gods or holy places, no religion and no imagination in Chinese myths. All is impossible and passionless.<sup>68</sup> This summary of the characteristics of Chinese myths is ambiguous. E. Erkes' article "The Similarities of Chinese Myths and American Indian Myths" (1926) and M. Granet's *Dances and Legends in Ancient China* (1926) show anthropological concern for religious rites and the cultural phenomena of ancient society. Comparisons between similar motifs in Chinese and other nations' myths became popular.

Although the early generation of Western scholars made contributions to the study of Chinese mythology, especially in their translation and introduction of Chinese myths to the West, many of them were missionaries whose initial purpose was to discuss theology. Moreover, in their experiments at doing research in Chinese mythology, they found difficulty

---

<sup>68</sup> E. T. C. Werner, *Myths and Legends of China* (London: G. G. Harrap, 1922), p. 65.

in collecting resources due to Chinese myths being scattered among different materials, and thus they expressed doubts as to the existence of a system of myths and legends called mythology in China and queried the psychological and physiographical truth in these stories as there was no official record and no famous poet who could form a great epic for the nation.

The translation of Chinese myths and legends in Western countries became more professional and accurate from the middle of the twentieth century. Scholars sometimes added explanations and comments into their translations. Some popular pieces of *zhiguai xiaoshuo* 志怪小说 [tales of marvels or the supernatural] were translated once again and put into different collections; for instance, W. Eberhard's *Stories of Immortals and Folktales of China* (1937), L. Giles' *A Gallery of Chinese Immortals* (1948), A. C. Graham's English version of *Liezi* (1960) and C. Birch's *Chinese Myths and Fantasies* (1961). Studies in Chinese mythology also developed quickly and more critical thinking and theories and methodologies from the social sciences were used in research. B. Karlgren's 1946 article "Legends and Cults in Ancient China" discussed the myths related to the origins of different patriarchal clans in primitive society and provided a critical review of the early generation's studies.

It was in 1961 that Derk Bodde's article "Myths of Ancient China" was published and marked a new stage of studies in Chinese mythology in the West. In this article, Bodde adopted the etiological approach and comparative mythological studies to explain three problems of studying Chinese mythology: the problem of Euhemerisation, the problem of fragmentation and language and the problem of chronology. When explaining the problem of Euhemerisation,<sup>69</sup> which means the transformation of what were once myths and gods into seemingly authentic history and human beings, Bodde queried the validity of the prehistoric stage in China. He summarised two general schools during that time. One is the historical school with B. Karlgren as the representative. The other is the sociological school with W.

---

<sup>69</sup> Euhemeus, A Greek writer lived around third to fourth century B. C., he believed that the origin of myth is to be found in actual history, the gods and demigods of mythology were actual human beings. See Derk Bodde, "Myths of Ancient China", in *Mythologies of the Ancient World*, ed. S. N. Kramer (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1961), p. 372.

Eberhard as the representative. Scholars of the latter school see the rise of Chinese civilisation as resulting from the interaction and intermixture of various components.<sup>70</sup> Bodde classified Chinese myths into four groups: the creation myth, the separation of Heaven and Earth, sun myths and flood myths. His conclusions on ancient Chinese myths embraced all the academic trends of his age, such as the influence of regional and ethnic materials, humanisation and euhemerization of myths and the relationship between historical stories and literary stories.

Western scholars' contributions to Chinese mythology studies continued to develop in translation and in systematic research. Bodde's 1975 article "Ancient Chinese Festivals" discussed religious rites in China and analysed the myths related to religious rites and festivals. This article opened up a new view on the evolution of Chinese myths. In 1986, the dictionary-like and copiously illustrated collection *Classical Chinese Myths*, edited by Jan and Yvonne Walls, was published. R. Mathieu's *Étude sur la Mythologie et L'ethnologie de la Chine Ancienne* [Anthology of Ancient Chinese Myths and Legends] (1983) has the same characteristic. In 1993, Anne Birrell's book *Chinese Mythology: An Introduction* came out. It was the first time a Western scholar used the word "mythology" to describe the system of Chinese myths and legends. Studies in Chinese mythology in the West had entered a more professional age.

Theories and methodologies from the ethnological, historical and sociological fields were adopted in Chinese mythology studies from the later part of the twentieth century. Motifs and archetypes in Chinese myths became popular research topics. R. Mathieu's comparative studies in East Asian, Central Asian and East Siberian mythology gave a new view of the historical and ethnological elements of the origination of some non-Han peoples in China. Birrell reviewed the history of Japanese, modern Chinese and Western studies of Chinese myth. She summarised the comparative methods in the study of Chinese myth and outlined future research. She divided Chinese myths into sixteen topics and in each topic she adopted different methods, such as the etiological approach and F. R. S. B. Raglan's

---

<sup>70</sup> Derk Bodde, "Myths of Ancient China", in *Mythologies of the Ancient World*, ed. S. N. Kramer (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1961), p. 380.

typology.

In spite of Western scholars' many achievements, their studies in Chinese mythology have some shortcomings, especially in the early period. First, they were inclined to use Western myths, such as the Greek and Roman, as a standard to define Chinese mythology and classify Chinese myths. Due to the fact that Chinese myths are "unsystematic", they represented Chinese mythology as a passionless and rigid discourse.<sup>71</sup> Secondly, they failed to distinguish between legendary stories in religious classics, such as Buddhist stories, Daoist stories and Confucian classics, and myths of gods, semi-divine heroes and cultural founders. They mentioned the influences from popular religion, habits and customs and historical writings, but in their eyes, mythical stories, legends and even folktales belonged to one group called Chinese myths. Thirdly, when translating Chinese myths and legends, they would add their personal understandings and imagination about the stories, and sometimes they did not point out the original sources of their translations and explanations. Last but not least, because of the difficulty in collecting stories from different kinds of texts in original sources, they typically chose pieces or paragraphs of a story in two or three versions of records, edited them together and rewrote them themselves into a new story. These problems were gradually solved from the later part of the twentieth century.

In spite of these shortcomings, Western scholars contributed some basic knowledge in mythological studies, such as definitions of myths, contexts of myths, functions of myths, themes in mythical stories and different approaches and schools of mythological studies in the West. These theories influenced Chinese scholars' studies. Birrell summarised nine popular approaches for studying myths in the West during the twentieth century in *Chinese Mythology: An Introduction*, such as the naturalistic school, the theory of evolution, the social anthropological school and structuralism. However, she pointed out that myth should have its own system and scholars should distinguish mythological studies from religious studies, anthropological studies and psychological studies. Her conclusion of nine types of myths has inspired Chinese scholars in their classification efforts. W. G. Doty summed up the

---

<sup>71</sup> E. T. C. Werner, *Myths and Legends of China* (London: G. G. Harrap, 1922), pp. 67-68.

functions of myths in his book *Mythography: The Study of Myths and Rituals* (1986), in which myth's function as an appraising tool for cultural phenomena within a society was highlighted. This belief was shared by many Western scholars when they were studying Chinese myths. Western scholars from the 1980s also tried to forge a definition of Chinese mythology and analyse the differences among myths, legends and folktales, and Birrell's research was a good example. Although there is no one definite conclusion, their efforts set a model for Chinese scholars' studies.

Western scholars have made many comparative studies of Chinese myths and myths of their own nations. The comparative approach leads to a new direction of thinking about some problems in Chinese mythological studies. The problems, for instance, skepticism about the existence of Chinese mythology, the preservation of the original sources, the relationship between history and myth and between similar motifs in Chinese myths and Western myths, need to be studied in the future.

#### ● Chinese Mythology in the New Literature

In the early stage of the New Culture Movement, many scholars regarded Chinese myths and legends as a tool for enlightenment. Some elements in mythical stories, such as rebellious heroes, the creativity and positive action of the ordinary people and an optimistic belief that man will conquer nature, met the writers' needs to point out the evils of the age and offer salutary advice. They also believed that stories with mythical or legendary figures would reach wide audiences. Therefore, myths and legends became background material for literary writing and some writers adapted motifs and themes from myths into their fiction. Certainly, these themes or stories hold new meanings and contain authors' personal comments. We may call the new mythical stories during the New Culture Movement "new wine in old bottles". There were three ways of adapting ancient myths into fictional writings at this time: the pattern of sounding the alarm, the pattern of regeneration and the pattern of surmounting

tradition.<sup>72</sup> Representative writers are Lu Xun, Xu Dishan, Zhou Zuoren and Zheng Zhenduo.

In his *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction*, Lu Xun asserted that myth is the origin of fiction. Later he completed a collection of short stories *Gushi xinbian* 故事新编 [Old Tales Retold], in which four stories come from Chinese myths and legends. They are “Bu tian” 补天 [Mending the Sky], “Ben yue” 奔月 [Escaping to the Moon], “Li shui” 理水 [Controlling the Flood] and “Zhu jian” 铸剑 [Casting the Swords]. He said in the preface to the collection that the first story “Bu tian” was written in 1922 and initially named “Buzhou shan” 不周山 [Buzhou Mountain]. He sought materials from both ancient literature and modern thoughts for these short stories.<sup>73</sup> Although he confessed that he would not write this kind of mythical stories any longer, his *Old Tales Retold* was the first such experiment in modern Chinese literature. In “Bu tian”, Lu Xun portrayed two figures: a destroyer Gonggong 共工, who butted into the Buzhou Mountain and spoiled the order of the world, and a creator Nüwa, who mended the sky and created human beings. They represent two powers: first to destroy tradition and then to create a new nation. In “Ben yue”, the author described how the deity Yi 羿 declined from good to evil and expressed his regret for heroes who were corrupted by success and power. In “Li shui”, the author pointed out that the flood was controlled by the demigod Yu whose nature was nearer to the human than the divine. In “Zhu jian”, the rebellious couple Ganjiang 干将 and Moye 莫邪 are praised. Lu Xun added details from the contemporary life into these legendary stories as he wished to profess his modern thinking. Especially when he felt uncertain about the nation’s road to modernity and helpless in the face of other people’s apathy, he chose to express his resolution of fighting against the old hierarchy by narrating mythic stories of rebellious heroes or destroyers. At the same time, the author revealed his loneliness at being misunderstood, so that he could only find comfort in ancient stories.

---

<sup>72</sup> Hu Zhiyi, “Wusi xinwenxue de shenhua yishi jiqi liubian” “五四”新文学的神话意识及其流变 [Mythic Consciousness and Its Changes in May Fourth New Literature], in *Zhongguo xiandai wenxue yanjiu congkan* 中国现代文学研究丛刊 [Studies on Modern Chinese Literature], no. 3 (1992): 9-11.

<sup>73</sup> Lu Xun, Preface to *Old Tales Retold*, in *Lun Xun quanji* 鲁迅全集 [The Complete Works of Lu Xun], Vol. 2 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1963), p. 303.

Literary writings with mythical elements later grew broader in scope. Writers began to rethink the relationships between humans and nature and humans and gods. The belief that man will conquer nature lost its popularity. On the contrary, a harmonious relationship between human and nature was emphasised. More personal feelings and understanding of different ancient myths were added into literary writings, which indicated that myth's function as a social tool for awakening the common people was not as important as before. Moreover, writers began to use myths of other nations, such as Greek, Roman and Indian myths, to create stories. Zheng Zhenduo composed some short stories based on the Greek myths in the late 1920s and the early 1930s. Zhou Zuoren wrote some articles on Greek and Roman myths when he was translating them with Mao Dun. He also discussed the Japanese myth *Kojiki* 古事记 [Records of Ancient Matters] in some of his essays. Myths and legends also appeared in drama, such as Wu Zuguang's two plays *Niulang zhinü* 牛郎织女 [The Cowherd and the Weaver Maid] and *Chang E ben yue* 嫦娥奔月 [Chang E Escaping to the Moon]. A good example of literary works that combine mythical elements in personal stories and contain myths from both home and abroad is Xu Dishan's early writing, including fiction and prose.

Lu Xun commented that in traditional Chinese literature myths and legends serve merely as allusions and embellishments in poetry or prose.<sup>74</sup> However, the impact from myths and legends on poetry writing is obvious in modern Chinese literature. Guo Moruo's poems and Mao Zedong's poems are two examples. In Guo's poems readers can always sense the author's attitude towards myths and legends: religious worship of those ancient gods or supernatural beings. He used many mythical images both from China, such as the *fenghuang* 凤凰 [phoenix], *Zhuanxu* 颛顼 and *Gonggong*, and from Western countries, such as Cupid, Apollo, Prometheus and Hygeia, to express his beliefs in aestheticism, individualism and pantheism. Unlike other early modern Chinese writers, such as Lu Xun, who used mythical images to highlight the opposition between man and nature and to praise man's power of defeating his enemies in nature, Guo emphasised the harmony between man

---

<sup>74</sup> Lu Xun, "Myths and Legends", in *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction*, trans. Yang Hsien-Yi and Gladys Yang (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1959), p. 19.

and nature in his poems. Guo's recreation of myths in poems has social purposes. In his collection of poems *Nüshen* 女神 [The Goddesses], Guo eulogised liberty, democracy, regeneration of the self and the birth of a new nation: Western themes beloved of the May Fourth intellectuals.

War with Japan suddenly thrust Chinese tradition onto the centre stage. But writers' interests in mythology and folklore now contained more concern for politics and nationalism. Even an old-style romantic novelist such as Zhang Henshui (1895-1967), used myths in his writings to imply the resistance against Japanese aggression. A good example is Zhang's *Bashiyi meng* 八十一梦 [Eighty-one Dreams] (1939). As Hung Chang-tai has pointed out, given their long historical roots and enduring popularity, Chinese myths became potent weapons for rallying the people.<sup>75</sup> Besides his romantic expressions of ambition, the target of Mao Zedong's writing is the common people. He adapted many mythical images and figures into his poems in classical metre, but most of them are rebellious heroes or human beings who challenge authority, such as Gonggong and Chang E. In his poems man becomes the protagonist and man's target is to win the battle against nature. It seems that the optimistic resolution that man will conquer nature comes back. Secondly, the immortals and the natural scenery in myths and legends provided Mao a romantic stage and players with which to encourage the common people and to mark his leadership. Chinese mythology also narrates many battles among ancient heroes, emperors, gods and semi-gods. The motifs of disputes between justice and evil and man's struggle for goodness and freedom with the help of gods appear in Mao's poems. Mao's emphasis on the masses as the source of wisdom and experience gives the mythical elements in his poems some clear intentions. From the early generation of writers' uses of myths as a resource for literary writings to Mao's poems up to the 1960s, many writers stressed myth's social functions and their works look utilitarian. Xu Dishan is an exception.

---

<sup>75</sup> Hung Chang-tai, *War and Popular Culture: Resistance in Modern China, 1937-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), p. 192.



## Section 2, Mythic Consciousness in Xu Dishan's Early Writings (1921-1930)<sup>76</sup>

Xu Dishan (1893-1941) began his writing career along with the New Culture Movement. He entered Yanjing University in Beijing majoring in literature in 1917 and got his B.A. degree in 1920. In 1921 he was one of the twelve founders of the Association for Literary Studies in Beijing. In the same year Xu began to do research in religion at Yanjing and published his first short story "Mingming niao" 命命鸟 [The Bird of Destiny] in the association journal *Xiaoshuo yuebao* 小说月报 [Short Stories Monthly]. Xu Dishan was born in Tainan, Taiwan. After Taiwan became a colony of Japan in 1895, Xu drifted from place to place with his family in mainland China and Burma. The experiences enriched his life. He was interested in traditional religion and mythology and spent four years in America (1922-1924), Britain (1924-1926) and India (1925-1926) studying comparative religion and folklore, Sanskrit and Buddhism. Xu's first wife Lin Yuesen died in 1920 and this event influenced his attitude toward life.

Xu Dishan, also known under the pen-name of Luohuasheng [Peanut], was an unusual writer in the Association for Literary Studies. He supported the slogan "Literature for Life" but mainly concerned himself with fundamental religious experience and attempted to demonstrate its ubiquitous presence in human lives. He tried to seek the meaning of life through metaphysical pursuits<sup>77</sup> and adapted many elements in traditional culture to explain modern life. He wrote many stories about the common people's real life but we cannot simply consider him as a realistic writer. C. T. Hsia said that by temperament Xu was a writer of romances. Most of his early works have an affinity with popular Buddhist tales and Indian legends.<sup>78</sup> In Lin Zhiyi's eyes, Xu tried to answer the questions of life in his writings through self-perfection and detachment from reality.<sup>79</sup>

---

<sup>76</sup> This section has been delivered as a conference paper at the 2005 Association of Chinese and Comparative Literature Biennial Conference, Nanjing.

<sup>77</sup> Zbigniew Slupski, ed., *A Selective Guide to Chinese Literature 1900-1949*, Vol.2: The Short Stories (Leiden: Brill, 1988), p. 223.

<sup>78</sup> C. T. Hsia, *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), p. 85.

<sup>79</sup> Lin Zhiyi, ed., *Zhongguo xinwenxue dashi mingzuo shangxi: Xu Dishan Zheng Zhenduo* 中国新文学大师名作赏析: 许地山、郑振铎 [Analysis of Masterpieces by Modern Chinese Writers: Xu Dishan and Zheng Zhenduo] (Taipei: Haifeng chubanshe, 1990), p. 10.

Mao Dun stated in the preface to *Zhongguo xinwenxue daxi* (Vol. 3) 中国新文学大系·小说一集 [The Compendium of New Literature of China: Fiction 1] that Xu Dishan was more earnest and practical than other writers in the Association for Literary Studies.<sup>80</sup> He accepted reality and presented a rational understanding about life via the wisdom of myth and religion. Readers seldom sense any complaint in his stories even when he is describing a life full of suffering and pain. This temporary forgetting of reality does not originate from Xu's romantic temperament or religious testament as Hsia believes, but from his mythic consciousness toward life.

“Mythic consciousness” is a concept in myth criticism first identified in 1951 by Northrop Frye as the source of all literary genres.<sup>81</sup> Modern novels in which the author uses myth with an intention of adding significance to a theme or situation by means of illustration or parallel are among the most popular of literary works.<sup>82</sup> Mythical thinking and a religious mode of understanding are the core of Xu's views on life, relating to his family background, personal experience and academic training. His grandmother, parents and wife were all devout Buddhists. He taught in high schools in Burma in his early twenties and studied mythology in India in his early thirties. He came naturally to think of myths and religious legends which can embody deep insights into human nature. In his early writings mythical stories are not just supernatural phenomena.

When in India in 1925-26 Xu translated some Hindu myths and legends into Chinese. The foreign culture engendered Xu's interest in Hinduism. The desire for boundlessness is shown in all Hindu speculations, myths and legends.<sup>83</sup> Xu believed that individual liberation can be gained through the quest for boundlessness. To Xu, death is not fearful because liberation is liberation from rebirth. Rebirth starts from death and happens only when there is a desire for pleasure. Desire keeps one confined to the personal ego. In Xu's writings, people

---

<sup>80</sup> Mao Dun, Preface to *Zhongguo xinwenxue daxi* [The Compendium of New Literature of China], Vol. 3: Fiction 1, in *Mao Dun lun Zhongguo xiandai zuojia zuopin* 茅盾论中国现代作家作品 [Commentary on Modern Chinese Writers and Their Works by Mao Dun] (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1980), p. 33.

<sup>81</sup> K. K. Ruthven, *Myth* (London: Methuen, 1976), p. 76.

<sup>82</sup> John J. White, *Mythology in the Modern Novel: A Study of Prefigurative Techniques* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 51.

<sup>83</sup> Pratima Bowes, *The Hindu Religious Tradition: A Philosophical Approach* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), p. 46.

remain modest and relaxed. According to Indian Buddhism, the individual soul roams about in reincarnation. The soul, overcome by the bright or dark fruits of action, enters a good or an evil womb.<sup>84</sup> Xu believed in the human soul and related several times the paradise after death with reference to some Buddhist legends.

His mythic consciousness also means that Xu appears to be telling stories rather than creating a piece of literary work even when he is writing non-fiction. He regards life as a kind of event in a story. Xu's use of mythical fragments suggests a cure for the human heart rather than an exploration of sub-rational qualities of the human situation. The modern writer can seek beneath the well-explored moral world, which may mean in practice the world of complex explanations, reasons and accommodations that man in any civilized context owes to man.<sup>85</sup> Xu's early writings are all about people's efforts to change a bitter life into a sweet one.

We will see below how Xu describes life as a story and how he understands life through his mythic consciousness. Nine stories, from "Mingming niao" (1921) to "Ying deng" 萤灯 [The Firefly Lamp] (1930), and one collection of essays *Kong shan ling yu* 空山灵雨 [The Rain of the Soul in the Empty Mountain, hereafter *KSLY*] (1922) will be discussed.<sup>86</sup>

### ● Bitter Life and Tides of Love: Two Sides of a Contradiction

The term "bitter life" 苦生 comes from Xu Dishan's preface to his collection of essays *KSLY*, in which he said life is by nature unhappy; the only time that man will feel a little respite from sadness is when at rest, but it is impossible to experience actual happiness in such a short period.<sup>87</sup> This thinking is influenced by Buddhism. According to Buddhism, life is a process full of bitterness and pain; a human should cultivate himself/herself with the aim

---

<sup>84</sup> Pratima Bowes, *The Hindu Religious Tradition: A Philosophical Approach* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), p. 57.

<sup>85</sup> William Righter, *Myth and Literature* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), p. 39.

<sup>86</sup> All the references to Xu Dishan's works are from *Xu Dishan wenji* 许地山文集 [Literary Works of Xu Dishan], ed. Gao Wei, 2 vols. (Beijing: Xinhua chubanshe, 1998) and *Xu Dishan xuanji* 许地山选集 [Selected Works of Xu Dishan] (Taipei: Liming wenhua shiye, 1976), hereafter *XDWJ* and *XDXX*; variations are noted where relevant. I translated the sentences, paragraphs and poems from Xu Dishan's works cited in the following sections.

<sup>87</sup> Xu Dishan, "Bianyan" 弁言 [Preface], in *KSLY* (Beijing: Zhongguo wenlian chuban gongsi, 1993).

of ending the painful process, to escape from the wheel of life and death and so enter Nirvana, which means the repose of the soul, a passionless condition of body and spirit and an absolute rest obtained by the absorption of the soul itself.<sup>88</sup> The term “tides of love” is from the title of the essay “Ai liu xi zhang” 爱流汐涨 [Evening Tides of Love] in *KSLY* and represents the other side of Xu’s philosophy: the tragedy of love.

First, a human feels bitterness and pain when s/he cannot break away from the oppression of nature and fate. In the essay “Chan” 蝉 [Cicadas], cicadas are easily washed down from trees by rain and then eaten by birds or ants. This is a metaphor for a human’s powerless situation in society. Again in the essay “Zhai” 债 [Debts], Xu states directly “life is a garden of defectiveness and a farmland of vexation.”<sup>89</sup> A human cannot escape the fate of death as a natural being; therefore, sufferings do not only exist in the social environment, but also in the whole circle of life. A human’s strongest will is to live forever and his/her deepest fear is the inevitability of death. But in Xu’s eyes, the only way to end suffering is to end life and thereby escape the process; he even extolled death and cursed life, because it was possible for a human to enter paradise after s/he dies.

It is happiness to abandon all the sense organs;  
It is happiness to become a skeleton.  
We praise you, for there are no tear drops when you are crying;  
We praise you, for there is no deep breath when you are angry;  
We praise you, for you won’t knit your brows when you are sad;  
We praise you, for there is no lip to cover your teeth when you are smiling;  
[.....]<sup>90</sup>

The most painful part of life is that a human never knows his/her fate. Xu explained this point in the story “Zhui wang lao zhu” 缀网劳蛛 [The Vain Labours of a Spider] (1925). The heroine Shangjie believes that people are powerless against catastrophe because everyone lives blindly like a spider and can never overcome their predestined fate, thus she

---

<sup>88</sup> Hampden C. Du Bose, *The Dragon, Image and Demon: The Three Religions of China, Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism Giving an Account of the Mythology, Idolatry and Demonolatry of the Chinese* (Richmond: The Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1899), p. 227.

<sup>89</sup> Xu Dishan, “Zhai” [Debts], in *KSLY*.

<sup>90</sup> Xu Dishan, “Gui zan” 鬼赞 [The Eulogy of Ghosts], in *KSLY*.

accepts her fate with no struggle. People are ignorant about their past, present and future, like a spider that just goes on weaving its web, which may easily turn to shreds at any moment. Spiders will weave their webs again and again when they are broken, while people will struggle on through their lives though they are full of suffering. It seems that their work is vain. Because of the uncertainty of fate, Shangjie tries to cope by savouring every instant of happiness instead struggling against the things life throws at her. This is Xu's attitude toward life.

On the one hand, Xu expressed his sense of the bitterness of life and therefore was inclined towards the ending of life; on the other hand, the "bitter life" is also full of love, especially love between husband and wife. The death of Xu's wife changed his understanding of love. In his stories love is combined with death, heightening the tragedy. An important motif of the collection *KSLY* is in regard to lovers' parting. About half of the essays record the happy lives of couples, such as "Xiang" 香 [Fragrance], "Yuan" 愿 [A Wish] and "Xiao" 笑 [A Smile]; the other half conveys husbands' cherished memory of their wives. For instance, in the essay "Evening Tides of Love", the husband feels very sad and lonely when evening approaches. He reminds his two children that their mother has been dead for one hundred days.

Although life is full of love, love can turn out to be tragic. Therefore in Xu's writings few people achieve happiness. Time and space are infinite but human beings have their individual limitations. Indian Buddhists believe that both the life of the individual and the history of society follow a cycle of growth, fruition, dissipation and then re-growth.<sup>91</sup> This belief is adapted by Xu in his stories to solve the contradiction between the desire for happiness and the reality of pain. Two stories written in 1921, "The Bird of Destiny" and "Huan chao luanfeng" 换巢鸾凤 [The Phoenixes Change Their Nest], display this inherent contradiction.

In the story "The Bird of Destiny", Minming and Jialing, who are both Buddhists, commit suicide to achieve Nirvana because of the hopelessness of life. Their complete

---

<sup>91</sup> Heinrich Zimmer, *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1946), p. 13.

abandonment of life expresses the belief in the existence of a happy paradise after death. Here is the description of Minming's daydreaming about her visit to a beautiful land with a spiritual guide.

They go to the end of the wall and enter into a forest. The grassland is covered with petals. Birds are singing sweetly in branches. Minming looks up and suddenly sees a couple of beautiful birds sitting in the south corner of a tree. The birds are not singing. Minming asks the spirit guide,

"All the birds are singing except this couple. Why are they silent and what kind of birds are they?"

"They are Mingming niao. I don't know the reason why they are silent." The guide answers.

Minming has a flash of realisation when she hears the three words "Mingming niao". She looks at the birds more closely and says to the guide,

"Aren't they like my best friend Jialing and I?"

"It depends on your thinking." The guide says.<sup>92</sup>

This imaginary visit reveals a belief that people can fulfil their love by killing themselves. The young couple show their passion in seeking for happiness at the cost of ending their lives.

There are similarities in the story "Phoenixes Change Their Nest". "Luan" 鸾 is the female phoenix and "feng" 凤 is the male one. They are traditionally used as a metaphor of husband and wife in traditional China. The protagonist, Zufeng, persuades his lover, Heluan, to elope with him, but once they are together they can find no contentment in each other's company, because of the endlessness of human desire. In the end Zufeng does not return after taking part in a robbery with his partners. Heluan's belief in her pure love and hope for her lover's safe return are shattered. This is the symbol of their failure to solve the contradiction of life and love.

Xu tries to keep a balance between "bitter life" and tragic love. As suggested by the title "The Rain of the Soul in the Empty Mountain", all desires are empty. A human will feel satisfaction only after s/he abandons his/her body and allows his/her soul to become eternal.

---

<sup>92</sup> Xu Dishan, "Mingming niao", in *XDWJ*.

A human either chooses to bear his/her painful life and hope for happiness after Nirvana or commits suicide to end all suffering. Everyone suffers because suffering is a necessary condition of life itself. Therefore, Minming and Jialing gain happiness, while Zufeng and Heluan lose hope.

### ● Nihilism vs Hope: The Burden of Religion

One of the characteristics of Xu Dishan's early writings is expressions of religious belief against the foreign backdrops of South Asian countries like Burma, Singapore and India. In his writings, he described the life of monks and priests and country people in South and Southeast Asia. He created a harmonious fusion of opposites in his work, such as Buddhist doctrine and love.<sup>93</sup> In his works, young Buddhists enjoyed love and even could get married. It is apparent that Xu's life experience in Burma and India made him rethink his philosophy on life and decide to follow in the footsteps of the hermits he met there.

For Xu, the locus classics of eremitism was the young Indian prince Sakyamuni, who isolated himself on a hillside in order to meditate, with only one head of wheat and one of hemp to eat each day for the six long years that he stayed there. After six years of penance, his body was like a dried tree.<sup>94</sup> This was the first stage of his cultivation to become the Buddha, which relates to Xu's attitude toward life. Xu believes that a human is imprisoned in his/her mind because s/he has placed too much value on material desires and wishes. If one can lead a secluded life and neglect all social trappings, then and only then can come freedom from frustration and sadness. Xu followed this style of life. When studying religious philosophy at university, he spent a great deal of time learning Sanskrit. He did not get involved in university social life and always gave others the impression of being a shadowy solitary figure.<sup>95</sup>

The Buddhist goal of emptiness and nothingness and the emphasis on man's mortal soul

---

<sup>93</sup> Shen Congwen, "Lun Luohuasheng" 论落花生 [On Luohuasheng], in *Shen Congwen wenji* 沈从文文集 [Literary Works of Shen Congwen] (Guangzhou: Huacheng chubanshe, 1984), pp. 103-04.

<sup>94</sup> Hampden C. Du Bose, *The Dragon, Image and Demon: The Three Religions of China, Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism Giving an Account of the Mythology, Idolatry and Demonolatry of the Chinese* (Richmond: The Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1899), p. 152.

<sup>95</sup> Mao Dun, "Luohuasheng lun" 落花生论 [On Luohuasheng], in *Wenxue* 文学 [Literature], no. 3 (October, 1934): 4.

in Xu's early writings arouse a sense of nihilism. It is difficult to get any positive inspiration from Xu's works. The prevailing image in the collection *KSLY* is that of a desolate man in his middle age. In the short story "Haijiao de gu xing" 海角的孤星 [The Lonely Star of the Cape] (1923), Xu wrote about his chance shipboard meeting with a sick widower. The widower had had three years of happy times with his wife on an isolated island. She dies because he cannot get her to hospital in time when she feels ill. He tells the author that he is like a lonely star and feels very sad about his wife's death. Suffering from a serious disease, he dies on the ship after a small storm. During the widower's shipboard funeral, an Indian man suggests that women are evil and they should sacrifice the widower's little daughter to the god of the River Ka [*Jia he shen* 迦河神] to gain blessings from heaven. Xu criticised his belief. At the end of the story, he described the image of a beautiful star hanging above the surface of the sea, symbolising a gleam of hope for the little girl.

Xu enjoyed the hermit lifestyle for several years and many have considered this as evidence of his honesty and bravery, in his effort to understand suffering via Buddhism rather than just giving up. He dared to elaborate on and analyse pain in his writings and finally discovered that life would cease to be bitter if love was cherished and people were able to see through the vanity of society, which was expressed in the title "Kong shan ling yu" 空山灵雨: the rain of the soul in the empty mountain.

Apart from his affinity with the Buddhist negation of worldly life, Xu also expressed a positive attitude towards the secular life in his early writings. Xu accepted suffering in reality and struggled peacefully in hope for the future. Buddhists should seek escape from the secular world, which contains sin and evil. One cannot enter paradise until s/he atones for all his/her crimes. The secular world in Xu's early writings not only contains evil and demons but also hope and justice. Two stories "Ku yang sheng hua" 枯杨生花 [A Wither Poplar Blossoms] (1924) and "Tao Jinni" 桃金娘 [The Woman Tao Jinni] (1930) are two examples.

A second, a minute, a month and a year are mechanical units of time.  
Over the years white hair and withered skin compose an old body.



Who has ever seen white hair grow in the heart or  
The skin of the heart to become withered?  
The flowers in the heart are always blossoming.  
Though they eat like parasites in an old, sad and sick body,  
They are still dazzlingly brilliant.  
In that case,  
Who can say that the blossom of a dried poplar lasts for only a short period?<sup>96</sup>

The above poem shows the main theme of the story “A Wither Poplar Blossoms”. Xu describes the peaceful life of an old woman named Yungu and her daughter-in-law in a small village near the sea. The men are always out fishing to make a living and seldom at home. Yungu and her daughter-in-law are waiting for their husbands’ return but never hear any news. They do not give up hope, especially Yungu who has waited her whole lifetime. Yungu’s daughter-in-law dies in an accident. Yungu experiences many misfortunes. Then she meets an old fisherman, who was her lover long ago. The author ends the story at their meeting and does not give any clue about their future. Readers can expect that they begin to love again and find happiness together.

In the story “The Woman Tao Jinniāng”, Xu writes about how an orphan becomes the chief of a tribe in the south of Fujian. When Jinniāng’s parents die in a storm, the villagers believe that it is a punishment delivered by the gods. Out of fear of retribution, no one is willing to speak or look at the orphan, except her aunt. Jinniāng grows up to be a beautiful woman who is good at weaving cotton cloth. She is so diligent and competent that even the daughter of their chief feels jealous of her. But she never holds a grudge against the villagers though they mistreat her and spurn her. Finally, Jinniāng rescues all the villagers from a conflagration caused by the old chief’s daughter and is elected as the new chief.

Both Jinniāng and Yungu suffer a lot during their lives, but they live their own lives and always face up to misfortune with a smile. They struggle against misfortune and mistreatment without violence. This is a type of character that Xu approves of in his writings.

Following the hermit’s philosophy, Xu criticises material desires and secular lives. At

---

<sup>96</sup> Xu Dishan, “A Wither Poplar Blossoms”, in *XDWJ*.

the same time, he cares about the fate of humans in the secular world: he is hopeful about human life and supports a non-violent struggle against misfortune. This attitude may reveal another part of modern Chinese writers' contradictory thinking which is different from the hermit. It is indeed a variety of sinified Buddhism, which might be influenced by Western Christianity at the beginning of the twentieth century.

### ● Buddhist, Humanist and Christian: A Person of Mixed Cultures

Three religious beliefs influenced Xu's early writings and his attitude toward life: Buddhism, Daoism and Christianity. Buddhism originated in India and spread to China. There it was influenced by Chinese culture and developed into what is known as Chinese Buddhism. Xu came from a Buddhist family and he studied Buddhist philosophy and Sanskrit in London, Burma and India. He was a Christian for a short period though he later renounced this religion. One of his research interests was comparative religion. His style of life was more Daoist and he edited *Zhongguo daojiao shi* 中国道教史 [The History of Chinese Daoism]. Buddhist thinking is the most important characteristic of Xu's early writings. In addition, he was attracted to the many myths in the Hindu religion.

Xu adapted many images and legends in Buddhist scripture. The title of his first story "Mingming niao" [The Bird of Destiny] is from a Buddhist story, being a translation of the Sanskrit word *jivajivaka*, referring to a mythical bird which has two heads, one body and the same fate.<sup>97</sup> In the Buddhist story, the two heads of the bird fight for the one body and finally they eat poison and perish together. Xu used the image of the two birds to express a new meaning. In the story, the birds symbolise the young couple Minming and Jialing, who share the same religious belief and have the same fate. Xu described the natural scenery of Burma as the religious background of the story. In Burma, parents in rich families will send their sons to local temples to study Buddhism for several years for spiritual cultivation. Jialing is a student in a local Buddhist school, the *Falum* 法轮 [the wheel of birth and death] School, when the story begins.

---

<sup>97</sup> The Sanskrit word "jivajivaka" is also translated phonetically as *shi po shi po jia* 释婆释婆迦. See Ding Fubao, *Foxue da cidian* 佛学大辞典 [The Dictionary of Buddhism] (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1984), p. 679.



In an essay of the collection *KSLY* called “Qibaochi shang de xiangsi” 七宝池上的相思 [Lovesickness on Qibao Pond] Xu expressed his yearning for his dead wife. He imagined that his wife missed the secular world (more specially Xu himself), though she was living in the Buddhist Western Paradise after she died,<sup>98</sup> and that she wept beside Qibao Pond.<sup>99</sup> Buddha heard her crying and sent the mythical bird *Jialingpinjia* 迦陵频伽 to ask her about her grief.<sup>100</sup> According to Xu’s description, the Western Paradise is a place full of bamboos and trees on which leaves and flowers grow in pairs. There is music in the air: the choirs of the Devas, harps tuned by invisible hands and sweet voices in the aerial vaults.<sup>101</sup>

Secondly, some images in Hindu myths are adapted by Xu in his early writings. The story “Tihu tiannü” 醍醐天女 [The Goddess of the Sea of Finest Cream] was published in 1923, before Xu had been to India, but he was already quite familiar with Hindu myths. At the beginning of the story, Xu wrote as follows:

It is said that Lakshmi is born and risen in the Sea of Finest Cream. She is mother of the God of Love and wife of the God Vishnu. All Indians praise her when they talk about her stories.<sup>102</sup>

Xu used the Hindu legend about the event of the gods’ stirring of the Sea of Finest Cream. The gods Brahma and Asura organise the activity of stirring the Sea of Finest Cream to get “The Dew of Life”. With the help of the dragon Vasuki, they use Mandara Mountain as a pestle. Finally, the gods not only get “The Dew of Life” but also find two Goddesses, Varuni (the Goddess of Rice and Wine) and Lakshmi, in the sea.<sup>103</sup> Lakshmi, also known as the Goddess of Auspiciousness and Beauty, is the wife of Vishnu, who is one of the three main gods of Hindu myth. Hindus worship Lakshmi in the belief that she can bring them peace and wealth. As with the “mingming niao” 命命鸟 [Jivajiva], Lakshmi’s image in Xu’s story

---

<sup>98</sup> *Sukhavati* in Sanskrit: humans can enter paradise, where riches will be given to the poor; office will be given to the lowly; those who desire health, long life or sons can fulfil their dreams by their cultivation.

<sup>99</sup> A pond located in the Western Paradise.

<sup>100</sup> The *jialingpinjia* 迦陵频伽 (phonetic translation from Sanskrit [kalavinka]) lived on a snowy mountain and was famous for its beautiful singing.

<sup>101</sup> Xu Dishan, “Lovesickness on Qibao Pond”, in *KSLY*.

<sup>102</sup> Xu Dishan, “The Goddess of the Sea of Finest Cream”, in *XDXY*.

<sup>103</sup> The legend can be found in *Mohepoluoduo chahua xuan* 摩可婆罗多插画选 [Illustrated Edition of *Mahabharata*] (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1987).

has a new meaning. Xu wrote about a Hindu woman who made every effort to rescue her injured husband, praising her bravery and love for her husband. The woman symbolises the Goddess Lakshmi in the story.

The aim of Indian Buddhism is to learn the secret of “entanglement” and to find a reality outside the emotional and intellectual convolutions that enwrap our conscious being.<sup>104</sup> Buddhist practice focuses on individual cultivation to escape from transmigration,<sup>105</sup> standing aloof from the secular world and accepting suffering. When Buddhism was introduced to China, it developed into different branches influenced by traditional Chinese culture. The Buddhist thinking in Xu’s early writings is combined with Daoist beliefs, which has a more flexible and optimistic attitude toward life and the secular world.

A good example is the short essay “She” 蛇 [The Snake] in *KSLY*, which is about the author’s fear of a viper under a tree. He and the viper are equally startled when they meet. Xu tells this to his wife and his wife comments that,

If you stay still, there will be no danger. In your eyes, it is poisonous; in the viper’s eyes, you are more poisonous.<sup>106</sup>

The story represents ecological balance because of the fear among different kinds of living things. Daoism emphasises the harmonious relationship among different kinds of living things in the natural environment.

Xu wrote a critical review of *Laozi* 老子 [The Book of Master Lao] in which he expressed his understanding about Buddhism and Daoism. According to Xu, human beings cannot triumph over nature and it is worthless fighting or resisting as a way of solving problems. He said that tragedy happened everyday and everywhere and life was full of pain

---

<sup>104</sup> Heinrich Zimmer, *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1946), p. 26.

<sup>105</sup> Transmigration refers to the wheel of the law in Buddhism. In this wheel there are six ranks: insects, fish, birds, animals, poor men and mandarins. It is not necessary to go in order through the six paths, but one may go from the highest to the lowest and from the lowest to the highest. All sentient creatures are bound to this revolving wheel. See Ding Fubao, *Foxue da cidian* [The Dictionary of Buddhism] (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1984), p. 567.

<sup>106</sup> Xu Dishan, “The Snake”, in *KSLY*.

and suffering; there was no use complaining for these were inevitable phenomena.<sup>107</sup> Xu holds a sensible and optimistic view on life. Life is a natural process from birth to death. To Xu, this is human fate and cannot be resisted. People can only do what they are capable of in a limited scope and once they have decided on a course of action they should carry out the plan actively.

Xu was also a Christian for a short period before the 1920s, but he gradually found that some doctrines were against his own philosophy so he rejected Christianity in favour of Buddhism. Readers can sense some critical thinking on Christianity in his early writings. Two protagonists Xiguan and Shangjie in the stories “Shangren fu” 商人妇 [The Merchant’s Wife] (1921) and “The Vain Labours of a Spider” are both Christians. They believe in fatalism and fraternity. They meekly submit to oppression. Even when their husbands betray them, they tolerate this behaviour and merely try to change their husband’s thinking by persuasion and love. As Shangjie says,

There is no difference between bitterness and happiness among all things in the world: when you are living through an experience, it tastes bitter; when you are imagining the experience, it is sweet; when you are facing up to something, it tastes bitter but when you recall the same experience, you remember it with happiness.<sup>108</sup>

In conclusion, Xu is a person of mixed cultural influence, having been influenced by India, China and Western countries. In his early writings, he expresses his understanding of “bitter life” and individual cultivation using Buddhism for reference, but his attitude and solution to overcome the bitterness are from some beliefs in Daoism. He holds critical thinking on Christianity, which gives readers another angle for reflection on life.

### ● Mysticism: Estrangement and Loneliness

Religious beliefs, folk legends and the foreign background of Xu’s early writings give readers a taste of mysticism. The last part of Xu’s mythic consciousness is his exploration of

---

<sup>107</sup> Xu Dishan, *XDWJ*, p. 828.

<sup>108</sup> Xu Dishan, “The Merchant’s Wife”, in *XDWJ*.

estrangement and misunderstanding among people and his display of a psychological need: the need to overcome the feeling of separateness. At the beginning of Xu's writing career, he had already tried to reveal estrangement among people. In the first story "The Bird of Destiny" he not only describes the contradictions between Minming and her father and the estrangement between Jialing and his family, but also the lack of understanding between the two lovers. Although they choose to end their lives together as a kind of sacrifice and share the same religious belief, the causes of their deaths are different. Minming sees through love's impermanence and estrangement among people as a result of her imaginary visit to a dreamland, then decides to abandon the secular world; while Jialing's reasons are curiosity about the Western Paradise and unwillingness to leave Minming alone. The two silent birds in the story symbolise the estrangement between Minming and Jialing. "Keeping silent" then also signals the difficulties in effectively communicating with each other.

In 1930, Xu wrote two fairy tales for children, which may be inspired by some South Asian legends he had read. One is "The Firefly Lamp" and the other is "The Woman Tao Jinniāng". The story "The Firefly Lamp" is about Prince Nansheng's adventures. Nansheng wishes to lead troops in defence of his country, but first he has to solve a difficult problem posed by his father: how to light a lamp without wax or oil. He cannot find any solution and so the troops of his country are defeated and he becomes a captive. With the help of the princess of the enemy state and her servant, Prince Nansheng escapes from prison and uses a lamp filled with shining fireflies to go back to his motherland and become the new king.

This is a legendary tale with a happy ending, but estrangement among the characters is still evident. First, the old king tries to exacerbate the conflict between his son and himself by posing an insoluble problem rather than communicating with his son. Secondly, Princess Yuhua meets Nansheng on a dark night and falls in love with him, without knowing anything about him. They continue to meet on dark nights and never see each other clearly until the end of the story. Thirdly, the princess' parents do not know why their daughter behaves so strangely at night and do not even try to find out, even though they feel curious. It seems that there are barriers in communication between these people. Whether they are lovers or family

members, it is difficult for them to understand each other. The image of fireflies in the lantern represents the author's wish to enlighten them. Little communication means living in darkness, hopelessness and ignorance and Xu believed that his characters needed light, so Nansheng fulfils his dream with the help of the firefly lamp.

In Xu's eyes, estrangement among the people in his stories is hard to explain but exists everywhere. This thinking on the one side constructs a mysterious atmosphere for stories, on the other side it reveals Xu's attitude toward life: there is no way to eliminate estrangement. The only effort that people can make is to cut down the distance between their inner worlds; one can never get rid of the distance altogether. Therefore, people are cold-hearted and always feel lonely.

The feeling of loneliness and the need to overcome separateness are described in the story of "The Woman Tao Jinniāng". Jinniāng is an orphan. The villagers believe that her parents were cursed to death by gods so no one dared talk to her. This is the first layer of Jinniāng's loneliness: she is afraid of being detested by her compatriots. As with most heroes and heroines, Jinniāng is a woman with a perfect body and a beautiful mind. She is so beautiful and capable that every man in the village admires her but no one has the courage to court her. This is the deeper layer of Jinniāng's loneliness: she cannot join any community to enjoy friendship. She never complains about life and is always ready to help others partly because she holds an optimistic attitude toward life and partly because she has a strong desire to overcome the feeling of separateness.

Although the villagers eventually accept Jinniāng as one of them because of her skillful weaving, they always keep a distance and hold a detached view of her. The folk song that the local young men sing several times in the story reveals the situation.

Old peach trees become a pile of dried branches,  
Jinniāng's weaving is valuable as treasure.  
Peach trees can be planted every year,  
No one knows the direction in which Jinniāng has gone.<sup>109</sup>

---

<sup>109</sup> Xu Dishan, "The Woman Tao Jinniāng", in *XDWJ*.

The weaving is a medium for Jinniang to join her tribe so she works very hard and believes that villagers will accept her one day. With this belief Jinniang manages to find happiness in life and she believes that she will not be isolated for long.

Xu Dishan believes that every individual has its own spiritual world, into which others are not allowed to pry. People have to bear the feeling of loneliness as a cost of keeping their privacy. As he wrote in the essay “Wufa toudi zhi youjian” 无法投递之邮件 [An Undeliverable Letter] (1923),

I understand him very well. I understand you too. But I would like to remind you that you should not go forward even by one step even when you are showing your estranged friendship. For the final destination is always located on the other side of the world, which is higher, further and darker, and we cannot arrive there by a normal vessel or vehicle.<sup>110</sup>

The feeling of loneliness comes not only from estrangement among different people, but also from the isolation of a human's inner world. Once people start to comprehend life, they protect themselves from others more intentionally. No matter with whom they stay, their feeling of loneliness can never be overcome. Similarly, because of estrangement readers find difficulty in understanding the characters' unreasonable insistence and optimism in Xu's writings, such as Minming and Jialing, Prince Nansheng and Princess Yuhua, Yungu and so on. Xu derives this aspect of his philosophy from Daoism, which also gives his writings a mystical flavour. In *Zhuangzi* 庄子 [The Book of Master Zhuang], there is a saying: “If you are not the fish, how can you know the joy of the fish? 子非鱼，焉知鱼之乐？” Xu agrees that estrangement and loneliness always accompany each human being.

## ● Summary

Xu Dishan balances the contradictions in his thinking via a form of self-comfort. Influenced by Buddhist thinking, Xu regards life as a process full of bitterness and suffering and longs for a paradise after death. Meanwhile, he enjoys life in the secular world with its love and its

---

<sup>110</sup> Xu Dishan, “An Undeliverable Letter”, in *XDWJ*.



warmth. On the one hand, he writes about estrangement among people; on the other hand, he praises people's optimistic attitude toward life in his stories. He holds a dialectical view of life and accepts all pain without complaint. The religious beliefs of Buddhism, Daoism and Christianity provide not only a mysterious atmosphere for Xu's early writings, but also a reliable support for the vulnerable hearts of the characters in his stories.

Xu does not accept religious beliefs blindly; instead, he carefully considers them and incorporates parts of them into his own understanding of life. Thus, he faces up to life in good humour rather than negates the whole process of life. The human's intense fear of death, his/her strong desire to postpone it and his/her deep sorrow at the departure of loved ones belie the optimistic creed.<sup>111</sup> Even in tough situations, characters in Xu's stories still hope for a bright future and dream of happiness. If Minming and Jialing did not hold such a strong faith that they would achieve an afterlife in the Western Paradise and gain happiness, they would not have ended their lives. If Zufeng and Heluan did not have such a strong desire for happiness, Heluan would not have let her lover Zufeng carry out a dangerous robbery and finally lose his life.

Xu also adapted many magical elements from myth and legend in his early writings. On the psychological side magic leads to a mental integration, to that optimism and confidence in the face of danger which has won many a battle with nature or with human foes. Socially, by giving leadership to one person, it has established organisation in ancient times when organized and effective action is of supreme importance.<sup>112</sup> As the story "The Firefly Lamp" describes, it proposes that man can succeed by firm decision and a sort of magical power: with the help of fireflies Prince Nansheng takes back his country from the control of an enemy state and finally leads a happy life with his wife. The magic power here is the outcome and the correlation of man's intelligent adjustment to his environment which makes him the master thereof.

After 1926, when Xu came back from abroad, his writings increasingly moved from an imaginary paradise to a secular world. There are still religious theories and mystery in his

---

<sup>111</sup> Bronislaw Malinowski, *Myth in Primitive Psychology* (Connecticut: Negro University Press, 1971), p. 77.

<sup>112</sup> Bronislaw Malinowski, *Sex, Culture and Myth* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1963), p. 189.

writings, where he agrees that one must identify some kind of metaphysical religious foundation.<sup>113</sup> However, from that time on, Xu cared more about real life than his own philosophy. Mythical stories in Xu's writings simply serve as an attraction to readers or emphasise a theme, as in the legendary story of Tao Jinniang, which reveals human relationship in a community.

From Mao Dun and Shen Congwen onwards, critics and scholars have followed with interest the writings of Xu Dishan. There are generally three kinds of comments on Xu's early writings. Some critics think that in most of his stories Xu concentrated on the negative side of life. Admittedly, pain in life does appear in almost all of his writings directly or indirectly, which contributes to the dark and oppressive quality that his works convey. Critics also rightly claim that the mythical atmosphere of Xu's stories reveals a certain nihilism, whereby characters are tempted by death because of the promise of a better future in the hereafter. Yet scholars have also suggested that some of his mythical stories are so idealistic and fantastical that they may be reasonably put aside because readers cannot see how the story relates to them and hence feel no inclination to heed Xu's cautionary tales.<sup>114</sup> This latter comment is unfair to Xu, who makes it possible for readers to distinguish between myth and reality and provides stories that linger in their symbolism, allowing for a deeper understanding on each reading. Readers can appreciate that the legendary adventure of Prince Nansheng in the story "The Firefly Lamp" serves as the medium for Xu to display people's experiences and relations. The plot of animals (fireflies) serving as a help to the hero in his victorious return to the motherland can be traced back in many myths. Xu was not alone in describing life's tragedy and pain, but writers of the 1920s seldom described the ongoing suffering and unsatisfactory reality with such grace and imagination. Xu Dishan is a good example of a writer who dealt with the suffering of secular life in a poetic and mythic manner.

---

<sup>113</sup> William Righter, *Myth and Literature* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), p. 20.

<sup>114</sup> Charles Eliot, *Hinduism and Buddhism: An Historical Sketch*, Vol. 1 (London: Edward Arnold & Co., 1921), p. 326.

### Section 3, Adaptation of Chinese Mythology in the Poetry of Mao Zedong

Mao Zedong (1893-1976) began to write poems in 1906, when he was only thirteen years old. His last poem was finished in 1976. So far as we know, there are a total of one hundred and four poems written by him. This section discusses the adaptation of Chinese mythology in Mao Zedong's poetic creation before 1966. The main reference is *Mao Zedong shici xuan* 毛泽东诗词选 [Selected Poems of Mao Zedong] (1986), which contains fifty poems. The second reference is the website *The Complete Poetry of Chairman Mao* 毛主席诗词(全集) (<http://www.mzdthought.com/sc/scindex.htm>), which includes all Mao's extant poems. The translation used below comes from *Poems of Mao Tse-tung* (1966), published by Eastern Horizon Press in Hong Kong and Nancy T. Lin's version *Reverberations: A New Translation of Complete Poems of Mao Tse-tung with Notes by Nancy T. Lin* (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing Co., 1980), in the following cited as *PMT* and *Reverberations* respectively.

Mao Zedong, a middle class peasant's son of a town of Shaoshan in Hunan, was sent to be taught how to read and write at the age of seven. From that time the classical fiction of the Ming and Qing dynasties, such as *Xiyouji* 西游记 [The Journey to the West], *Shuihu zhuan* 水浒传 [The Water Margin] and *Sanguo yanyi* 三国演义 [The Romance of the Three Kingdoms] became influential upon him. In the summer of 1911 Mao was admitted into the Xiangxiang Middle School of Changsha. There, in the provincial capital, he began to absorb Sun Yatsen's political thought and read magazines from Beijing, including the famous *New Youth*. The new trends of thought may not have penetrated into the less enlightened parts of Hunan, but Mao's enthusiasm for revolution and literary learning had emerged.

Arguably, Mao Zedong's poetic abilities would have secured him a place in modern Chinese literature independent of his position in the political sphere. Mao had always been interested in the nature of men, of human society, of China, the world and the universe.<sup>115</sup> All Mao's poems contain a wealth of allusions: some referring to classical literature, others to Chinese myths and legends and local folk cultures, and yet others to ancient and modern

---

<sup>115</sup> Jerome Chen, *Mao and the Chinese Revolution* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 318.

historical events. Especially in the Cultural Revolution era, these classical and mythical elements in Mao's poems became the only resource for readers to learn Chinese history and China's classical heritage, including some basic knowledge of traditional Chinese poetry. During a period in which the New Poetry in vernacular Chinese flourished, Mao's use of traditional form, idioms and allusions with his own notes makes him a special case for research.

Mao Zedong received in his youth a more than adequate training in Chinese classics, so much so that whenever he wanted to make a veiled criticism or to express his sentiments through a classical parallel, he had ample facility to do so.<sup>116</sup> The years from 1920 to 1927 were the first phase of Mao's career as a writer using the vernacular with three ingredients at his disposal: Europeanisation, the classical heritage and colloquialism. In his case of poetry writing, there was more classical heritage than Europeanization. The classical heritage to Mao Zedong is more than traditional Chinese literature, but also his own understanding of Chinese civilisation. Chinese myths are an important part. From Mao Zedong's point of view, the myriad changes in mythology delight people because they imaginatively picture man's conquest of the forces of nature and the best myths possess "eternal charm"; in myths or legends, the aspects constituting a contradiction have only an imaginary identity, not a concrete identity, which provides more space for people to think.<sup>117</sup> Below we will see how Mao adapts Chinese myths and historical events into his poems.

### ● Mythological Images

Inheriting traditional Chinese poetry's characteristic of the leisurely and unfettered spirit of Daoism, Mao Zedong used two types of imagery most frequently in his poems: one is natural scenery, such as a vast land of enchanting beauty; the other is things and figures with symbolic or mythical meanings. Both come from myths and legends. Mao's favourite image is heaven (the sky/the blue), which appears sixty-nine times in his poems. Heaven in Mao's poems is always described as resplendent scenery in autumn with a magnificent expanse,

---

<sup>116</sup> Jerome Chen, *Mao Papers: Anthology and Bibliography* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. xiii.

<sup>117</sup> Mao Zedong, *Mao Tse-tung on Literature and Art* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1960), p. 46.

hinting at a kind of titanic will amid the vicissitudes of life in this world. Examples are as follows:

Trees of tumultuous red singe the frosty sky      万木霜天红烂漫，  
As the wrath of the titans mounts to heaven.<sup>118</sup>      天兵怒气冲霄汉。

Once a year in autumn the winds blow fierce,      一年一度秋风劲，  
Unlike the spring day;      不似春光，  
Yet better than the spring day      胜似春光，  
As sea and sky and overall frost infinitely meet.<sup>119</sup>      寥廓江天万里霜。

I lost my proud Yang,      我失骄杨君失柳，  
You your dear Liu.        
Light as *yangliu* in the wind, they soar      杨柳轻飏直上重霄九。  
Straight to the Realm beyond the blue.<sup>120</sup>

The following data show Mao's use of natural scenery in his poems: mountains and hills appear fifty-three times; wind appears forty times; rivers appear twenty-three times; waves appear fourteen times; rain appears twelve times; snow appears thirteen times and frost eight times. Some of the natural scenery is aesthetically allusive and hyperbolic, similar to primitive peoples' praise of nature in myths and legends. For instance, "thundering storm", "the Magic Cord of myriad yards", "thousands of craggy cliffs", "three million dragons of alabaster" and "mountains dance like silver serpents" all eulogise the power and beauty of nature.

Mao's skill in using folk associations, usually combining the classical language and literary allusions with the everyday vernacular, does not prevent him from creating metaphors. One such cluster centres on the image of a mountain: a towering structure sometimes endowed with life force, rearing like "ten thousand horses drunk with battle",

<sup>118</sup> Nancy T. Lin's translation of Mao's poem "Yu jia ao: Fan diyici da weijiao" 渔家傲·反第一次大“围剿” [Breaking through the First "Encirclement"], spring 1931, in *Reverberations*, p. 23.

<sup>119</sup> Wong Man's translation of Mao's poem "Cai sangzi: Chongyang" 采桑子·重阳 [The "Double-Ninth" Festival], October, 1929, in *PMT*, p. 12.

<sup>120</sup> Nancy T. Lin's translation of Mao's poem "Die lian hua: Da Li Shuyi" 蝶恋花·答李淑一 [Reply to Li Shu-yi], May 11, 1957, in *Reverberations*, p. 54.

“piecing the green heavens”, which would topple without its support. The vast and mighty Kunlun Mountain, standing between Mao and the terminus of the Long March in 1935, endured beyond mortal times, challenging man’s temporality. If Mao could only lean on heaven to draw his “precious sword”, then he could slice Kunlun in three and share its energy with the world to realize the era of great peace.

Legendary figures and mythic things and events also appear frequently in Mao’s poems.

The sky would have wrinkled with age	天若有情天亦老，
Had it trifled with sentiments.	
What marks the course of men	人间正道是沧桑。
Is the Flood-tides and Mulberry-fields. <sup>121</sup>	

In this poem, Flood-tides and Mulberry-fields is a traditional allusion, meaning the vicissitudes of the transient world, derived from the legend of the fairy lady Magu 麻姑 who has eternal life and will never get old. She had seen the surging sea dry up and turn into fields grown with mulberry trees three times. The legendary figure Magu is first recorded in Ge Hong (284?-363)’s *Shenxian zhuan: Magu zhuan* 神仙传·麻姑传 [Biographies of the Immortals: The Biography of Fairy Magu] and later elaborated in Liu Jingshu (390?-470)’s *Yi yuan* 异苑 [A Supernatural World]. The metaphor is used here to suggest the law of change as the inexorable dialectic of nature and history. Such mythical places can be seen in other poems like “Qilü: Da youren” 七律·答友人 [Reply to a Friend] (1961). In this poem, we can see the legendary place “the Nine Mounts” 九嶷山 in south Hunan, where the legendary king Shun 舜 is said to have died while making an inspection tour of the region. According to the classics of Daoism, “Dongting Lake” 洞庭湖, “the Long Island” 长岛 and “the Land of Furong (lotus)” 芙蓉国 in the poem “Reply to a Friend” are all mythical places inhabited by immortals and female celestials. “Fairy Cave” 仙人洞 in the poem “Qijue: Wei Li Jin tongzhi ti suo she Lushan xianrendong zhao” 七绝·为李进同志题所摄庐山仙人洞照 [Fairy Cave, Lushan: Inscription on a Photograph by Comrade Li Jintong] (September 9

---

<sup>121</sup> Nancy T. Lin’s translation of Mao’s poem “Qilü: Renmin jiefangjun zhanling Nanjing” 七律·人民解放军占领南京 [Occupation of Nanjing by the People’s Liberation Army], April 1949, in *Reverberations*, p. 43.

1961) and “the Isle of Immortals with palaces of jade” 仙山琼阁 in “Nian nu jiao: Niao'er wenda” 念奴娇·鸟儿问答 [Two Birds: A Dialogue] (autumn 1965) are both derived from an ancient legend, in which Emperor Wu of the Han dynasty 汉武帝 vainly sought to procure the elixir of life.

Mythical animals are another important type of mythological image in Mao's poems.

The whale-roc,	鲲鹏展翅,
Wings spreading,	
Strikes and soars	
Ninety thousand <i>li</i> up	九万里,
Over the goat's horn of the hurricane. <sup>122</sup>	翻动扶摇羊角。
We are the hosts of June's fire	
Out to scorch the sinful and corrupt.	六月天兵惩腐恶,
The Magic Cord of myriad yards in our hands,	
The rocs and whales we'll surely truss. <sup>123</sup>	万丈长缨要把鲲鹏缚。

The “whale-roc” which appears three times in Mao's poems is a parable from *Zhuangzi: Xiaoyao you* 庄子·逍遥游 [A Happy Excursion], which tells of a whale in the North Sea transforming into a giant roc, who in preparation for the migration to the South Sea soared ninety thousand miles up in the sky over the “goat's horn” of the hurricane,<sup>124</sup> and who was mocked for this titanic undertaking by a tiny sparrow smugly stalled in its bush.

The golden crane appears twice in Mao's poems, in “Pusa man: Huang he lou” 菩萨蛮·黄鹤楼 [Golden Crane Tower] (spring 1927) and “Qilü: Deng Lushan” 七律·登庐山 [Ascending Lushan] (1 July 1959). It is a legendary bird ridden by a Daoist immortal.<sup>125</sup> The “fluffy hen”, the “sparrow” and the “giant roc” in “Qilü: Diao Luo Ronghuan tongzhi” 七律·吊罗荣桓同志 [On the Death of Comrade Lo Jung-huan] (December 1963) derive from I. A. Krylov's fable, in which an eagle happened to alight on the top of a hayloft and was

<sup>122</sup> Nancy T. Lin's translation of Mao's poem “Nian nu jiao: Niao'er wenda” [Two Birds: A Dialogue], autumn 1965, in *Reverberations*, p. 81.

<sup>123</sup> Nancy T. Lin's translation of Mao's poem “Die lian hua: Cong Tingzhou xiang Changsha” 蝶恋花·从汀州向长沙 [From Tingzhou to Changsha], July 1930, in *Reverberations*, p. 21.

<sup>124</sup> Ma Jibin and Pu Ren, ed., *Mao Zedong zhuzuo yinyu, chengyu, diangu cidian* 毛泽东著作引语、成语、典故辞典 [Dictionary of Quotations, Idioms and Allusion in Mao Zedong's Works] (Beijing: Zhongguo wenlian chubanshe, 1997), pp. 286, 541.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 460.

ridiculed by a hen for having no more ability to fly higher than any common fowl.<sup>126</sup>

Moreover, “the dragons of alabaster” in “Nian nu jiao: Kunlun” 念奴娇·昆仑 [Kunlun] (October 1935) is an image the poet borrowed from Chinese myth to describe snow-covered mountains. “The Green Dragon” in “Qing ping le: Liupanshan” 清平乐·六盘山 [Mount Liupan] (October 1935) was borrowed from *Shiji: Tianguan shu* 史记·天官书 [Historical Records: Astrologists] and *Hanshu: Wang Mang zhuan* 汉书·王莽传 [History of the Han Dynasty: Biography of Wang Mang]. It is the name of a star and implies an ill omen.<sup>127</sup> In Mao’s poem, it indicates his enemy: the KMT party. All the above images are samples of the poet’s skill in making political points in terms of symbolisms of myth and nature.

### ● Mythological Symbols

Each mythical story Mao Zedong used in his poems serves as a symbol melded in his thoughts on twentieth century China’s revolution. In his poems, we can find creation myths or cosmogenic myths such as the story between the goddess Nüwa 女娲 and the god Gonggong 共工; nature myths, which include dramatisations of the sun, the moon, the stars and other natural phenomena and their origins, the story of the stars named Cowherd 牛郎 and Weaving Maid 织女 and the legend of Chang E 嫦娥 flying to the moon; myths of conflicts between gods can be seen in the battle between Gonggong and Zhuanxu 顓頊 at Buzhou Mountain 不周山. There are also stories of the Five Emperors and Three Sovereigns 三皇五帝, mythical kings of ancient China; the legend of the tearstained bamboo telling how legendary king Shun’s two consorts E huang 娥皇 and Nüying 女英 lamented the death of their lord on the banks of the Xiang River; the Fairy Maid of Wushan who assumed the form of a fleeting cloud in the morning and of swift rain in the evening and so on. Three types of myth and legend and their symbolic meanings in Mao’s poems will be analysed below: the story of Buzhou Mountain, the legend of the moon goddess and the fairy story of Wushan.

---

<sup>126</sup> Nancy T. Lin, trans., *Reverberations: A New Translation of Complete Poems of Mao Tse-tung with Notes by Nancy T. Lin* (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing Co., 1980), p. 88.

<sup>127</sup> Ma Jibin and Pu Ren, ed., *Mao Zedong zhuzuo yinyu, chengyu, diangu cidian* [Dictionary of Quotations, Idioms and Allusion in Mao Zedong’s Works] (Beijing: Zhongguo wenlian chubanshe, 1997), pp. 276-77.



Then, blasts of reeking smoke from mid-air:	二十万军重入赣，
Back to Jiangxi, a horde of two hundred thousand.	风烟滚滚来天半。
Roused and rallied,	
Workers and peasants, tens of millions,	唤起工农千百万，
Unite in one cause, one mind.	同心干，
O, the restless red flags below Buzhou Mountain! <sup>128</sup>	不周山下红旗乱。

Buzhou Mountain (now known as the Kunlun Mountain) is taken from the ancient myth of Gonggong butting Buzhou Mountain during his fight against the ruling dynasty of Zhuanxu. Gonggong, a descendant of the Flame Emperor 炎帝, wanted to apply his new methods of regulating rivers and watercourses but the ruler Zhuanxu, a descendant of the Yellow Emperor 黄帝, was against the new idea. Being regarded as a rebel, Gonggong also lost support from the common people. He butted Buzhou Mountain to declare his resolution. In using Buzhou Mountain to symbolise the seat of Red power, the poet wrote in a footnote:

Stories differ. I'm in favour of the version in "Astronomical Notes",  
*Huainanzi*, which represents Gonggong as the conquering hero.<sup>129</sup>

In *Huainanzi* 淮南子 [The Writings of the Prince of Huainan],<sup>130</sup> Gonggong butted Buzhou Mountain, breaking the pillars of heaven and snapping the mooring of the earth. Thereupon, the sky tilted to the northwest and with it, the sun, the moon and the stars. Gonggong did not die, he triumphed.

Mao felt that the battle between the two lords and the outcome of heaven and earth turning upside down symbolised earthshaking changes, and the rebellious spirit of Gonggong aroused a sympathetic chord in his heart, so that he directly used this story as a metaphor for the revolution he led. Mao wrote that red flags were fluttering below Buzhou Mountain. It may be noted that the name Gonggong 共工 may be taken to mean "concerted labour", implying that the workers' [*gongren* 工人] CCP [*Gongchandang* 共产党] would win the

<sup>128</sup> Nancy T. Lin's translation of Mao's poem "Yu jia ao: Fan diyici da weijiao" [Breaking through the First "Encirclement"], spring 1931, in *Reverberations*, p. 23.

<sup>129</sup> Nancy T. Lin, trans., *Reverberations: A New Translation of Complete Poems of Mao Tse-tung with Notes by Nancy T. Lin* (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing Co., 1980), p. 24.

<sup>130</sup> The *Huainanzi* is a syncretic Daoist work written in the Former Han dynasty by guests attached to the court of Liu An 刘安, Prince of Huainan (179BC-122BC).

battle just as the hero Gonggong.

Mao used several stories of the moon and stars in his poems. Two mythological symbols, Wu Gang 吴刚 bearing a cup of cassia blossom brew and Chang E flying into the moon, can be seen in the following poem “Reply to Li Shuyi”:

I lost my proud Poplar, You your dear Willow. Poplar and Willow soar to the Ninth Heaven, Straight to the Realm beyond the blue. What, ah, has Wu Gang of the moon brought? In outstretched hands he bears A cup of cassia blossom brew.	我失骄杨君失柳， 杨柳轻飏直上重霄九。 问讯吴刚何所有， 吴刚捧出桂花酒。
Lone Chang E steps out too, Our martyr-souls to entertain. Ample sleeves spreading, she whirls in dance Ten thousand leagues over the sky main. There comes word of Tiger Subdued on earth. Tears of joy fly — Lo, a downpour of celestial rain! <sup>131</sup>	寂寞嫦娥舒广袖， 万里长空且为忠魂舞。 忽报人间曾伏虎， 泪飞顿作倾盆雨。

Wu Gang is a mythical figure condemned to the eternal labour of cutting the huge cassia blossom tree (5,000 feet tall) on the moon, which heals itself after every stroke of his axe. The story became widespread through Duan Chengshi (803?-863)’s *You yang za zu: Tian zhi* 酉阳杂俎·天咫 [Assorted Anecdotes from the Youyang Caves] in the Tang dynasty (618-907).<sup>132</sup> Chang E is known as the moon goddess in Chinese myths and legends, who fled to the moon, choosing to live an eternal solitary life after stealing the elixir of life her husband Hou Yi the Archer 后羿 had received from the Queen of the Western Heaven 西王母. The story was early recorded in *Huainanzi: Lan ming xun* 淮南子·览冥训 [The Idea of Resonance]. Wu Gang and Chang E, as offenders of the powers that be, are apt rebel images

<sup>131</sup> Nancy T. Lin’s translation of Mao’s poem with my slight revision, “Die lian hua: Da Li Shuyi” [Reply to Li Shu-yi], May 11, 1957, in *Reverberations*, p. 54.

<sup>132</sup> Ma Jibin and Pu Ren, ed., *Mao Zedong zhuzuo yinyu, chengyu, diangu cidian* [Dictionary of Quotations, Idioms and Allusion in Mao Zedong’s Works] (Beijing: Zhongguo wenlian chubanshe, 1997), pp. 292-93.

for the occasion of the poem. The poem stands as an example of the poet's imaginative skill in pressing mythical figures and events into modern service, wherein personal sentiment and revolutionist dignity reach a height of dynamic balance.

Referring to Song Yu 宋玉's *Gaotang fu* 高唐赋 [Ode to Gaotang] of the Warring States Period (475BC-221BC), Mao used another mythical story, The Fairy Maid of Wushan, to draw his theme of the relationship between human beings and nature.

A bridge shall fly across, north to south;	一桥飞架南北,
Nature's chasm shall be man's highway.	天堑变通途。
Walls of granite, too,	
Shall rise on the west,	更立西江石壁,
Turning back the Wushan Cloud-and-Rain	截断巫山云雨,
To conjure up placid lakes	
On top of towering gorges.	高峡出平湖。
Wouldn't the Fairy Maid,	
Fair as ever perhaps,	神女应无恙,
Be startled to find her world	
So utterly changed! <sup>133</sup>	当今世界殊。

The phrase "Wushan Cloud-and-Rain" 巫山云雨 was first used by Song Yu in his preface to *The Ode to Gaotang*, depicting how king Huai of the Chu Kingdom 楚怀王 had a dream of meeting the fairy lady of Wushan when he was passing through the town of Gaotang in Sichuan. In Mao's poem, which celebrates the building of the first bridge over the Yangtse River, it symbolises the torrents of the latter. The Fairy Maid is identified in myths as the third daughter of the Flame Emperor, named Yao Ji 瑶姬, who died serving as a valiant aid to the Great Yu 大禹 in regulating China's floods and was buried on the southern slope of Wushan, where on top of Feifeng Peak 飞凤 [Flying Wind] a temple has been built in her honour. The last sentence of the poem reveals the poet's favourite themes of change and the triumph of man over nature.

---

<sup>133</sup> Nancy T. Lin's translation of Mao's poem "Shui diao ge tou: Youyong" 水调歌头·游泳 [Swimming], June 1956, in *Reverberations*, p. 51.

## ● Mythological Thoughts

Chinese myths are concerned with some of the universal themes: the creation and maintenance of natural and cultural orders, disruptions and challenges to them. They also express a spirit of concern and even self-sacrifice for the well-being of humanity on the part of benevolent gods and mythological cultural heroes. The relationship of man, god and nature in myths is also expressed in Mao's poems and those of others of the same generation, such as Guo Moruo (1892-1978). Mao's favourite theme is the triumph of man over nature. Human beings and nature struggle coincide in many of his poems, especially those inspired by the civil war celebrating the Red Army's victory in it.<sup>134</sup>

Mao Zedong championed man's struggle against nature, but he did not thereby deny man's natural being. To him, however, nature as such is inimical where it hinders man's advance: the river to be dammed and the mountain to be moved. Mao combined two traditions: a culturally inherited sense of unity with cosmic forces and a Western-derived notion of Darwinian struggle and Marxist self-determination.<sup>135</sup> Guo Moruo's early poems, such as "Fenghuang niepan" 凤凰涅槃 [The Nirvana of the Phoenixes] and "Taiyang lizan" 太阳礼赞 [Hymn to the Sun], reveal his consciousness of the contrast between the shortness of life and the boundlessness of the universe. Unlike Mao Zedong, he did not separate himself from nature. The individual is simply a part of nature; sometimes s/he is even powerless in the universe.

The myths of primitive peoples did not draw a clear line between man and nature. In their eyes, natural entities such as the sun, the moon, the stars, animals, plants or mountains are similar to themselves, invested with life and emotions.<sup>136</sup> At the same time, nature is different from human beings. It brings sufferings and obstructions. Although Mao and Guo both adapted the theme of the relationship between man and nature in their poems, they held a different understanding of the image of the self. Mao had a strong sense of history, so the historical events he described in his poems were in chronological order, from the mythical

---

<sup>134</sup> Frederic Wakeman JR., *History and Will: Philosophical Perspectives of Mao Tse-tung's Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), p. 89.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>136</sup> Mao Dun, *Shenhua yanjiu* [Studies on Myths] (Tianjin: Baihua wenyi chubanshe, 1981), pp. 60-61.

age (Buzhou Mountain) to the Warring States Period (Confucianism and Daoism) and from the Qin dynasty (the first “empire” in Chinese history) to the CCP-KMT split in 1927. Individuals and nature interacted in history. Moreover, Mao’s fusion of man and nature is especially visible in his poem “Qiltu: Renmin jiefangjun zhanling Nanjing” 七律·人民解放军占领南京 [The Occupation of Nanjing by the People’s Liberation Army] (April 1949).

So track down the desperate foe	宜将剩勇追穷寇，
In a last dash of valor;	
Barter not, The Old Conqueror’s fashion,	不可沽名学霸王。
For an all-too-human name.	
The sky would have wrinkled with age	天若有情天亦老，
Had it trifled with sentiments.	
What marks the course of men	人间正道是沧桑。
Is the Flood-tides and Mulberry-fields. <sup>137</sup>	

This reads as a call for “No Mercy” as the civil war with the KMT is progressive from the historical perspective although it brings people suffering. War is against human nature. But a just cause gives Mao a good excuse. It is this human nature, distinct from natural forces, which realises itself by transforming the outer world. Human and natural struggle once again coincide in Mao’s poems. By contrast, in Guo Moruo’s early poems there is no historical order, social judgements or limitation of time and space. Influenced by pantheism, Guo described the individual and the image of the self as performances of nature in this world. He never mentioned any natural struggle or conflict between man and nature.

Primitive peoples’ view of the world as expressed in myth embodies a curiosity about nature. They imagined that gods live in a compact community in somehow gorgeous mountains such as the Olympus of ancient Greek myth and the Kunlun Mountain of ancient Chinese myth.<sup>138</sup> They were interested in natural change and in unknown places. The spirit of curiosity in Chinese myth is transformed into the spirit of rebels and heroes and the consciousness of temporal change in Mao Zedong’s poems. Rebellious spirit, along with

<sup>137</sup> Nancy T. Lin’s translation of Mao’s poem “Qiltu: Renmin jiefangjun zhanling Nanjing” [Occupation of Nanjing by the People’s Liberation Army], April 1949, in *Reverberations*, p. 43.

<sup>138</sup> Mao Dun, *Shenhua yanjiu* [Studies on Myths] (Tianjin: Baihua wenyi chubanshe, 1981), pp. 167, 170.

hero worship, can also be seen in the early poetry of Guo Moruo. In “Nüshen zhi zaisheng” 女神之再生 [The Rebirth of the Goddesses], Guo depicted the battle between Gonggong and Zhuanxu to symbolise the struggle for control over China that was then going on between the northern and southern warlord factions and the rebirth of the goddesses to symbolise the rise of a new China. The mythical figure Gonggong was described as a hero in Mao’s poem. Mao regarded himself as the rebel Gonggong, fighting against the powerful authority Zhuanxu, who symbolised the leader of the KMT Party: Chiang Kai-shek. Therefore, the adaptation of the same story is more as individual promotion rather than social concern in Mao’s poem. After all, Mao Zedong is not a mythologist; he adapted mythological thoughts to express his literary and political views.

### ● Summary

As in traditional Chinese poetry, figures, stories, proverbs and allusions to Chinese myths, legends and historical events appear frequently in Mao Zedong’s poetry. However, Mao said in his 1957 letter to Zang Kejia (1905-2004),

Up to now I have never wanted to make these things [the poems] known in any formal way, because they are in old style and I was afraid this might encourage a wrong trend and exercise a bad influence on young people. [...] Of course our poetry should be written mainly in the modern form. We may write some verse in classical forms as well, but it would not be advisable to encourage young people to do this, because these forms would cramp their thought and are also difficult to master.<sup>139</sup>

In Mao’s eyes, new poetry is the trend modern poets should follow and poetry does not simply express personal sentiments but also is a weapon for revolution. Poetry is one type of proletarian literature. Proletarian literature is one part of the nation’s revolutionary cause.<sup>140</sup> His poems are different from traditional pieces meditating on the past and using the past to

---

<sup>139</sup> Mao Zedong, “A Letter about Poetry”, in *Mao Tse-tung on Literature and Art* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1960), pp. 135-36.

<sup>140</sup> Zhang Yijiu, *Mao Zedong he shi* 毛泽东和诗 [Mao Zedong and Poetry] (Beijing: Chunqiu chubanshe, 1987), p. 124.

disparage the present. All the mythological images in his poems are for modern service. Mao said in the “Talks at the Yan’an Forum on Literature and Art” that the masses are seen as spontaneously producing their own forms of literature and art, which professional writers and artists must use as a basis on which to proceed. Mao seemed to take for granted a relative harmony between traditional Chinese elite and popular culture.<sup>141</sup> He followed the traditional practice in his poetry and the classical forms left him free to deliver literary judgements on an instinctual level.<sup>142</sup>

Mao Zedong borrowed many images and symbols from old literature to describe natural scenery, giving readers a picture of folk culture in China. The mixing of vernacular parlance and classical allusion is particularly effective in delivering the satirical punch. Combining classical vocabulary with the vernacular and even vulgar is a stroke of literary audacity. Apparently, Mao’s thoughts are thousands of years away from the mythological age. He made use of nature, of nature-in-myths and nature-in-history to express his concern for social reform and political revolution and his experiences of political ambition, personal promotion and feelings. Those poems Mao wrote to give to his friends or reply to their poems are good examples. Just as nature and man co-exist in Mao’s poems, objective history and Mao’s subjective will are described harmoniously, which displays two realms of Mao’s thoughts: the public/social and the private/personal.

Although Mao Zedong regarded writing poetry as a skill that can be learned, not as a gift of sensibility or inspiration that comes mysteriously to a chosen few,<sup>143</sup> the mythological stories in Mao’s poetry actually served as individual promotion for him to make clear that he was the nation’s hero and to predict or praise the revolutionary victory of the Red Army over the authority KMT Party. Those poems Mao wrote to celebrate his army’s victory or to commemorate revolutionary places, such as the Jinggang Mountain, Changsha, the Liupan Mountain, Huichang and the Loushan Pass, are cases in point.

---

<sup>141</sup> Bonnie S. McDougall, *Mao Zedong’s “Talks at the Yan’an Conference on Literature and Art”: A Translation of the 1943 Text with Commentary* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, The University of Michigan, 1980), pp. 17, 3.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

#### **Section 4, Different Understandings of Myth; Different Attitudes toward Myth: Xu Dishan's Early Writings and Mao Zedong's Poetry**

Xu Dishan and Mao Zedong were both born in the last decade of the nineteenth century. They each received a traditional education during their childhood and teenage years. In their youth they witnessed the revolution and social change of the early twentieth century. They were both influenced by the New Culture Movement. However, because of their different family backgrounds, life experiences and interests in different philosophical schools, although they both adopted mythical elements in their literary writings, they held different understandings of China's traditional heritage. Mythical elements played different roles in their writings.

##### ● What is art, what is literature and what is myth?

After his unsettled childhood, Xu Dishan's family settled down in Fujian. Xu completed a formal undergraduate education at Yanjing University and quickly established that his interests lay mainly in religious studies and folklore. He also had the experience of studying and living in Britain and America, doing research under the guidance of Western theories and methodologies in the anthropological field. His early writings before the 1930s do not convey any utilitarian or political purposes. His philosophy appears to conform to the Association for Literary Studies' slogan "art for life's sake". However, his descriptions and thoughts about life are personal and tranquil and do not touch directly upon social problems. Life is a process of self-examination, self-expression and self-perfection. Art is the reflection of several processes of life.

In Xu's early writings, readers may also see various philosophical and religious perspectives: Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism and Christianity. None of them dominates, but the four systems co-exist harmoniously. At the same time, Western culture and Chinese culture keep a balance in his writings. Yu Simu remarks that Xu was enthusiastic about



religious studies, but he never showed any religious prejudice in literary creation.<sup>144</sup> To Xu, his literary creation or translation of literary works were a good help in his research on religion. He confessed in the preface to his translation of Bengali folk tales that he used mythical elements in his stories and translated many Hindu and Bengali myths and legends because he was interested in folklore. He believed that there must be some connections between Chinese folk tales and Hindu tales and that translation could be a help for studies in folklore.<sup>145</sup>

Mao Zedong followed a different way. He did not receive any formal higher education, but witnessed and took part in the first revolution in China of the twentieth century when he was a middle school student in Changsha. Early in 1913, Mao was admitted into the Fourth Teacher Training School, which was merged into the First Teacher Training School that autumn. Mao recalled that he had never been to a university nor had he studied abroad. The groundwork of his knowledge and scholarship was laid in teacher training school.<sup>146</sup> A book that influenced Mao deeply in this period was F. Paulsen's *A System of Ethics*. Mao was influenced by Paulsen's emphasis on self-control and will power.<sup>147</sup> He wrote in his notes to this book that:

Myself is my small being; the universe, my greatest being. The former is my physical being; the latter, my spiritual being.<sup>148</sup>

As Mao began to think about the relationship between physical existence and spiritual being, he was interested in the nature of men and of human society. This point was expressed several times in his poetry. The attack on Confucianism, the demand for democracy and science and the praise for Marxism, which characterised the New Culture Movement, were

---

<sup>144</sup> Yu Simu, *Zuojia Xu Dishan* 作家许地山 [The Writer Xu Dishan], 2 October, 2006. <[http://www.gmw.cn/02blqs/2005-12/07/content\\_362855.htm](http://www.gmw.cn/02blqs/2005-12/07/content_362855.htm)>.

<sup>145</sup> Xu Dishan, trans. and ed., *Mengjiala minjian gushi* 孟加拉民间故事 [Bengali Folk Tales] (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1956), p. 9.

<sup>146</sup> Zhou Shizhao, "Diyi shidan shidai de Mao zhuxi" 第一师范时代的毛主席 [Chairman Mao at the First Teacher Training School], in *Xin guan cha* 新观察 [The New Observation], no. 2 (1951): 17-19.

<sup>147</sup> Jerome Chen, *Mao and the Chinese Revolution* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 44.

<sup>148</sup> Li Rui, *Mao Zedong tongzhi de chuqi geming huodong* 毛泽东同志的初期革命活动 [Comrade Mao's Early Revolutionary Activities] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1957), pp. 38-44. See Jerome Chen's explanation in the bibliography of *Mao and the Chinese Revolution* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965).

accepted by Mao although he did not go onto the road of literary creation. He said: "In my youth, I too engaged in learning from the West."<sup>149</sup>

Because of his research interests, Xu Dishan's attitude toward myth sounds scientific. Like contemporary Chinese folklorists, who emphasised the literary and romantic value of folk culture, Xu regarded myth as a branch of folktale and legend. Although he used many mythic elements in his literary writings, to Xu, myth was primarily a source for comparative studies between the folk cultures of China and India. It was a part of his studies in folklore. His adaptation of myths in his writings is unintentional, especially his early essays. His intention was to express his views and understanding of life. He chose mythic, folk or religious stories as his media because he was familiar with them.

Mao Zedong described art and literature as basically the result of a mental process of "polishing" wherein the greater the degree of polishing the greater the artistic merit of the finished work.<sup>150</sup> Mao's use of Chinese myths, proverbs and legendary figures in his poetry is a way of polishing the writing. Moreover, in Mao's article "Wusi yundong" 五四运动 [The May Fourth Movement] (May 1939), he criticised the May Fourth intellectuals for cutting themselves off from the masses, so that they could accomplish nothing.<sup>151</sup> His negative attitude toward May Fourth literature shows up in his lack of enthusiasm for the new works of the present. He was more interested in the masterpieces of the past.<sup>152</sup> Therefore, traditional elements and the classical poetic forms become his favourites.

In his article "Shenhua he xianshi" 神话和现实 [Myth and Reality] (August 1937), Mao claimed that myths can delight people because they imaginatively embody man's conquest of the forces of nature.<sup>153</sup> Myth's entertainment value, in Mao's eyes, accords with the two requirements for a good piece of literature: to be in the interests of the masses and to

---

<sup>149</sup> Jerome Chen, *Mao and the Chinese Revolution* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 63.

<sup>150</sup> Bonnie S. McDougall, *Mao Zedong's "Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art": A Translation of the 1943 Text with Commentary* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, The University of Michigan, 1980), p. 11.

<sup>151</sup> Mao Zedong, "The May Fourth Movement", in *Mao Tse-tung on Literature and Art* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1960), p. 13.

<sup>152</sup> Bonnie S. McDougall, *Mao Zedong's "Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art": A Translation of the 1943 Text with Commentary* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, The University of Michigan, 1980), p. 11.

<sup>153</sup> Mao Zedong, "Myth and Reality", in *Mao Tse-tung on Literature and Art* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1960), p. 5.

take the masses as an audience.<sup>154</sup> However, this does not mean that Mao regarded myth as a type of literature for the common people, nor that every Chinese knows about Chinese myth. On the contrary, myth is a part of the “high art”, which consists of the art of the ancient times. We may think it more likely that both “high” literature and proletarian literature can appear within the broad category of literature and art for the masses. “High” literature may express some proletarian thoughts while proletarian literature may embrace aesthetically literary classics. A model Mao gave to his audiences is his poetry. Bonnie McDougall said in her commentary to Mao’s “Talks at the Yan’an Forum on Literature and Art” that Mao’s poems could share a place in literature for the masses in such an argument.<sup>155</sup>

The phenomenon of mythic elements reappearing in May Fourth literature may reveal the May Fourth writers’ efforts to explore different ways to display their experiments. It also shows their target of deepening the development of New Literature through the use of old writings to bring forth the new. Furthermore, the term “New Literature” does not simply mean literature written in the vernacular language but also refers to an open discourse embracing different thoughts, styles and genres. From the perspectives of myth, religion and folklore, Xu Dishan expressed his views of life in his writings. Although Mao Zedong had written dozens of poems during the 1920s and the 1930s, he was obviously not a May Fourth writer. To Mao, who considered himself a revolutionist first and foremost, the political purpose had to be solved before the aesthetic in any kind of writing. Therefore, art was not to be judged by its quality, but by its intention.<sup>156</sup> Mao’s intentional adaptation of mythic elements in his poetry is his experiment in discarding old ideas and introducing new ones through returning to traditional forms but expressing contemporary thoughts. Mao encouraged young writers to create new poetry in the vernacular language and new forms; but in his eyes, it was pity that few of the poems in vernacular written by the May Fourth

---

<sup>154</sup> Bonnie S. McDougall, *Mao Zedong’s “Talks at the Yan’an Conference on Literature and Art”: A Translation of the 1943 Text with Commentary* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, The University of Michigan, 1980), p. 16.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>156</sup> Hung Chang-tai, *War and Popular Culture: Resistance in Modern China, 1937-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), p. 237.

poets could be regarded as successful models.<sup>157</sup> He also suggested that it would be wiser to learn from Chinese folk songs and thereby to develop a “New Poetry” which would be attractive to readers.<sup>158</sup>

Mao’s attitude toward poetry was influenced by his classical education. He believed that writing poetry was a social accomplishment to which all educated persons aspired, but he also demanded that poetic skills could and should be shared with the masses.<sup>159</sup> He further stated that poetry could be a kind of weapon for revolution, uniting the whole proletariat and fighting against enemies.<sup>160</sup> Mao’s use of mythic elements and historical figures and events in his poems and composition in a classical style actually shows his intention of making the traditional heritage serve the social revolution.

### ● A Frame of Pessimism & A Frame of Optimism

Embodying the Association for Literary Studies’ spirit of creating “art for life”, Xu Dishan shows his views of life in his early stories and essays. As a classicist in his attitude toward art, Mao Zedong carried forward traditional poetry’s essence of “expressing one’s will” [*shi yan zhi* 诗言志] in his poetry. Although both used mythic elements as symbols or metaphors in their writings, their understandings of life displayed two opposed types of disposition: pessimism and optimism.

Xu’s early writings leave readers an impression of the author’s mental struggle between sense and sensibility. Complying with his “common” sense, Xu praised people’s quest for love and beauty and encouraged them to explore life’s true meaning. Following his religious and intellectual sensibility, he set forth the hopelessness of life and expressed his belief in destiny. Especially in his essays, he repeatedly harped on death, disease and impermanence. We can list the different mythic stories Xu reconstructed in his early stories: the bird of destiny, the mythical bird *Jialingpinjia*, the goddess of the Sea of the Finest Cream, and so

---

<sup>157</sup> Zhang Yijiu, *Mao Zedong he shi* [Mao Zedong and Poetry] (Beijing: Chunqiu chubanshe, 1984), p. 120.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> Bonnie S. McDougall, *Mao Zedong’s “Talks at the Yan’an Conference on Literature and Art”: A Translation of the 1943 Text with Commentary* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, The University of Michigan, 1980), p. 34.

<sup>160</sup> Zhang Yijiu, *Mao Zedong he shi* [Mao Zedong and Poetry] (Beijing: Chunqiu chubanshe, 1984), p. 124.

on. The images or plots of these myths or legends all contain a sense of dispiritedness, which Xu reused as a pessimistic background for his protagonists. However, the pessimistic humour in Xu's early writings does not indicate that he really set his mind on inaction; on the contrary, it represents the author's gentle struggle against the disappointment of reality. The impact of his religious studies made Xu Dishan prefer not to say any fine-sounding things about his views of life.

The themes in Mao Zedong's poetry are simple and lacking mental struggle: progressive and positive. Mao drew directly from traditional heritage and presented his poems in a framework of optimism. Because Mao believed that the masses were spontaneously producing their own forms of literature, which professional writers must use as their basis,<sup>161</sup> he thought that even one gloomy image or one obscure sentence in a work would lose popularity for it among the common people. In Mao's poems mythical images like Gonggong and mythical landscapes like the Kunlun Mountain all suggest his ambition to be a hero and the nation's liberator. When discussing the philosophical perspective of Mao's thought, F. Wakeman gave an example of Mao's self-determination by comparing his poem "Bu suan zi: Yong mei" 卜算子·咏梅 [Ode to the Plum Blossom] (1962) with Lu You (1125-1210)'s *ci* poem with the same title. Lu displayed the individual courage to resist the impermanence of time and his plum blossom symbolised heroic solitude: "In the growing yellow dusk she (the plum blossom) grieves for solitude and makes the wind and rain her own 已是黄昏独自愁，更著风和雨."<sup>162</sup> Writing on the same theme, Mao emphasised the harsh brightness of flying snow and mountain ice and claimed that the plum blossom stood above wind and rain, frozen to complement the cliffs of ice.<sup>163</sup> Mao's poem expressed his confident anticipation of springtime, which indicated the revolutionary future:<sup>164</sup> "when the mountain flowers are in full bloom, she will smile, mingling in their

---

<sup>161</sup> Bonnie S. McDougall, *Mao Zedong's "Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art": A Translation of the 1943 Text with Commentary* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, The University of Michigan, 1980), p. 17.

<sup>162</sup> Lu You, a famous lyricist in the Southern Song dynasty (1127-1279). See Frederic Wakeman's explanation in *History and Will: Philosophical Perspectives of Mao Tse-tung's Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), p. 87.

<sup>163</sup> Frederic Wakeman JR., *History and Will: Philosophical Perspectives of Mao Tse-tung's Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), pp. 88-89.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89.

midst 待到山花烂漫时，她在丛中笑。”

In his article “Xinwenxue de yaoqiu” 新文学的要求 [Requisites for the New Literature] (1920), Zhou Zuoren complained that the “art for life” school could lead easily to utilitarianism, where art became a tool of ethics or a sermon from some altar.<sup>165</sup> He called for a human “art for art” literature. Although Xu Dishan was one of the members of the “art for life” school, his early writings embraced the essence of Zhou’s humanist literature: a literature in which the individual, as a qualified member of humanity, uses artistic methods to express his/her individual feelings, to represent the will of humanity, and to bring about happiness in human life.<sup>166</sup> In Zhou’s eyes, this can also be called a “literature for life”. Influenced by Daoism, Xu’s early writings expressed his concerns of humanism and life in his stories always abided by nature. To be sure, the theme of doing nothing that goes against nature condemns the protagonists in Xu’s stories to a humble status and thus leaves a pessimistic impression. Their efforts never surpass their destiny. But it is human nature, not fight nor struggle, that is decisive in human life. Xu’s early writings lead a way of returning to man the humanity due him/her.

In Mao’s poems, the power of man is definitive and even exaggerated. He used heroic figures in Chinese myths to elaborate the theme that man will triumph over nature. Mao displayed his serene confidence and man remained at the centre of his poems. Wakeman explained that in Mao’s eyes man could only realise his/her nature by “reshaping the objective world”.<sup>167</sup> The themes of conquest of nature and recreation of a whole new world appear frequently in Mao’s poems; they are Mao’s ideals. Mao’s eulogy to natural forces, such as wind, storm, thunder and waves, actually serves as a foil to foreshadow the climax: overcoming nature. In his poems his optimistic attitude was expressed through the insertion of some purposive phrases to explain man’s fighting and struggling, such as *zhengdao* 正道 [the right path], *tianbing* 天兵 [Heaven’s soldiers], *saochu yiqie hairenchong* 扫除一切害

---

<sup>165</sup> Zhou Zuoren, “Xinwenxue de yaoqiu” 新文学的要求 [Requisites for the New Literature], in *Xin qingnian* 新青年 [The New Youth], no.1 (1920), trans. Kirk A. Denton, 8 October, 2006. <<http://mclc.osu.edu/rc/pubs/zhou.htm>>.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> Frederic Wakeman JR., *History and Will: Philosophical Perspectives of Mao Tse-tung’s Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), p. 47.

人虫 [away with all pests to men], and so on.

● What is old and what is new?

To assess Chinese classical heritage in modern Chinese literature and to see different styles of writings that convey traditional elements during the first half of the twentieth century, Xu Dishan's early writings and Mao Zedong's poetry represent two directions. Xu Dishan, a scholar of the May Fourth generation, used the vernacular to tell old stories. Mao Zedong adopted traditional forms to compose poems which contain new themes. Both have escaped from the framework and restrictions of the New Literature. Their writing styles do not reflect the controversies over different opinions about the relationship between the old and the new, a popular topic during the period of the New Culture Movement and afterwards.

Xu Dishan's early writings embody the two important characteristics of New Literature: vernacular language and the modern form. However, these two characteristics cannot represent Xu's writing style; in other words, Xu is more famous for the mythic and religious thinking in his writings and his special understanding of life. Xu's language and form remain in the experimental stage. Fiction, especially short stories, became popular during the New Culture Movement. It had never been the mainstream of traditional Chinese literature. The difference between short stories and essays is not obvious in Xu's early writings. Some of his works published as essays can also be regarded as short stories, such as "Bie hua" 别话 [Parting Words] (1922). Some of his "short stories" contain no plot but resemble monologues, such as "Bu poyi de laofuren" 补破衣的老妇人 [An Old Woman Mending Clothes] (1922). Xu's language style is also immature. His vernacular contains classical elements. A good case is Xu's collection of essays *KSLY*, in which he used many classical terms, such as *yinming* 因明 [for *yuanyin* 原因, reason]. Moreover, in some of his essays Xu's wife addresses him as *liangren* 良人 [a good person], which was a classical format.

Although the language is not completely new and the form is still in its development in Xu's early writings, his way of adapting myth is Western-influenced. He used mythic elements to reshape the real life reflected in his stories. Techniques such as deforming a

complete story (“The Goddess of the Sea of Finest Cream”), incredible plot (“The Firefly Lamp”), allegory (“The Woman Tao Jinniāng”) and recounting as if true (“The Bird of Destiny”) all represent modern Western literary techniques. Xu set the natural environment of some of his stories in a foreign place and provided some introductions to the local customs and religions, which then form an exotic and mythic atmosphere in his writings.

Mao wrote his poems in traditional formats, including both the regulated *shi* 诗 form and the *ci* 词 pattern of irregular length lines. He quoted the classics: quotations from classical poetry, well-known remarks, proverbs and allusions. Ma Jibin and Pu Ren have composed a dictionary of the remarks, proverbs and allusions in Mao’s writings cited in text as a footnote. Taking the masses as his audience, he also used the spoken language of the common people, even slang. Examples are “Potatoes piping hot, with beef to boot! No need to fart! 土豆烧熟了, 还有牛肉。不须放屁!” in “Two Birds: A Dialogue” (autumn 1965)<sup>168</sup> and “Just a couple of flies, up against the wall on a dot of a globe! They buzz, they hum. 小小寰球, 有几个苍蝇碰壁。嗡嗡叫,” in “Reply to Comrade Kuo Mo-jo” (January 9, 1963).<sup>169</sup> In a period when modern forms were popular for poets, Mao provided commentary and explanations for readers to every piece of his poetry. These were put at the end of a poem and usually contained two categories: *zhushi* 注释 [annotation] and *tijie* 题解 [notes on the title]. The former are explanatory notes for any classical terms quoted and the latter explains names of the tunes to which *ci* poems are composed. Mao’s poetry in this way became a source to spread knowledge of classical Chinese poetry to the common people.

Although Mao adopted old forms and language, the themes of his poems were for modern purposes. In Mao’s poetry, the motifs in Chinese myths, such as rebellious spirit, heroes of the nation and the relationship between man and nature, were rebuilt either for individual promotion or to express social and political thinking. Ideas of the Chinese past and the neologisms of Mao’s present are combined. Thus objective history and subjective will co-exist harmoniously in Mao’s poetry.

---

<sup>168</sup> Nancy T. Lin’s translation of Mao’s poem “Nian nu jiao: Niao’er wenda” [Two Birds: A Dialogue], autumn 1965, in *Reverberations*, p. 81.

<sup>169</sup> Nancy T. Lin’s translation of Mao’s poem “Man jiang hong: He Guo Moruo tongzhi” 满江红 •和郭沫若同志 [Reply to Comrade Kuo Mo-jo], January 9, 1963, in *Reverberations*, p. 77.



## Chapter 3: Fiction with Folk Elements

### Section 1, Review of the May Fourth Folklore Movement

According to Anglo-American definitions, folklore mainly covers the scope of oral traditions or oral literature of each society. The continental European definitions of the term folklore add the areas of popular beliefs, religions and customs. There is no exact equivalence of either meaning in the Chinese language. Modern folklore studies in China are greatly influenced by the European and Japanese folklore movements. The German word *volkskunde* [folklore], literally meaning study of the people, was first adopted in English in 1846 by W. J. Thoms to replace the expression “popular antiquities”,<sup>170</sup> which was already widely recognised during the Romantic Movement in Europe (the late eighteenth century). Romanticism proposed an expressive theory of language: the spoken was superior to the written. In particular, the German scholar J. G. Herder, who was inspired by the idea of *volksgeist* [folk spirit] in his promotion of the rise of German nationalism, stated that every work of art is a voice speaking.<sup>171</sup> To him, folk songs are created by the common people, who belong to the same society as their listeners, and thus their value has to be analysed in terms of particular groups.<sup>172</sup> This thinking enlightened Hu Shi and his colleagues in the New Culture Movement in China (1915-1923) and they launched a language reform that demanded that writers should compose literature in the “living language of the people”.<sup>173</sup> Herder’s interest in folk songs invigorated Liu Bannong and his friends in carrying out a project of Chinese folk song collection from 1918.

The impact of European and Japanese folklore studies on the May Fourth folklorists has been explored in L. A. Schneider’s *Ku Chieh-kang and China’s New History: Nationalism and the Quest for Alternative Traditions* (1971), Hung Chang-tai’s *Going to the People: Chinese Intellectuals and Folk Literature, 1918-1937* (1985) and Haiyan Lee’s “Tears that

<sup>170</sup> Charlotte S. Burne, *The Handbook of Folklore* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson Ltd., 1914), p. 1.

<sup>171</sup> Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1999), p. 59.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>173</sup> Hu Shi, “Wenxue gailiang chuyi” 文学改良刍议 [A Tentative Proposal for the Reform of Literature], in *Xin qingnian* 新青年 [The New Youth], II, no. 5 (January, 1917): 1-11.

Crumbled the Great Wall: The Archaeology of Feeling in the May Fourth Folklore Movement” (2005). What has not been adequately studied is the relationship between folklore studies and fiction writing during the Republican period, especially the development of the image of the folk (villagers) and descriptions of rural life in fiction. In this chapter, I will review the process of the May Fourth folklore movement and display one literary trend before the 1940s by analysing two writers’ stories.

### ● The Development of Folklore Studies

The development of folklore studies in modern China encompasses a long period from the New Culture Movement (May Fourth period) to Mao Zedong’s talks on art and literature at the Yan’an Forum in 1942. This section discusses the period up to 1937 when the journal *Geyao* 歌谣 [Folksong] of the Folksong Study Society stopped publication.

In 1918, a student journal of Peking National University (also known as Beijing University), under the editorship of Liu Bannong, started a project, gathering folk songs from all parts of the country. It was the first time in the academic field that people’s attention was drawn to Chinese folklore. The movement extended its scope to the study of folk customs when the *Fengsu Diaocha Hui* 风俗调查会 [Society for the Survey of Customs] was formulated in 1923 at Peking University. In 1926 Gu Jiegang became a tutor at the Graduate School of Xiamen University and in the next year he became the chief editor of *Minsu zhoukan* 民俗周刊 [Folklore Weekly] based at Zhongshan University in Guangzhou. The centre of folklore studies now moved from north to south China.

Liu Bannong (1891-1934), a member of the *Yusi she* 语丝社 [Threads of Talk Society], was a pioneer in writing New Poetry and initiating language reform during the New Culture Movement. His main contribution to folklore studies lies in his collection and compilation of folk songs during the period from the 1910s to the 1930s. In 1918, after a trip to his hometown Jiangyin, Jiangsu, he compiled the boat songs of this area. An accidental discovery of Feng Menglong (1574-1646)’s book *Shan’ge* 山歌 [Mountain Songs] as a predecessor for folklore studies encouraged Liu and his colleagues to go further in gathering

folk songs. A modern edition of *Mountain Songs* came out in the middle 1930s. In 1918, the Bureau for Collecting Folksongs was instituted at Peking University under the guidance of Liu Bannong, Shen Yinmo and Zhou Zuoren. Their goals were to gather folksong materials from the period of the Song dynasty (960-1279) to the present. They gave attention to folk songs dealing with soldiers away from home and grieving concubines, but not to those dealing with the lewd and obscene.<sup>174</sup> By 1919, Liu had published 148 folksongs in the student daily of Peking University. In 1925, he finished the work of editing folksongs of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom (1851-1864) period 太平天国 and published them in *Geyao zhoukan* 歌谣周刊 [Folksongs Weekly]. From 1928 to 1935, Liu and his friend Li Jiarui co-edited *Zhongguo suqu zongmu gao* 中国俗曲总目稿 [A General Catalogue of China's Folksongs].

Liu Bannong ascribed high value to folksongs. In the preface to *Guowai min'ge yi* 国外民歌译 [Foreign Ballads Translated], he summarised that:

People use the most natural words and tones to express the most natural feelings in folk songs. Folk songs are generally improvised spontaneously rather than composed meticulously; therefore, personal feelings are expressed freely. This is an important element for literature. On the one hand, they can display the common people's feelings and life truly and sincerely; on the other hand, they need not rigidly adhere to life and feelings. They also contain an unconventional grace of their own.<sup>175</sup>

Liu's original work on folksongs and his enthusiastic correspondence with Gu Jiegang about folksong gathering aroused Gu's interest in this field.

Gu Jiegang (1893-1980), an expert on ancient Chinese history, fortuitously joined Liu Bannong's work of gathering folk songs in 1918. After Gu heard the news that his wife had contracted tuberculosis, he abandoned school work and returned home to Suzhou, Jiangsu. During that time, he felt depressed and unable to pursue any serious studies, but he began to

---

<sup>174</sup> Laurence A. Schneider, *Ku Chieh-kang and China's New History: Nationalism and the Quest for Alternative Traditions* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1971), p. 136.

<sup>175</sup> Liu Bannong, *Liu Bannong wenxuan* 刘半农文选 [Selected Works of Liu Bannong], ed. Xu Ruiyu (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1986), pp. 182-83, 185.

collect songs which he had heard in Suzhou during his childhood.<sup>176</sup> In January 1920, Gu published his first article on folksongs “Wuge jilu xu” 吴歌集录序 [Preface to a Collection of the Songs of Wu] in *Chen bao* 晨报 [Morning News] on the advice of his friend Guo Shaoyu. Gu recollected that his most active period of folksong gathering was in 1919. During that year, he also enlarged his scope from children’s songs to include those from other sources. In his search for the original meanings of the songs, he expanded his investigations to include dialect, proverbs, riddles, dramatic songs, customs and religion.<sup>177</sup>

In 1924, Gu published the article “Meng Jiang Nü gushi de zhuanbian” 孟姜女故事的转变 [The Transformation of the Meng Jiang Nü Legend] and *Wuge jiaji* 吴歌甲集 [Collection of the Songs of Wu, Part 1] in *Folksongs Weekly*. He transferred his interest from gathering folksongs to studying folk legends and began to develop methodologies for recording folkloric data. Gu Jiegang and his friends and students in Xiamen University were the main contributors. Gu represents the link between the roots of the folklore movement in north China and its further development in the South.<sup>178</sup>

When working at Xiamen University and Zhongshan University, Gu often encouraged his colleagues to learn scientific tools which were necessary to develop the field of folklore more academically. In 1925, a year before Gu moved to Xiamen, he and his friends, including Rong Geng, Sun Fuyuan, Zhuang Shangyan, Li Jinghan, Bai Dizhou and Rong Yuantai, carried out a three-day fieldtrip at *Miaofengshan* 妙峰山 [Miaofeng Hill] near Beijing. They published a report of the customs of Miaofeng Hill in the supplement of *Jing bao* 京报 [Beijing News]. This was the first time that Chinese folklorists emphasised the value of folkloric data. Gu’s research in folklore reached its peak in 1927 when he published three important works: *Meng Jiang Nü gushi yanjiu ji* 孟姜女故事研究集 [Studies on the Story of Meng Jiang Nü], *Miaofengshan* 妙峰山 [Miaofeng Hill] and *Su yue de hunsang* 苏粤的婚丧 [Marriage and Funeral Customs in Jiangsu and Guangdong]. In the same year, Gu and his colleague He Sijing established *Minsu xuehui* 民俗学会 [Folklore Study

---

<sup>176</sup> Gu Jiegang, *The Autobiography of a Chinese Historian*, trans. and annot. Arthur W. Hummel (Taipei: Ch’eng-wen Publishing Company, 1966), pp. 66-67.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 67, 70.

<sup>178</sup> Laurence A. Schneider, *Ku Chieh-kang and China’s New History: Nationalism and the Quest for Alternative Traditions* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1971), p. 138.

Society], signalling the beginning of a systematic institute for folklore studies.

Gu left the Folklore Study Society in 1929. From 1920 to 1929, in addition to research on specific folk stories, his study of folklore included three features: folksongs, religious systems and sacrificial societies.<sup>179</sup> Gu's original contributions to folklore studies in modern China lie firstly in his use of ancient history as reference in the compilation of folk songs. Secondly, he created a new method *Yambian faze* 演变法则 [Evolution Principle] to study the root, development and reshaping of each legend.<sup>180</sup> Finally, he was one of the first scholars in modern China to urge a scientific way of recording and using folkloric data, although this thinking has never been completely put into practice.

Although folklore activities continued in the 1930s, some initial interests were lost. The journal *Minsu* 民俗 [Folklore] stopped publication in the spring of 1930. After Gu Jiegang left Xiamen University in 1929, Zhong Jingwen set up the National Folklore Society with its home office in Guangdong in 1930 which flourished up to 1934 with branches in almost every province.<sup>181</sup> From 1935 to 1937, Peking University resumed its leadership in folklore studies. In 1935, Hu Shi became the chairman of the new Folksong Study Society. He also edited the new journal *Folklore* from 1935 to 1937. It stopped publication in 1937 after 31 issues in total. During and after the War period, the official media of the CCP tried to reuse the 1920s idea of spontaneous folk culture. However, these new folklore studies are very different from the Republican discourse.

### ● Problems in Folklore Studies

First, during the Republican period, Chinese folklorists' attitude toward the methodology of folklore studies is ambiguous. They never find a balance between scientific research and spontaneous creation. L. A. Schneider commented in his 1971 book that Chinese folklorists

---

<sup>179</sup> Gu Jiegang, *The Autobiography of a Chinese Historian*, trans. and annot. Arthur W. Hummel (Taipei: Ch'eng-wen Publishing Company, 1966), p. 134.

<sup>180</sup> Zheng Liangshu, *Gu Jiegang xueshu nianpu jianbian* 顾颉刚学术年谱简编 [Chronology of the Academic Activities of Gu Jiegang] (Beijing: Zhongguo youyi chubanshe, 1987), p. 26.

<sup>181</sup> Laurence A. Schneider, *Ku Chieh-kang and China's New History: Nationalism and the Quest for Alternative Traditions* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1971), p. 142.

seemed to find it difficult to remain outside the natural process of organic cultural growth.<sup>182</sup> In 1985, Hung Chang-tai once again pointed out that Chinese folklorists had no more than a superficial understanding of Western folklore scholarship and lacked a systematic methodology for conducting folklore surveys.<sup>183</sup> Modern Chinese folklorists did not solve this problem on their road of leading the development of folklore studies.

Schneider's main interest in Gu Jiegang leads him to assess the writings of Hu Shi, the pioneer of folklore studies. Hu Shi stated that vernacular literature and folk literature were two native genres of literature that were independent of the West.<sup>184</sup> In Hu Shi's 1917 article "Wenxue gailiang chuyi" 文学改良刍议 [A Tentative Proposal for the Reform of Literature], he encouraged writers to use "common language and ideographs" and a "simple, familiar written style".<sup>185</sup> If we examine more works by Hu Shi, we will find that his appeal for vernacular literature can also be seen in the introduction to his *Baihua wenxue shi* 白话文学史 [History of Vernacular Literature] (1928). In this book, he concluded that vernacular literature had a long history in China and was the core of literary history. To Hu Shi, *baihua* 白话 [vernacular] means a language that can be spoken and understood. It is natural, easy and smooth.<sup>186</sup> The value of folk songs manifests itself in their constantly evolving in response to the changing needs and tastes of each age, and thus they are one type of vernacular literature. However, Hu Shi is unaware of the fact that language is not a natural phenomenon.

In the article "Shi yu xiaoshuo jingshen shang zhi gexin" 诗与小说精神上之革新 [Innovation in the Spirit of Poetry and Fiction] and the preface to *Guowai min'ge yi* 国外

---

<sup>182</sup> Laurence A. Schneider, *Ku Chieh-kang and China's New History: Nationalism and the Quest for Alternative Traditions* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1971), p. 140.

<sup>183</sup> Hung Chang-tai, *Going to the People: Chinese Intellectuals and Folk Literature, 1918-1937* (Cambridge, Mass.: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1985), p. 161.

<sup>184</sup> Laurence A. Schneider, *Ku Chieh-kang and China's New History: Nationalism and the Quest for Alternative Traditions* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1971), p. 155.

<sup>185</sup> Hu Shi, "Wenxue gailiang chuyi" [A Tentative Proposal for the Reform of Literature], in *Xin qingnian* [The New Youth], II, no. 5 (January, 1917): 1-11.

<sup>186</sup> Hu Shi, *Baihua wenxue shi* 白话文学史 [A History of Vernacular Literature] (Hefei: Anhui jiaoyu chubanshe, 1999), p. 9.

民歌译 [Foreign Ballads Translated], Liu Bannong claimed several times that folk songs were natural, spontaneous and understandable.<sup>187</sup> But he did not explain what was meant by “natural” and “spontaneous”. He took for granted that folk songs’ quality of naturalness was valuable as a basis for the folk songs collection project, and that poets could learn from folk songs to advance the New Poetry. The initial purpose of this project had nothing to do with folklore studies, but was intended to serve literary reform. Intellectuals were concerned more about “new” elements in popular culture and folk literature than scientific research in folklore itself.

Although many scholars emphasised the features of spontaneity, imagination and a collective unconscious genius in folk literature, Zhou Zuoren stated in his 1923 article “Guizu de he pingmin de” 贵族的和平民的 [Aristocratic and Common] that he could not believe creative innovation could come from the masses for they were largely preoccupied with the details of day-to-day life.<sup>188</sup> The folklorists could not offer any counter-arguments. Pioneers of the folklore movement initially tried to learn from folk songs to develop the New Poetry. But if the usefulness of folksongs was based on its originality, how could the New Poetry avoid imitation? How could modern poets create poetry suitable for their age if traditional poetry, such as the odes and ballads in *Shijing* 诗经 [The Book of Songs] and *Han yuefu* 汉乐府 [The Music Bureau of the Han dynasty], was the model? Again, these May Fourth folklorists had no answer.

It was from the time when Gu Jiegang went to the South and promoted a wide range of research projects on the folklore and ethnography of China’s intra-Asian frontiers that scientific tools were emphasised. Gu had a profound educational background in historical criticism. He used several historical approaches, including diachronic and synchronic, to study folk songs and legends. It had become Gu’s job to legitimise folklore studies, to argue the case for the value of folkloric data and to urge his colleagues to gather data while

---

<sup>187</sup> Liu Bannong, *Liu Bannong wenxuan* [Selected Works of Liu Bannong], ed. Xu Ruiyu (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1986), pp. 182-83.

<sup>188</sup> Zhou Zuoren, *Ziji de yuandi* 自己的园地 [One’s Own Garden] (Jiulong: Shiyong shuju, 1972), pp. 13-16.

circumstances still permitted it.<sup>189</sup> But the embryonic stage of such scientific research methods ended after Gu left the field and folklore studies once again switched onto emphasising literary values.

Schneider states that C. S. Burne's *Handbook of Folklore* influenced 1930s folklore studies in China.<sup>190</sup> In the introduction to her book, Burne summarised several ways to collect and record folklore, emphasising that researchers should first enter into friendly relations with the folk and should collect information by listening rather than by talking.<sup>191</sup> Chinese folklorists opened themselves to such theories and tried to follow a scientific way because they otherwise always felt themselves conspicuously aloof from the masses they studied. This belief brings out the second problem in modern China's folklore studies: what is Chinese folklorists' real focus: the common people or simply their culture; have they entered into friendly relations with the masses?

Hung Chang-tai points out that Chinese folklorists generally shared a rather narrow definition of the folk as peasants.<sup>192</sup> On the one hand, they agreed that the life of the common people and their literary products are important areas for research; on the other hand, they believed that the common people in rural areas need to be educated. Schneider also queries the value of folk literature, citing Zhou Zuoren's theory. As early as the start of the folksong collecting movement in Beijing, Zhou Zuoren had criticised the backwardness of rural areas and the ignorance of the common people. Zhou agreed with Liang Shiqiu (1902-1987), an essayist and translator, that literature by the common people was limited by the basic nature of their outlook.<sup>193</sup> He even doubted the technical usefulness of the study of folk songs.

Gu Jiegang held a similar view to Zhou's that the common people were superstitious

---

<sup>189</sup> Laurence A. Schneider, *Ku Chieh-kang and China's New History: Nationalism and the Quest for Alternative Traditions* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1971), p. 141.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 146.

<sup>191</sup> Charlotte S. Burne, *The Handbook of Folklore* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson Ltd., 1914), pp. 6, 13.

<sup>192</sup> Hung Chang-tai, *Going to the People: Chinese Intellectuals and Folk Literature, 1918-1937* (Cambridge, Mass.: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1985), pp. 8-9.

<sup>193</sup> Laurence A. Schneider, *Ku Chieh-kang and China's New History: Nationalism and the Quest for Alternative Traditions* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1971), p. 169.



and backward. He did not pay attention to the future technical value of folklore studies; his main interest was in recording the past. He confessed in his autobiographical preface to *Gu shi bian* 古史辨 [Symposium on Ancient Chinese History] that he took very little interest in the investigation of folk songs and had no intention of becoming a specialist in the field of folklore. He collected folk songs because he believed that this practice could offer him new methods for historical criticism.<sup>194</sup> Gu paid attention to folk customs as early as 1919 when he wrote an article about marriage customs in Suzhou. Gu's report on customs in Suzhou and Guangdong, which appeared in *Folklore Weekly* in 1927, laid a foundation for Chinese folklorists' critical outlook on peasant culture. The leading folklorists began to get interested in the social and cultural values of folk songs and expanded their research areas to include legends, customs and religion. In 1929, Yao Yizhi stated in *Hunan changben tiyao* 湖南唱本提要 [Synopsis of the Ballads of Hunan] that ballads were one of the few expressions of what people themselves felt to be wrong with contemporary society and thus they were good devices for revealing all sorts of social evils and discontents. Similar ideas can be found in Chen Yuanzhu's "Taishan geyao ji" 台山歌谣集 [Collection of the Folksongs of Taishan] in *Minsu* 民俗 [Folklore].<sup>195</sup> The two-thousand-year-old tradition whereby China's imperial government incorporated a special Music Bureau [*Yuefu* 乐府] for collecting folksongs and lyrics among the people provided a precedent for what May Fourth Chinese folklorists were doing.

I agree with Schneider's comment that it is not the common people who received the attention of Chinese folklorists' considerable energies, but rather the common people's culture.<sup>196</sup> The most fundamental motivation of the May Fourth folklore movement, as one part of the New Culture Movement, was to find a fresh source of inspiration for a new literary discourse. It was not the intention to plunge into folklore studies per se. Therefore, the term "to the people", no matter whether to educate peasants or to enter their society to

---

<sup>194</sup> Gu Jiegang, *The Autobiography of a Chinese Historian*, trans. and annot. Arthur W. Hummel (Taipei: Ch'eng-wen Publishing Company, 1966), pp. 124, 145.

<sup>195</sup> Gu Jiegang, ed., *Minsu* 民俗 [Folklore], no. 49-50 (March, 1929): 4-5.

<sup>196</sup> Laurence A. Schneider, *Ku Chieh-kang and China's New History: Nationalism and the Quest for Alternative Traditions* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1971), p. 152.

collect folkloric data, remained only a slogan and not a reality.

The third problem in modern China's folklore studies is that the Chinese folklorists of the May Fourth era were not professional and they were weak in academic research. Hung Chang-tai has even asserted that none of the May Fourth folklorists was professional. He believed that their regular occupations, such as teaching, occupied their energies and they could devote only part of their time to folklore studies.<sup>197</sup> More accurately, it is not that they did not have enough energy to study folklore but that they were more interested in literary reform at that time. Because of their emphasis on literature, they did not care about folklore studies methodology or Western scholarship. They knew little about or showed only slight interest in folklore debates in the West and tended to be quite selective in translating Western sources. When introducing Western anthropological theories to Chinese audiences, Chinese folklorists often interchanged terminology, such as myth, legend and folktale or tribe and clan. They preferred to study folk songs and neglected other areas in folklore studies.

Zhou Zuoren and Hu Shi are two exceptions. Greatly influenced by Andrew Lang (1844-1912), Zhou's research interest in anthropology covers a wide scope, including folklore, mythology and fairy tales. The new journal *Folksongs*, edited by Hu Shi from 1935, published folk tales, translations of fairy tales and folksongs and analytical articles.<sup>198</sup> However, neither of them considered himself a folklorist, nor did they regard folklore studies to be their main interest.

Moreover, these folklorists were mainly urban dwellers employed at universities. Although a large number of them came from villages or small towns, they were long settled in cities and rural life only appears in their memories. Some Chinese folklorists envisioned a simple and cheerful life of Chinese peasants and held extremely romantic views of the common people.<sup>199</sup> They did not live near the people in the villages and usually beautified

---

<sup>197</sup> Hung Chang-tai, *Going to the People: Chinese Intellectuals and Folk Literature, 1918-1937* (Cambridge, Mass.: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1985), p. 161.

<sup>198</sup> Laurence A. Schneider, *Ku Chieh-kang and China's New History: Nationalism and the Quest for Alternative Traditions* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1971), p. 142.

<sup>199</sup> Hung Chang-tai, *Going to the People: Chinese Intellectuals and Folk Literature, 1918-1937* (Cambridge, Mass.: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1985), p. 164.

rural life in their writings, so Liang Shiqiu suspected that they had missed the true product of the common people. Qu Qiubai (1899-1935), a Chinese literary theorist and early leader of the CCP, who opposed the use of folk literature for the purpose of reforming the masses, claimed that the writers of the May Fourth literary movement failed to produce a literature that was really written in the language of the masses.<sup>200</sup>

Finally, we will look into the common and contradictory features of folklore studies and the May Fourth spirit. The May Fourth movement was certainly of importance in pushing the early stages of family reform and women's liberation. In the article "Tears that Crumbled the Great Wall: The Archaeology of Feeling in the May Fourth Folklore Movement", Haiyan Lee has analysed the engendering of folklore as feminine and deconstructed dichotomies such as woman and patriarchy, folk and aristocracy, and emotion and ritual.<sup>201</sup> During the May Fourth period, some Chinese folktales were linked with opposition to arranged marriages and aspirations for freedom of choice, such as the stories "Niulang Zhiniü" 牛郎织女 [The Cowherd and the Weaving Maid] and "Baishe zhuan" 白蛇传 [The Tale of the White Snake].<sup>202</sup> Part of the importance of folk songs in the May Fourth milieu may lie in their perceived ability to inspire young Chinese searching for a new definition of love. Gu Jiegang explained the folksongs' rebelliousness as a reaction to the repressive Confucian moral order which resulted in many broken hearts and broken marriages.<sup>203</sup> Intellectuals were beginning to demand a new role for women and greater equality between the sexes and they found support in the texts of folksongs and legends. The myth of rural innocence, the rebellious heroes and the sympathy for the suffering of women in folk literary sources echoed the anti-traditional and anti-Confucian May Fourth spirit. In response to Marxist intellectuals' criticism that the May Fourth writers and their literary reform were too

---

<sup>200</sup> Laurence A. Schneider, *Ku Chieh-kang and China's New History: Nationalism and the Quest for Alternative Traditions* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1971), pp. 169, 162.

<sup>201</sup> Haiyan Lee, "Tears that Crumbled the Great Wall: The Archaeology of Feeling in the May Fourth Folklore Movement", in *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 64, no. 1 (February, 2005): 35-65.

<sup>202</sup> Zhongguo funü zazhishe 中国妇女杂志社, *Women in Chinese Folklore* (Beijing: China Publications Centre, 1983).

<sup>203</sup> Hung Chang-tai, *Going to the People: Chinese Intellectuals and Folk Literature, 1918-1937* (Cambridge, Mass.: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1985), pp. 66-68.

Europeanised, folklorists found an alternative, native source of inspiration in their own heritage: folklore.

Chinese folklorists did not negate the tradition as severely as some of the other May Fourth advocates did. Like Gu Jiegang, they believed that in China's past there were valuable materials both for destroying the old and for creating and giving authority to the new. One of the aims of the New Culture Movement was to break with the past and thus to facilitate enlightenment and self-consciousness. But as Duara suggested, traditional and modern elements are not so separable from each other or so invariant that they determine our lives as modern or traditional, nor is it possible even to predict identifiable combinations of the old with the new.<sup>204</sup> Although folklore studies in the May Fourth era contained many weak points and did not find any clear solution to balance the traditional and modern sources of radical inspiration, they did set out to bring out the essential spirit of Chinese myths, legends and folksongs.

### ● Literary Concerns and a New Literary Trend

During the New Culture Movement, along with folklore studies, many intellectuals became involved in debates on distinguishing between two native genres of literature: *baihua wenxue* 白话文学 [vernacular literature] (later defined as *tongsu wenxue* 通俗文学 [popular literature]) and *minjian wenxue* 民间文学 [folk literature]. To encourage more people to use the vernacular, they defined vernacular literature, primarily fiction, as “a living literature” with a simple style. Folk literature, according to the brothers Grimm’s theory of communal creation, is produced by a community and it is an oral literature.<sup>205</sup> Zhou Zuoren explained that popular literature was primarily written by the literati on the basis of folk materials, a constant source of inspiration for high literature, and included two main categories: stories of *caizi jiaren* 才子佳人 [talents and beauties] and of *xiayi* 侠义

---

<sup>204</sup> Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 89.

<sup>205</sup> Hung Chang-tai, *Going to the People: Chinese Intellectuals and Folk Literature, 1918-1937* (Cambridge, Mass.: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1985), p. 2.

[unconventional heroism]; while *yuanshi wenxue* 原始文学 [primitive literature], also called folk literature, was the source of many genres including popular literature and was created by the common people primarily for their own entertainment.<sup>206</sup> In 1928 Tan Zhengbi (1901-1991) summarised the differences between folk literature and popular literature. In his eyes, the former is spontaneous and the latter is intentional. The former is superior to the latter in both quality and style.<sup>207</sup> Although Zhou Zuoren and Tan Zhengbi held different views on the superiority of the two genres of literature, they agreed that both of them were simple and wide-spreading. The definition of folk literature was not systematic at that time. It was Zheng Zhenduo in 1938 who systematised the ideas of Chinese folklorists about folk literature: its authors are anonymous; it is transmitted orally and has undergone considerable change by the time it happens to be recorded by the educated class; it is fresh but crude; the imagination it displays is free and wide-ranging; and it incorporates new things and foreign influences.<sup>208</sup> The debate on the two literary genres developed into a broader discussion about Chinese peasants and their literature.

Wolfram Eberhard believed that there were two groups of intellectuals interested in folklore during the May Fourth era. One group occupied itself with study of the Chinese past. Under the leadership of Hu Shi, they tried to show that the literary use of popular language was not un-Chinese, and certainly not new. They claimed that modern Chinese literature should not imitate Western models, but should rather develop trends already present in traditional Chinese literature. The second group claimed that the true way to create a new, popular and understandable literature is to go to the common people to study their language. This group, which was supported by Zhou Zuoren, Lu Xun and Gu Jiegang, led to the

---

<sup>206</sup> Hung Chang-tai, *Going to the People: Chinese Intellectuals and Folk Literature, 1918-1937* (Cambridge, Mass.: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1985), pp. 5-6. Zhou Zuoren used the word “*yuanshi*” 原始 to translate the English word “folk”.

<sup>207</sup> Tan Zhengbi, *Zhongguo wenxue jinhua shi* 中国文学进化史 [An Evolutionary History of Chinese Literature] (Shanghai: Xinyue shudian, 1928), p. 241.

<sup>208</sup> Zheng Zhenduo, *Zhongguo su wenxue shi* 中国俗文学史 [A History of Popular Chinese Literature], Vol. 1 (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1938), pp. 1-6.

development of Chinese folklore studies.<sup>209</sup>

Eberhard's analysis is original but not quite accurate. First, the first group of intellectuals did not belong to the field of folklore studies nor did they spend their energies on this field. In contrast, the second group promoted Chinese folklore studies, and their efforts encouraged the emergence of a new literary trend. However, there is a major division within the second group between Gu Jiegang on the one hand and Zhou Zuoren on the other. Gu Jiegang represented a positive school of thought. To Gu, folk literature was a potent social and moral tool which, if used effectively, could improve people's livelihood and bridge the gap between intellectuals and the masses. He believed that the common people were by nature pure and sincere and he rationalised their shortcomings.<sup>210</sup> These folklorists' idealistic thinking about the common people and their lives, their appreciation of the anti-authoritarian trend contained in folk literature and their high praise for the natural genius of the common people led to the romantic images of rural life and idyllic descriptions of the pastoral countryside common in Chinese literature from the 1920s to the 1940s.

From the 1920s, life in the countryside forms an important theme in fiction. One group of writers highlighted local customs and folklore, following the example of Chinese literary classics: adopting the language style from traditional Chinese poetry or prose, to restore the "purity" of the national culture. In their writings, they reveal their belief in rural innocence and their hatred for polluted urban civilisation. Their romantic prejudice in favour of rural life contrasts the rich pastoral ideal of the past with the frightful and monotonous present. Their back-to-nature sentiments may have been influenced by Western naturalistic romanticism. A good example is Fei Ming's fiction.

Representing a less positive attitude toward the folk and rural life, Zhou Zuoren is ambivalent. On the one hand, he cherished the valuable features of folk literature, its sincerity and the true voice of the people, representing the heart and mind of a nation. On the

---

<sup>209</sup> Wolfram Eberhard, *Studies in Chinese Folklore and Related Essays* (Bloomington: Indiana University Research Centre for the Language Sciences, 1970), p. 4.

<sup>210</sup> Hung Chang-tai, *Going to the People: Chinese Intellectuals and Folk Literature, 1918-1937* (Cambridge, Mass.: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1985), p. 167.

other hand, he criticised the backwardness of rural life and the ignorance of the peasantry and did not put his hope for the future in the countryside.<sup>211</sup> Also influenced by Lu Xun's essays and stories about his Zhejiang hometown in the early 1920s, one group of young Zhejiang writers in Beijing began writing about their hometowns around 1923, and these stories formed the initial phase in the development of *xiangtu wenxue* 乡土文学 [Native Soil Literature].

Echoing Zhou Zuoren's ambivalence, these writers held a contradictory attitude toward the countryside. They missed the simple life they had experienced in childhood but felt depressed about the backwardness of their hometowns. They praised human nature while exposing the shortcomings of the peasants. In their stories, people struggle for a living in a turbulent society, facing change in both social values and economic patterns. Lu Yan's short stories are a good example.

According to Archer Taylor, the difference between folklore and literature may be summarised as follows:

Folklore uses conventional themes and stylistic devices and makes no effort to disguise their conventional quality, while the literary artist either divests his work of conventional quality by avoiding clichés of either form or matter, or charges them with new content.<sup>212</sup>

Taylor also suggested that writers have two ways of composing literature with folk elements: the identification and interpretation of popular elements in a piece of literature, and the intentional literary imitation of folk genres.<sup>213</sup> Although the functional motivation of folklore studies in May Fourth China was not simply for the promotion of the New Literature, Taylor's theory is applicable to the development of literature with folk elements in modern China. A new trend of writing about rural life and one's hometown and reshaping

---

<sup>211</sup> Hung Chang-tai, *Going to the People: Chinese Intellectuals and Folk Literature, 1918-1937* (Cambridge, Mass.: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1985), p. 165.

<sup>212</sup> Hung Chang-tai, quoting Archer Taylor's views, in *Going to the People: Chinese Intellectuals and Folk Literature, 1918-1937* (Cambridge, Mass.: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1985), p. 39.

<sup>213</sup> Mentioned above, at the end of Chapter One.

the pastoral ideal in the light of traditional Chinese philosophy appeared in the 1920s, flourished in the 1930s and was revived in the 1980s. In the May Fourth spirit of rejecting the past, this kind of narrative was alienated from both contemporary mass culture and orthodox tradition.

## Section 2, Fei Ming's Short Stories: A Poetry of Folk Elements<sup>214</sup>

Fei Ming, the penname of Feng Wenbing (1901-1967), was a pioneer of lyrically descriptive fiction based on ordinary daily life. He was an innovator in adapting poetic language into short stories during China's New Culture Movement. In the first stage of developing the New Literature (1900-1937), Chinese writers were encouraged to speak on behalf of the oppressed classes and to help create a social revolution in literature.<sup>215</sup> Some activists advocated that literature at that time could be defined as one way of promoting social change. Fei Ming's writings clearly do not conform to this function; instead, he expressed his love of folk culture and the peaceful life of the countryside around his hometown. He refused to accept the left-wing line of highlighting social revolution in literary works and this refusal freed him from social burdens when writing fiction. Believing in his own principles of literature, he also refused to be well known among the public, as the meaning of his pen-name suggests: "abolishing names". Few histories of modern Chinese literature in English or Chinese mention Fei Ming and his works, or if he is introduced, it is only briefly as one of the writers in Peking literary circles in the 1920s.

Feng Wenbing was born in the small town of Huangmei in Hubei, which is famous for its local Buddhist culture. As a member of the May Fourth generation, he was interested in the New Culture and entered the English department of Peking University to complete foundation courses in 1922. From the 1920s to the 1930s, Fei Ming was one of the chief writers of the *Yusi she* 语丝社 [Threads of Talk Society] and published a number of poems,

---

<sup>214</sup> This section has been published as an article in *Studies on Asia*, Series II, Vol. 2, no. 2 (fall issue, 2005): 112-25. The copyright now belongs to the author.

<sup>215</sup> Bonnie S. McDougall and Kam Louie, *The Literature of China in the Twentieth Century* (London: Hurst, 1997), p. 23.



short stories and essays. After his graduation from the Department of English Language and Literature at Peking University in 1929, Fei Ming became a lecturer in the Department of Chinese Language and Literature. But student activism in the universities of Beijing influenced his thinking. He moved his attention from literary creation to social activities and pragmatic problems. In 1932, he stopped writing fiction.

Fei Ming's short stories contain three main characteristics. Influenced by the popular religious beliefs of his hometown, he was interested in the local folk customs and Zen thought [*chan* 禅, Dhyana, a branch of Chinese Buddhism], which was the dominant belief of the local people. As a disciple of Zhou Zuoren, he followed Zhou's aesthetics of *pingdan* 平淡 [blandness] and *ziran* 自然 [naturalness] when describing life in his hometown. Learning from the theory of "blandness," he puts across deep feelings and serious thoughts in a flat and unemotional way; while following the theory of "naturalness," he reduces complex and colourful plots into plain and unextravagant stories.<sup>216</sup> Being fond of traditional Chinese poetry, he uses poetic language (syntax and semantics) in composing his fiction, which may give readers some difficulty in understanding the plots and even in interpreting individual sentences.

In the preface to the fourth volume of *Zhongguo xinwenxue daxi* 中国新文学大系 [The Compendium of New Literature of China], Lu Xun commented that Fei Ming's first collection of short stories is plain and simple but readers can still comprehend the author's sadness and anxieties.<sup>217</sup> He also stated that readers who are straightforward may regard Fei Ming's self-pity as a kind of artificially low-keyed emotion for he is too grudging when expressing his feelings.<sup>218</sup> Lu Xun's comments reveal the first layer of Fei Ming's conceptualization, which emphasises a concealment of personal emotion in a peaceful mind. However, his concealment of feelings and non-engagement with social problems do not stem from emotional repression but from his appreciation of a traditional Chinese taste in art: *wu*

---

<sup>216</sup> David E. Pollard, *A Chinese Look at Literature: The Literary Values of Chou Tso-jen in Relation to the Tradition* (London: Hurst, 1973), pp. 87, 97.

<sup>217</sup> Lu Xun, Preface to *Zhongguo xinwenxue daxi* [The Compendium of New Literature of China], ed. Zhao Jiabi, Vol. 4: Fiction 2, ed. Lu Xun (Shanghai: Liangyou tushu gongsi, 1935), p. 6.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

*wu wo zhi jing* 无我之境, an artistic concept which ignores the author's personal feelings.<sup>219</sup> Shu-mei Shih called Fei Ming's portrayal of rural life "the painting-scroll form". In traditional Chinese paintings, natural scenery shares an equal or greater significance with human figures.<sup>220</sup> Fei Ming's writing portrays a detailed picture of life in his hometown and conveys his deep sadness, although he never mentions it.

Lu Xun did not understand Fei Ming's stories completely but his younger brother Zhou Zuoren gave his student's writings a high evaluation. Fei Ming does not ignore ongoing social change in his writings. His records of ordinary life are extremely lifelike.<sup>221</sup> Although after his graduation Fei Ming's writings gradually turned into a more critical style exposing socio-political problems, such as the novel *Moxuyou xiansheng zhuan* 莫须有先生传 [The Biography of Mr. Neverwas] (1932), his special angle of observing life provides readers with a new lens through which to see the ordinary rural life of China in the 1920s and the early 1930s.

The majority of Fei Ming's writings are poems and short stories. As his good friend Bian Zhilin said, Fei Ming's stories are better than his poems.<sup>222</sup> He poetically depicts the life of his hometown in three collections of short stories: *Zhulin de gushi* 竹林的故事 [Stories of the Bamboo Grove] (1925), *Taoyuan* 桃园 [The Peach Garden] (1927) and *Zao*

---

<sup>219</sup> The concept *wu wo zhi jing* 无我之境 is used by Wang Guowei (1877-1927) in *Renjian cihua* 人间词话 [Talks on *Ci* in the Human World] to analyse lyrics in the Song dynasty (960-1279). *Wu wo zhi jing* suggests that authors only give an objective description of a natural scene while suppressing their personal feelings. The book contains the essence of Wang's literary theory: the concept of *jingjie* 境界, which means a state of reality delineated by a boundary that assures the uniqueness of the object it describes. See William H. Nienhauser, ed., *The Indiana Companion to Traditional Chinese Literature*, Vol. 1 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), p. 870.

<sup>220</sup> Shu-mei Shih, "Writing English with a Chinese Brush: The Work of Fei Ming", in *The Lure of the Modern: Writing Modernism in Semicolonial China, 1917-1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), pp. 197-98.

<sup>221</sup> Zhou Zuoren, *Zhou Zuoren zaoqi sanwen xuan* 周作人早期散文选 [Selected Early Essays of Zhou Zuoren] (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1984), p. 332.

<sup>222</sup> Bian Zhilin, Preface to *Feng Wenbing xuanji* 冯文炳选集 [Selected Works of Feng Wenbing], ed. Feng Jiannan (Beijing: Remin wenzue chubanshe, 1985), p. 5.

枣 [Jujubes] (1929), and one novel: *Qiao* 桥 [Bridges] (1925-30).<sup>223</sup>

### ● Through the Eyes of Children: A Pastoral Realm

Fei Ming tries to display a complete picture of his hometown, a typical small town in Central China. Since he simply cares about the interests and charm of his stories, his writings have neither the kind of rapid development nor sharp climax, which make stories exciting and dramatic. His favourite topic is local people's ordinary life, especially the life of the younger generation. Children and teenagers usually are the protagonists in his stories. Through children's innocent insights, even evil and unhappiness can turn out to be kind and warm to some extent. Sadness and tragedies along the process of life can be alleviated through teenagers' positive attitude toward the future. Although Fei Ming seldom expresses his personal thinking in his stories, he describes his hometown as an Arcadia, in which suffering and misfortune look beautiful and peaceful.

In his first collection of short stories *Stories of the Bamboo Grove*, Fei Ming analysed young people's mental world. Their spirit, mood, sentiments and understanding of love and beauty form an important part of the social environment. Three stories all completed in 1923: "Youzi" 柚子 [Youzi], "Ah Mei" 阿妹 [Little Sister] and "Bannian" 半年 [Six Months] are good examples. There is no plot in the story "Youzi". The author records Yan'er's memory of his childhood with his cousin Youzi, who is a lovely and kind girl. In Yan'er's eyes, Youzi is the symbol of his hometown and their profound friendship represents Yan'er's love for it.

Fei Ming did not suggest any kind of romantic relationship between Yan'er and his cousin. Even at the end of the story, when Yan'er sees Youzi leave with her mother to prepare for her marriage, the author did not deliver any comment. Readers can sense the cherished feelings between the two young people from two details. When they are both children, the naughty boy often eats up Youzi's sweets secretly. Youzi discovers his trick but always

---

<sup>223</sup> All the references to Fei Ming's works are from *Feng Wenbing xuanji* 冯文炳选集 [Selected Works of Feng Wenbing], ed. Feng Jiannan (Beijing: Remin wenzue chubanshe, 1985); in the following cited as *FWXJ*; variations are noted where relevant. I translated the sentences and paragraphs cited from Fei Ming's works.

pretends she does not know about it. Moreover, as soon as Yan'er learns that Youzi will get married, he wants to see her future husband first and check whether he is reliable and sincere. As in "Youzi," the author depicts the folk customs in the story "Little Sister". The theme is the seven-year-old boy Yan'er's memory of the happy time with his six-year-old sister Lian, whose funeral is described with attention to local details.

Parting of friends in childhood and loss of family members are sorrowful. But in children's eyes, sadness is temporary while hope is lasting. In the story "Six Months", Yan'er has grown up into a young man. He is enjoying a rest at home with his wife as the result of an illness. The author describes every detail of the peaceful life during Yan'er's stay with his wife. The leisurely lifestyle of his recuperation becomes an ideal. Fei Ming gives no information about Yan'er's marriage, but he displays the newly-married couple's happiness indirectly by mentioning how Yan'er's mother blamed him for a perceived "mistreatment" of her daughter-in-law.

Apparently, neither mistreatment nor anger can be found in the story "Six Months" but only jokes and relaxation. Fei Ming explains his understanding of a pastoral idyll by narrating the relationship and experiences of these children, teenagers and young people. Because their minds are unpolluted, they hold a more natural and easygoing attitude toward life. They do not deny pain and sadness but they feel confident that people can overcome any difficulty. They cherish the beautiful natural environment of their hometown and respect friendship and love. Meanwhile, the author portrays the beauty of the village and the friendship and love among local people in subdued tones.

The most typical description of a pastoral realm can be found in Fei Ming's loosely arranged novel *Bridges*, of which each chapter can be considered a complete short story. The first part of the novel is a dreamlike record of three children's experiences in Shi Village. The author mainly depicts the natural scenes and local customs from the three children's points of view. In the second half of the novel, the children grow up and the young man Xiaolin leaves the village and moves to the town to receive education. Xiaolin and the two sisters Qinzi and Xizhu keep their innocence and cherish the peaceful life they had together even after they

become adults. Even though they part, they keep in touch, exchanging new and modern thinking they learn from the outside. Unlike the usual description of a triangular relationship, there is no jealousy, suspicion or intrigue among the three young persons. Xiaolin, Qinzi and Xizhu get on with each other harmoniously without stress, as Fei Ming seeks to portray a pastoral picture of a local village with no intention of leading readers to contemplate realistic problems.

Natural scenery in the pastoral realm of Shi Village has a taste of loneliness, mystery and quietness according to the three children's memory. Fei Ming created a peaceful environment by using negative images, such as graves, the sunset, a lonely wild goose in the vast sky, Aeolian bells hung on the eaves of temples and the shade of a tree. A piece of doggerel composed by Xiaolin to teach Qinzi Chinese characters can be regarded as a summary of Shi Village:

Once upon a time, we walk leisurely for two or three miles.  
On the way, we see four or five villages,  
Six or seven temples and towers,  
Eight, nine or ten branches of flowers.<sup>224</sup>

Besides these beautiful scenes, Fei Ming characterised the folk customs of his hometown in the novel. For instance, children fold willows' branches as their toys in spring; they fear going to out-of-the-way temples alone because it is said that fox spirits live there; local villagers organise small ceremonies around their dead relatives' graves on the Qingming 清明 [Pure Brightness] Festival<sup>225</sup> and family members will go to local temples to hold memorial services, holding lanterns in their hands.

In the chapter "Tianjing" 天井 [The Courtyard], Fei Ming explained the process of growing up. Xiaolin, Qinzi and Xizhu become teenagers, and "their minds are not as simple as before".<sup>226</sup> The lovely appearance of Qinzi's little sister Xizhu and the two girls' different

---

<sup>224</sup> Feng Wenbing, *FWXJ*, p. 136.

<sup>225</sup> A festival on 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> of April each year for Chinese people memorising the dead.

<sup>226</sup> Feng Wenbing, "Tianjing" 天井, in *Bridges*.

types of beauty make Xiaolin hesitate to choose his love and awaken his sexual passion. Fei Ming used the images of clouds, rain and a vertical bamboo flute, all of which symbolise sex in traditional Chinese culture, to represent the sexual impulses of youth in the chapter “Xiao” 箫 [A Bamboo Flute]. The author praised the power of human nature.

Two themes of the novel *Bridges* are children’s understanding of different situations they may face when seeking happiness and young people’s perplexity over puberty. Exploring life in Shi Village, the author on the one hand refers to his own memories of childhood; on the other hand, he suggests adults’ loneliness in society and their helplessness at having no alternative path. The pastoral realm seen through children’s eyes means the enjoyment of a peaceful life; at the same time, it contains the realm of the author’s ideologies in folklore and psychology.

### ● Behind a Smiling Face: Life’s Appeal

Fei Ming cares more about the temperament and appeal of his writings than the plots of stories. His stories are made up of fragmentary settings, intermittent events and lonely people’s shadows in the dusk. To Fei Ming, these fragments and details are the best way to display his hometown. The local people in his stories all lead a simple life, which is quite similar to the descriptions in the essays of the Wei and Jin period (220-589) and the lyrics of the Song dynasty (960-1279). Their personalities are tranquil and they always keep a smiling face even though they are experiencing sufferings and feel unsatisfied with society. Like the mothers in the story “Huanyi mu” 浣衣母 [Laundering Mothers] (1923) and the third daughter in the story “Zhulin de gushi” 竹林的故事 [A Story of the Bamboo Grove] (1924), behind their smiling faces they sob silently and bear up patiently.

The protagonists of the three stories “A Story of the Bamboo Grove”, “Laundering Mothers” and “Huoshenmiao de heshang” 火神庙的和尚 [The Monk of the Fire Deity Temple] (1923) in the collection *Stories of the Bamboo Grove* all enjoy life in difficult situations. In the story “The Monk of the Fire Deity Temple”, Jin Xi is an orphan and makes a living by begging. Thanks to an old man Wang Si’s recommendation, Jin Xi becomes a

monk in a local temple so that he can feed himself. Although Jin Xi is poor and is looked down upon by other villagers, he keeps an optimistic attitude and enjoys his simple and poor life. The happiest time for him is playing with a lost dog and collecting local villagers' offerings for the Fire Deity to give Wang Si's grandchildren as small gifts. He regards Wang Si as his father and does everything he can to show his gratitude by helping the old man. He always keeps a smiling face and no one has ever seen him crying. At the end of the story, after suffering for several days because of an accident and nearly going dying, he weeps, but still "Wang Si could not clearly see the many tears that flowed from his eyes".<sup>227</sup>

Similar descriptions about local people's tranquil and sober personalities can be seen in the story "Xiaowu fangniu" 小五放牛 [Young Five Herds Cows] (1927) in Fei Ming's third collection *Zao* [Jujubes]. Most writers would show anger and indignation in narrating the story of a rich landlord forcibly seizing a poor peasant's beautiful wife with swords drawn and bows bent. In Fei Ming's writing, the event becomes fascinating and even funny, for the narrator of the whole story is the little cowherd Young Five (Xiaowu). Readers can sense the author's cynical inclination, but the satiric meaning is expressed in a mild tone. Xiaowu affirms that "the rich butcher Fat Wang who always wears silk trousers has lived in Uncle Chen's home for a long period, but obviously Aunt Chen is not Fat Wang's wife".<sup>228</sup>

The sad story is told in a funny way. Xiaowu sympathises with Uncle Chen's misfortune but are neither quarrels nor fights among the four persons: Fat Wang, Uncle Chen, Aunt Chen and Xiaowu. They lead a peaceful life together and all seem quite satisfied with the present situation. Sadness is lightened by narrating the story through a child's curious but innocent eyes. Even when Xiaowu mocks Aunt Chen and Fat Wang, readers will believe that life is full of interest rather than pain and unfairness. Examples are Xiaowu's description of the fat bodies of both Aunt Chen and Fat Wang:

I figure, her feet won't be able to prop up her body if she gains even one more kilo of weight [...] Fat Wang gets drunk and his face turns in red;

---

<sup>227</sup> Feng Wenbing, *FWXJ*, p. 43.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

he sits there trying to undo his belt but cannot manage it.<sup>229</sup>

Fei Ming's most successful experiment in understatedly exploring local people's interest in life and their taste of life's bitterness is the short story "Taoyuan" [The Peach Garden] (1927) in his second collection. The author gave the story a terse beginning:

Wang Laoda has only one daughter who is thirteen years old. She has been ill for nearly a fortnight.<sup>230</sup>

It is about the deep love between the father Wang Laoda and his daughter Ah Mao. Ah Mao is suffering from a serious disease but still cares for her father. Although she knows that excessive drinking will damage her father's health, she persuades her father to buy some wine when she finds that his favourite beverage bottle is empty. Ah Mao's health is Wang Laoda's only concern. Because Ah Mao mentions that peaches are quite tasty, the father makes every effort to satisfy his daughter's wish. Even though the peach season has already passed, Wang Laoda buys a glass peach for Ah Mao, using his bottle as part payment.

The story is set in a warm atmosphere. The father and daughter face financial difficulty and the danger of death together. But they cherish the love between them and encourage each other to live positively. To Ah Mao, life is still filled with interest. She gains a lot of pleasure from observing local villagers passing by their peach garden. However, a smiling face is not the theme of the story. The author ended the story sadly: the glass peach was broken into small pieces by a group of running children.

One of the children felt as if his heart was broken into pieces silently.  
He and Wang Laoda stared at each other.<sup>231</sup>

Not only has the glass peach been broken, so has Wang Laoda's heart full of his love for his daughter. Wang Laoda's staunch attitude toward life depends on his daughter's happiness.

---

<sup>229</sup> Feng Wenbing, *FWXJ*, p. 86.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.



The author described poor people's true love artistically.

Fei Ming displays a beautiful picture of the local setting. He uses poetic descriptions, such as a little girl standing in the sunset in a garden of peach blossoms and her joy at seeing two red suns: one in the sky, the other in the shadow on the wall. The green leaves covering up the earth of the garden make her two big eyes shine. The young girl Ah Mao in the bright spring brimming with love of life contrasts with her father's heavy heart worrying about his daughter's illness. Combining beautiful nature with people's loneliness and the implicit helplessness behind their smiling faces is one of Fei Ming's favourite techniques. The relationship between nature and emotion in Fei Ming's stories echoes the poetic harmony between *qing* 情 [feeling] and *jing* 景 [landscape] in traditional lyricism.<sup>232</sup>

Moreover, Fei Ming shared local people's belief in the mystery of peaches in the story "The Peach Garden". Chinese people along the Yangtze River traditionally regard peach trees as their ancestors. There are many folk stories about the Spirit of peach trees and the goddess of peach blossoms. People along the river worship peach trees as they believe that peaches can bring them love, marriage and happiness.<sup>233</sup> A mysterious "Peach Forest" in which a group of deities and ghosts live was recorded in the ancient classic *Shanhai jing* 山海经 [The Classics of Mountains and Seas] (Han dynasty or earlier). Local people have the custom of carving images of peach trees on a thin board on New Year's Day to pray for auspiciousness.<sup>234</sup> In the story "The Peach Garden", Ah Mao's love for peaches and her life in the peach garden represent the awakening of the sick girl's youth along with the spring. Ah Mao, just approaching puberty, has the same feelings and desires as every ordinary girl. The young girl's joy and anxieties are expressed in a peaceful environment. Fei Ming's view, related to his own inner philosophy, demonstrates that the flavour of life can be enjoyed by everyone regardless social, economic or even physical condition.

---

<sup>232</sup> Shu-mei Shih, "Writing English with a Chinese Brush: The Work of Fei Ming", in *The Lure of the Modern: Writing Modernism in Semicolonial China, 1917-1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), p. 196.

<sup>233</sup> Zong Li and Liu Qun'er, *Zhongguo minjian zhu shen* 中国民间诸神 [China's Popular Deities] (Shijiazhuang: Hebei renmin chubanshe, 1987), p. 412.

<sup>234</sup> Yuan Ke, ed., *Zhongguo shenhua chuanshuo cidian* 中国神话传说辞典 [Dictionary of Chinese Myths and Legends] (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1986), p. 315.

## ● A Peaceful Mind: Zen Thought

Fei Ming began his interest in *chan* 禅 [Zen] thought when he was studying at Peking University. Zhou Zuoren recalled that he had seen several times that Fei Ming was sitting in meditation and suddenly achieved *chanwu* 禅悟 [enlightenment through meditation].<sup>235</sup> Zen, which is the Japanese pronunciation of the Chinese translation of Dhyana, is one branch of Chinese Buddhism, which flourished in the late Tang dynasty and the early Song dynasty. Its doctrines are quite similar to Daoist thinking and attitudes toward nature. Dhyanaists and Daoists both believe in Pantheism and they regard themselves as one part of nature. They try to free themselves from the secular world and gain mental liberation through religious practice.<sup>236</sup> In his short stories, Fei Ming expressed his understanding and appreciation of ordinary life, using Zen doctrines for reference. Local people in his writings seem to have a philosophical understanding of life and their stories stem from their personal experiences. Meanwhile, Fei Ming explained his thinking on the relationship among images, time, and space as inherited from artistic concepts in late Tang poetry and Song painting.

The first period of Fei Ming's development in understanding of Zen thought during the 1920s can be seen in his stories before 1928. He dreams of an empty, quiet and clean realm in which he can attain a lofty realm of thought, free himself from turmoil and examine his inner mind. This peaceful idyll is described in the story "Ling dang" 菱荡 [Water Chestnut Pond] (1927) in the collection *The Peach Garden*. The author portrays Tao Village [陶家村] as a domain separated from the outside by a big pond where local people lead a simple life and try to ignore social changes.

Tao Village is a quiet place all the year round. It is secluded behind a dense forest and is distanced from the populous local town by a small river and a pond where water chestnuts grow. The author creates a peaceful environment by describing the sounds of flowing water and rustling leaves, disappearing and melting into silence around the village. The protagonist, Chen Longzi (Deaf Chen), communicates with others only through sign language. In the

---

<sup>235</sup> Zhou Zuoren, "Huai Fei Ming" 怀废名 [Thinking of Fei Ming], in *Yaotang zawen* 药堂杂文 [Essays of the Medicine Hall] (1943). 16 February, 2006. <<http://www.ztdec.com/old/ebook/nowadays/zhouzhuoren/090.htm>>.

<sup>236</sup> Li Zehou, *Mei de licheng* 美的历程 [The Path of Beauty] (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1981), p. 169.

story, he symbolises an ideal personality. The world around him is always silent; he seldom communicates with others and is never disturbed by mundane noise. The implication is that people can realise their inner mind, observe the world objectively and appreciate the meaning of life only when they keep far away from loud noises and colourful images. To live in a tranquil place such as Tao Village is one of the essential conditions for achieving serenity. In the ideal realm, human beings and the natural environment are in perfect harmony.

Fei Ming's search for peace and emptiness is also shown in his depiction of intuition and sudden enlightenment [*dunwu* 顿悟]. He describes visitors from the outside seeking the right way to enter Tao Village as follows:

If you are a frequent visitor, you make a detour to find the entrance to the village catching a view of water in the pond and the sky converging into a line. You stop for a second and can hear the sound of the flowing water. . . You keep silent and go outside. This process is similar to local villagers' going outside to the town. As soon as you reach the outer streets, you realise that you are simply a traveller passing through Tao Village.<sup>237</sup>

Above, the author narrated visitors' difficulty in seeking the right direction. It seems that the search does not flow naturally and meets a few obstacles. Tao villagers are separated in this way so that no one can easily enter their world. The story produces an effect of desolation, which implies a negation of the outside world with its unmanageable urban chaos. In these stories, local villagers enjoy the beauty of nature which is neglected by urban dwellers.

In the second period of his work, 1928-1932, Fei Ming shifted emphasis from peace of mind in a silent realm to an empty mind in the boundless universe, again combining Daoism with his beliefs in Zen thought. According to his understanding, people can feel at ease only when they care for nothing in the world: achieving serenity is the first stage of enlightenment. Freeing one's mind means to empty the mind of all thoughts, no matter whether one lives in a peaceful or a noisy world. His belief in emptiness finally made him give up writing short

---

<sup>237</sup> Feng Wenbing, *FWXJ*, p. 72.

stories after 1932. Readers can see the transition in his short stories composed during the second period of his work.

Fei Ming began to focus on the relationship among images, time and space in his last stories. Disconnecting from his initial attempts to hide his personal emotions in fiction, from 1928 on, he allowed his likes and dislikes to emerge when he wrote about ordinary urban and village life. As he explained,

Now I only care about facts and reality and do not like imagination any longer.<sup>238</sup>

Some people complain that my stories are obscure and they cannot understand them thoroughly. Who knows that I have already tried my best to show my inner feelings? I am even afraid that my personal thinking is displayed too clearly.<sup>239</sup>

His short story “Jujubes” (1929) in the collection of the same name offers a sample of his transitional period.

The story is told in the first person narrative by a drifter in Beijing. The narrator first sighs about time flying by and reminisces nostalgically about his hometown. Then he recalls the time when he was chatting with his teacher about the beauty of rain. Finally he mentions his new neighbour who comes from his hometown. He talks with the neighbour cordially. In the end, looking back to his childhood, he suddenly discovers that his new neighbour is trying to shake down jujubes from the tree in his garden. The story reads like a diary of a boring life and reveals the author’s practice of Western modernist techniques such as stream of consciousness. Time and space change several times in his mind though his body stays in the room. The narrator indirectly expresses his disappointment with the new neighbour and with his boring life in the words “only those who take shelter from the rain can really appreciate the beauty of rain”.<sup>240</sup> Only those who sense time’s flowing and have no

---

<sup>238</sup> Feng Wenbing, *FWXJ*, p. 366.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 321.

<sup>240</sup> Feng Wenbing, “Zao” 枣, in *Jujubes*, 25 May, 2006. <<http://www.bwsk.com/xd/f/feiming/000/021.htm>>.

alternative can really appreciate life. Here Fei Ming shows how memory can provoke sudden enlightenment.

Another short story “Mao’er de baba” 毛儿的爸爸 [Mao’er’s Father] (1928) in the collection *Jijubes* has a similar theme but is set in the countryside. Fei Ming regarded this story as an observation of ordinary life.<sup>241</sup> He changed direction from creating an ideal realm to paying close attention to mundane occurrences. However, life in his stories remains peaceful and free. These stories do not convey any depressing feelings even though the characters are struggling for a living. In his last stories, Fei Ming tries to achieve his ideal of mental freedom in ordinary life rather than in his imaginary realm.

### ● Intermittence and Emptiness: Poetic Elements and Characteristics of Prose

Fei Ming’s stories, in the view of many critics, are better than his poems,<sup>242</sup> but there are poetic elements in his stories. Edward Gunn regarded these poetic elements as a variety of Europeanised constructions: “unmediated dialogue with unplanned sentences”, “anastrophe” and “a relatively rare use of synonym”.<sup>243</sup> Shu-mei Shih explained the poetic practices in Fei Ming’s stories as destroying spatial and temporal continuity and causal associational thinking.<sup>244</sup> The sentences, which tend to be short and concise, are constructed as in a poem. The topics change from one sentence to another, giving an impression of incoherence or, alternatively, of hidden connections. Even within a short piece, there is frequent change of ideas, making his stories abrupt, fragmentary and seemingly illogical. As in traditional Chinese poetry, these techniques leave space for readers to meditate on the meaning. What readers find is an artistic realm filled with flavour and charm rather than narrative. A Song writer on poetry, Yan Yu (1198-1241), concluded that good poems are like music in the air,

---

<sup>241</sup> Feng Wenbing, *FWXJ*, p. 395.

<sup>242</sup> Bian Zhilin, Preface to *Feng Wenbing xuanji* [Selected Works of Feng Wenbing], ed. Feng Jiannan (Beijing: Remin wenzue chubanshe, 1985), p. 5.

<sup>243</sup> Edward Gunn, *Rewriting Chinese: Style and Innovation in Twentieth-century Chinese Prose* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), p. 127.

<sup>244</sup> Shu-mei Shih, “Writing English with a Chinese Brush: The Work of Fei Ming”, in *The Lure of the Modern: Writing Modernism in Semicolonial China, 1917-1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), p. 194.

colours in a picture, the moon under water and images in a mirror. Sentences are short but meanings are deep.<sup>245</sup> Fei Ming adopted Yan Yu's principles of poetry in his stories.

Was Xiaolin looking at something patiently? He only caught a small image. His eyes could not surpass the limitation of the vision; within his gaze there was something pale — Qinzi's eyebrows. The unpainted light eyebrows indeed destroyed the beauty of a forest. Scenes of hills and waters from ancient to modern time combined together — really, that was the irrelevant word 'black'. He did not know whether that type of brow could be considered pretty. Her eyes merged into his instantly as in poets' descriptions. He was only an onlooker and dared not to applaud.<sup>246</sup>

Here Fei Ming linked different things together illogically from "Qinzi's eyebrows" to a beautiful forest and from "scenes of hills and waters" to a pair of eyes. He admitted that he would begin his writing with descriptions of a pretty girl and end it with descriptions of a natural scene far away.<sup>247</sup> He could link unconnected things together and let his ideas jump from eyebrows to forests.

In addition to the concept of *wu wo zhi jing* in poetry mentioned above, a second type of artistic concept: *you wo zhi jing* 有我之境, i.e. objective things conveying the author's emotions,<sup>248</sup> can also be seen in Fei Ming's stories. In the second half of the novel *Bridges*, Xiaolin grows up and is no longer a boy in the countryside but a young man with modern notions. From then on, Xiaolin turns out to be a young philosopher, who thinks deeply about life. The author uses the character Xiaolin as a medium to express his own feelings. Once Xiaolin talks about fallen flowers with his two friends, "the petals and flowers on the tree will not fall down on the ground but fly up into the sky".<sup>249</sup> In the author's eyes, the negative image of fallen flowers can be described positively.

---

<sup>245</sup> Yan Yu, *Canglang shihua* 沧浪诗话 [Poetry Talks by (the Escapist of) the Canglang River], comp. Guo Shaoyu (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1961), p. 24.

<sup>246</sup> Feng Wenbing, *FWXJ*, p. 157.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 409.

<sup>248</sup> Wang Guowei, *Renjian cihua* 人间词话 [Talks on *Ci* in the Human World] (Hong Kong: Zhonghua shuju, 1961), p. 1.

<sup>249</sup> Feng Wenbing, *Bridges*, 25 May, 2006. <<http://www.sinology.cn/main/book1/mjwj/ff/feiming/q/index.html>>.

Many other examples, such as “the rain in one’s imagination will not make people wet” (“Qingming” 清明 [The Pure Brightness] in *Bridges*) and “what you just said ‘*zou ma kan hua* 走马看花’ [a flying visit] makes me desperate to ride a horse” (“Lushang” 路上 [On the Way] in *Bridges*),<sup>250</sup> can be regarded as Fei Ming’s creation of mixing unconnected things together according to his own feelings. Although he does not express his personal views on any event in his stories, he uses many literary techniques that make his stories like poetry. The blurring and strange meaning in these sentences is the author’s challenge to the real world.

Xiaolin’s saying in the chapter “Gushi” 故事 [Stories] in *Bridges* reveals Fei Ming’s thinking about writing stories: “The meaning of life does not exist in stories but in the techniques of how to play up stories”.<sup>251</sup> The plots of his stories are not clear and the content is not compact. Readers can feel that Fei Ming’s train of thoughts drifts from one point to another in a disorderly fashion, and his descriptions of images are divided into several separated parts in his stories. To create an empty space for readers, Fei Ming emphasised time’s passage and its relation to changes of destinations. These literary characteristics make readers think of another literary form: the essay.

Qinzi’s eyes, however, stared at the lights; she stood under a willow-tree for a little while and in the next moment ran into the wheat field opposite the house. Her eyes still stared at the lights—suddenly she blossomed into a tree of flowers on behalf of the only plum tree in Shi village.<sup>252</sup>

I’m afraid it was a fault in his timing for he was thinking about drops of sweat flowing down his expressionless face. Therefore, he could not see her any more.<sup>253</sup>

The opposite shore is oblique and full of grasses. His eyes looked from one place to another following the shadows of the trees. Among the green grasses,

---

<sup>250</sup> Feng Wenbing, *Bridges*, 25 May, 2006. <<http://www.sinology.cn/main/book1/mjwj/ff/feiming/q/index.html>>.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid.

Sister Dog wore a white coat. She had black hair and her face was smiling, giving people an impression of completion. But he separated the thing (Sister Dog's hands washing clothes) apart as he remembered two arms in a picture and a white pigeon he saw inside the grasses. He became an observer in such a short minute.<sup>254</sup>

These paragraphs, especially the third, display the disjunctive relationship between time and space. The images are all from the author's momentary imagination, so they change quickly. The technique is somewhat similar to stream of consciousness, but Fei Ming's adaptation is learned from the literary conventions of the traditional Chinese essay.

Another characteristic derived from the essay in Fei Ming's stories is his use of *tonggan* 通感 [synaesthesia].<sup>255</sup> He combines different feelings together and disrupts different senses. For example, a mountain covered by flowers is described as a volcano, on which "the bright sunshine and the blue sky are adding flames".<sup>256</sup> Thanks to the profusion of flowers, the mountain looks like a burning volcano. The author writes down the change of feelings from the visual sense to the tactile sense. The bright sunshine and the blue sky in the summer make people feel hot, like someone walking close to a volcano.

Many other examples can be seen, such as "the depth of the water chestnut pond is stirred by them" in the story "Water Chestnut Pond" (association of the sense of sight with the sense of touch);<sup>257</sup> "willows are gradually growing in Laodie's heart" in the story "Heshang liu" 河上柳 [Willows on a Riverbank] (association of personal emotion with a

---

<sup>254</sup> Feng Wenbing, *Bridges*, 25 May, 2006. <<http://www.sinology.cn/main/book1/mjwj/ff/feiming/q/index.html>>.

<sup>255</sup> Synaesthesia means a condition in which one type of stimulation evokes the sensation of another, as when the hearing of a sound produces the visualisation of a colour. In Western theories of literature, it relates to the description of one kind of sense impression by using words that normally describe another. This technique is also known in traditional Chinese literature as *tonggan* 通感, which refers to the association of one sense with another. A good example is in Zhu Ziqing (1898-1948)'s essay "Hetang yuese" 荷塘月色 [The Moonlight around a Lotus Pond]. Zhu described the fragrance of lotuses as the singing from the far end of a building, associating the sense of smell with the hearing.

<sup>256</sup> Feng Wenbing, *Bridges*, 29 May, 2006. <<http://www.sinology.cn/main/book1/mjwj/ff/feiming/q/index.html>>.

<sup>257</sup> Feng Wenbing, *FWXJ*, p. 72.



botanical process);<sup>258</sup> and “you stop for a second and can hear the sound of the flowing water—the pond is filled up by one sound after another” in the story “Water Chestnut Pond” (association of the sense of sight with hearing).<sup>259</sup> These examples reveal Fei Ming’s mode of techniques learned from both Chinese and Western sources.

Fei Ming creates a new way of writing fiction by applying poetic expressions and techniques from essay writing into narrative stories. The literary form of his writings does not have a clear definition. Some of his short stories can also be regarded as essays and some of the sentences in his stories can be arranged into poems. The intermittence between the sentences leaves many empty spaces for readers, which, in the hands of Fei Ming, are full of vitality.

### ● Summary

Using the themes of rural life and local customs, Fei Ming created a new style of fiction in modern Chinese literature. A young man from the countryside observing urban culture, he emphasised an ideal farming civilisation of the rural areas to criticise urban culture, although he received a modern education in Beijing. In his short stories, readers can see his identification with local villagers’ simple life and their innocence; meanwhile, Fei Ming displayed the beauty of both natural scenery and local customs in his hometown. He rebuilt a simple and unadorned realm and gave a rebirth to traditional Chinese culture in his stories.

Fei Ming sought the past and experiences of ordinary life through fiction. Happiness and joy in his stories come from life’s small fragments, such as a local festival, a good meal and a beautiful scene. As a way of cultivating oneself according to religious doctrines, the author creates a peaceful environment for the characters in his fiction and conceals his personal emotions to achieve the temperament of writing about life honestly. Therefore, Fei Ming’s stories are all imbued with harmony, flexibility and silence.

To create a traditional style of life in dreams, Fei Ming learned from traditional Chinese literature and adopted aesthetics used by traditional poets. When describing the local villages,

---

<sup>258</sup> Feng Wenbing, *FWXJ*, p. 52.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

he used many poetic sentences, but the content of his stories is based on his own experiences. Bian Zhilin mentioned in his preface to Fei Ming's selected works that his own poetic style had been influenced by Fei Ming.<sup>260</sup> When describing local culture, Fei Ming adopted the aesthetics of traditional Chinese prose to elaborate the sentences in his stories. As Zhou Zuoren summarised in the preface to Fei Ming's collection of short stories *Jujubes* and the novel *Bridges*, the value of Fei Ming's writings lies in his expression of beauty.<sup>261</sup> Fei Ming is one of the few writers of the early twentieth century who could liberate himself from utilitarian and social purposes of literature, governed by the traditional slogans *shi yan zhi* 诗言志 [poetry expresses one's will] and *wen yi zai dao* 文以载道 [literature conveys principles].<sup>262</sup> At the same time, he frees himself from the burden of revealing realistic problems and awakening the common people's consciousness of a modern society, as advocated by most May Fourth period writers.

Fei Ming avoids dramatic changes, intricate plots or characters with special personalities in his stories. His fiction displays the natural qualities of ordinary life. Zhou Zuoren compared the characteristics of Fei Ming's stories with the movement of water and wind: although water and wind will meet with many impediments, such as waterweeds and caves, when they flow forward or blow, they will go on as if nothing has happened.<sup>263</sup> Fei Ming's abstruse writing demonstrates his techniques learned from different sources to describe complicated things within a short piece.

### **Section 3, The Grey Countryside: Eastern Zhejiang in Lu Yan's Short Stories**

From the early 1920s a group of young men from Eastern Zhejiang congregated in Beijing.

---

<sup>260</sup> Bian Zhilin, Preface to *Feng Wenbing xuanji* [Selected Works of Feng Wenbing], ed. Feng Jiannan (Beijing: Remin wenxue chubanshe, 1985), pp. 9-10.

<sup>261</sup> Zhou Zuoren, *Zhou Zuoren xuanji* 周作人选集 [Selected Works of Zhou Zuoren], ed. Xu Chensi and Ye Wangyou (Shanghai: Wangxiang shuwu, 1936), p. 104.

<sup>262</sup> William H. Nienhauser, ed., *The Indiana Companion to Traditional Chinese Literature*, Vol. 1 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), p. 60.

<sup>263</sup> Zhou Zuoren, *Zhou Zuoren xuanji* 周作人选集 [Selected Works of Zhou Zuoren], ed. Xu Chensi and Ye Wangyou (Shanghai: Wangxiang shuwu, 1936), p. 102.

Eager for knowledge and curious about the “new culture”, some of them became auditors at Peking University and embarked on the road of literary writing. Many of their literary works were published in newspapers in Beijing and Shanghai from the mid 1920s. This group of young men included Feng Xuefeng, Xu Qinwen, Wei Jinzhi and Wang Luyan. Wang Luyan (1902-1944), also known as Lu Yan, was born to a declining gentry family in Zhenhai, Zhejiang. He was sent to a traditional private school at the age of six. He went to Shanghai at eighteen for several years of apprenticeship in watchmakers’ shops. At the beginning of the 1920s, Lu Yan became a visiting student at Peking University and began his literary creation.

Lu Yan’s stories can be regarded as *xiangtu wenxue* 乡土文学 [native soil literature], and he was one of the followers of Lu Xun, as seen in his slightly satirical style and his primary interest in rural society. Lu Xun was the first critic who showed interest in the descriptions of rural life by this group of writers from his native province. In the preface to *The Compendium of New Literature of China* (Vol. 4), Lu Xun compared the stories of Lu Yan and Xu Qinwen. Although their styles and ways of expressing feelings were different, they both drew on the folk customs and stories they had known since childhood.

These writers in the 1920s who wrote about life in the countryside shared a similar background. They all left their hometowns in their youth and lived in urban areas for most of their adult lives. In their writings, they utilised a realistic mode to criticise the patriarchal clan system in rural areas; at the same time, they followed with interest local people’s popular beliefs and local conditions. Lu Yan’s stories convey the customs of Eastern Zhejiang: the lives of poor peasants and small landowners. An important feature of these customs is local people’s esteem for agriculture and disregard for trade. The breakdown of the rural economy in this area exacerbated local conservatism. In Lu Yan’s stories, readers can see that villagers’ lives are mainly controlled by their beliefs in agricultural customs. Their conservative thinking represents the general mood of local society: everyone is content with things as they are. Thanks to Lu Yan’s detailed descriptions, his early native soil literature has a high value in folklore studies.

Apart from the novel *Yehuo* 野火 [A Prairie Fire] (1937) and the novella *Xiangtu* 乡

土 [Native Land] (1936), the majority of Lu Yan's writings are short stories. His stories were completed within three periods. His first two collections of short stories *Youzi* 柚子 [A Pomelo] (1926) and *Huangjin* 黄金 [Gold] (1928) were published between 1923 and 1928. In these two collections, Lu Yan expressed his sympathy for the poor peasantry, whom he depicted as embodied a kind of humble humanism in a pastoral ideal. His fiction writing reached its peak in the 1930s, when he published five collections of short stories, including the famous *Xiaoxiao de xin* 小小的心 [A Little Heart] (1933) and *Wuding xia* 屋顶下 [Under the Roof] (1934). With his objective attitude and mature literary techniques, Lu Yan realistically evoked the depressing life of the countryside. The last period of his writing was the late 1930s and early 1940s; his 1940 collection of short stories *Qiao shang* 桥上 [On the Bridge] will also be discussed below.<sup>264</sup>

#### ● "Simple Humanism" and Rustic Life

As a young man migrating from the countryside, Lu Yan was readily receptive to the ideas of the New Culture Movement in Beijing. At the same time he was ambivalent, hoping to introduce local customs from his hometown to urban readers. Comparing rural life with urban life, he showed the traditional values of the countryside. The author not only described local conditions but also portrayed the changes in people's thinking. The natural environment of Eastern Zhejiang in Lu Yan's short stories is bleak. Local people still follows human nature, but they lead a humble life without the ability to improve their lives and realise their aspirations.

In the story "On the Bridge" (1940), Lu Yan described the typical landscape of rivers and lakes of Eastern Zhejiang. The small town forms a link between the countryside and the city, introducing changes to the way in which people are living.

Gah [...] gah [...] gah [...] Uncle Yixin felt his legs shivering. The husking boat was once again berthed alongside South Bridge, opposite Xue Village. Although

---

<sup>264</sup> All the references to Lu Yan's works are from *Lu Yan xuanji* 鲁彦选集 [Selected Works of Lu Yan] (Shanghai: Wanxiang shuwu, 1936) and *Lu Yan xuanji* 鲁彦选集 [Selected Works of Lu Yan] (Shanghai: Zhongyang shudian, 1937); in the following cited as *LYXJ*; variations are noted where relevant. I translated the sentences and paragraphs cited from Lu Yan's works.

he was standing on North Bridge, half a mile away from the village, he could see smoke circles made by the boat's exhaust rolling up towards him.<sup>265</sup>

Small rivers and lakes divide Xue Village into several parts, so the bridges are the roads and streets. People can easily see each other no matter whether they stand on bridges or sit in boats, although the distance between them is very far. These are typical scenes in Eastern Zhejiang. The mechanical husker in Lin Jikang's boat is a sign of the industrialisation which is changing modes of production in the small town. The author points out some common problems in the countryside in 1920s China in the story of conflict between the owner of a rice store, Uncle Yixin, and a small merchant, Lin Jikang. Local villagers are still under the control of the patriarchal clan system: the place is very hard to get to; local villagers are ill-informed; and they are satisfied with their self-sufficiency in a small-scale peasant economy. The competition between Yixin and Lin Jikang in the rice business is an epitome of the clash between rural economy and industrial civilisation. The two themes—the breakdown of rural economy in the southeast of China during the 1920s and local people's resistance to industrialisation—can also be seen in Mao Dun's celebrated short story “Chun can” 春蚕 [Spring Silkworms] (1932).

In Uncle Yixin's eyes, the machine in Lin Jikang's boat for husking rice is an evil. The author mentions Yixin's hatred of its exhaust fumes several times in the story. At first he looks down upon Lin's business, as he believes that rice husked by machine tastes bad. He insists on the traditional way of husking rice by mortar and pestle as being superior in terms of *renqingwei* 人情味 [human quality]. Uncle Yixin is so intoxicated by his pastoral ideal that he values human nature but neglects profits. It seems that his fellow villagers and customers are more realistic than he is since they choose to buy Lin's rice because of the lower price. The impending failure of Uncle Yixin's business is implied at the end of the story. His conservative belief in “humanism” and small-scale farming is powerless against the inevitable process of rural industrialisation.

Lu Yan depicted the conflicts between old and new thinking in a more melancholy

---

<sup>265</sup> Wang Luyan, “On the Bridge”, in *LYXJ*.

mode in the story “Hebian” 河边 [Beside the River] (1937). Grandmother Mingda falls ill. Her son Hanzi, who has been in a nearby city for almost three years, comes back to persuade her to see a doctor. But Grandmother Mingda holds a strong faith in fate and she believes that only the Buddha can save her. Hanzi feels helpless. He realises that persuasion is useless and finally sends his mother to a local temple to pray for health. In this peaceful village by a small river, local people still keep their faith in religion and human feelings, although their traditional values are confronted by influences from urban areas.

Both at the beginning and at the end of the story, the author imparts poetic beauty to this village in Eastern Zhejiang:

It is a melancholy late spring. The sky hangs down gloomily. The river is rising again. Although it is only drizzling, the continual rain pours into tributaries in hills, in fields and beside small houses. Finally the raindrops converge into a river.<sup>266</sup>

Here the melancholy spring represents ingrained traditional values, which emphasise human nature and popular beliefs. Spring will pass soon and rainy season has begun, implying a sort of change. The river implies the separation between the old and the new. The river is again filled with water and overflows its banks. It is difficult to change local thinking even though it is ignorant and humble.

Besides analysing local people’s mental world, Lu Yan expressed his personal attitude toward local people in the story “A Pomelo”, set in Hunan. At first, the author describes the tough local social conditions from the point of view of two young men, both from Zhejiang: local warlords battle against each other and kill local villagers wantonly. However, the locals are keen to be in the front row as a fellow villager’s head is chopped off. The author sympathised with local people’s sufferings, detested their ignorance and criticised the warlord’s savage acts.

The author’s complicated feelings lead to a contradictory tone in his narration: satire mingles with sympathy. He would like to save the villagers from the chaos caused by war,

---

<sup>266</sup> Wang, Luyan, “Beside the River”, in *LYXJ*.

but he feels depressed by his helplessness. He is dissatisfied with society and tries to change it through his writings; at the same time, he reveals his weakness and realises that the idea of rescuing people from their suffering by writing stories is an illusion. Therefore, he longs to escape. This longing for escape is implied at the beginning of the story:

It was autumn, a desolate autumn, the third day after the shots had kindly disappeared and the battles were finished at Yuelu Mountain. I sat on an upper floor, feeling dejected.

Two numbed young men came into boring Changsha just at the right time.<sup>267</sup>

Like Lu Yan himself, the two young men leave their hometown and drift from one place to another, but disappointedly find that the whole nation is enduring chaos and difficulties. The cause of the author's despair is people's apathy. The townspeople even laugh at the severed head when they realise that it looks like a pomelo, the local product for which the area is famous.

The tone in "On the Bridge" is detached, describing the economic difficulties people have met in an unstable society. The style of "Beside the River" is more poetic, suggesting nostalgia for rural tranquillity. "A Pomelo" is written as a note of modern drama or even as satire. The unspoiled nature in the countryside evokes a pastoral ideal. Local people cherish their traditional values and respect human nature. But rural life was difficult in 1920s China. As Lu Yan wrote in "A Pomelo", "How cheap the pomelo is!"<sup>268</sup>

### ● Minor Tragedies Caused by Folk Customs

To display his hometown, Lu Yan described local customs in his fiction. He mentioned marriage customs in the story "Juying de chujia" 菊英的出嫁 [The Marriage of Juying] and praying for rain at a local temple in the story "Chalu" 岔路 [A Back Road]. In the story

---

<sup>267</sup> Wang Luyan, "A Pomelo", in *LYXJ*.

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.*

“Shu ya” 鼠牙 [Rats’ Teeth], Lu Yan discussed the local belief that rats hold a wedding ceremony for their daughters at night and human beings should not disturb them.<sup>269</sup> By demonstrating these customs and associating them with local people’s mental activities, Lu Yan tried to explain the causes behind local tragedies and the popular beliefs which controlled everyone in the countryside.

In “The Marriage of Juying”, Lu Yan depicted the special custom of posthumous marriage, which was still very wide-spread in Eastern Zhejiang in the 1930s. Juying dies at the age of eight. Ten years later, her mother holds a big wedding ceremony for Juying, provides her a diverse dowry and moves her coffin to her husband’s home in a blue sedan. The custom of posthumous marriage is connected with local people’s belief in ghosts and goblins. First, parents feel uneasy if they cannot help their sons or daughters accomplish “the biggest event of their whole life” [*zhongshen dashi* 终身大事]. As Juying’s mother believes, “if Juying can find a home for both her body and soul, she will be happy.”<sup>270</sup> Secondly, local villagers believe that dead children need a place to rest; otherwise their souls will be homeless. To organise a wedding ceremony for a dead child is the only thing that their relatives can do for them.

Lu Yan chose an unusual way to narrate the story. The focus is a mother’s love for her lost daughter rather than the custom itself. Lu Yan’s satirical tone is mute as he records in every detail how deeply the mother misses her daughter. Juying has been dead for nearly ten years. During that time, her mother wept secretly as she recalled the past. She finds a ray of hope in the local custom of posthumous and respite from her senses of guilt and resentment. To relieve her daughter’s loneliness in the nether world, she believes that “the only way was to choose a husband for Juying, a young husband”.<sup>271</sup> She lives frugally in order to save money for a lavish wedding. After the ceremony is completed, the mother “cried herself into a coma at home”.<sup>272</sup> She finds that her fantasy of a living daughter has been destroyed. As

---

<sup>269</sup> Wang Luyan, “Rats’ Teeth”, 6 June, 2006. <<http://book.ayinfo.ha.cn/mjwj/ll/luyan/zzz/018.htm>>.

<sup>270</sup> Wang Luyan, “The Marriage of Juying”, in *LXXJ*.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*



had happened ten years ago, her maternal love has been unable to save her daughter; the happy time of preparing the big wedding is over in a twinkle, leaving only deeper loneliness in the mother's heart.

In the story, reality is mingled with illusion. It is only when the author mentions a coffin and a blue sedan that readers realise that this wedding ceremony is for the dead. Local people believe that children who die young continue to grow up. The author's use of a serious tone to describe the formalities of the wedding sounds awkward. But the mother could only seek comfort in her illusion of a proper wedding. Lu Yan once again emphasises human nature. At the same time he expresses pessimism at the local villagers' ignorance.

Another folk custom Lu Yan introduced in his stories concerns the peasants' esteem for agriculture. The story "Rats' Teeth" shows local peasants' contradictory attitude toward rats. On the one hand, they hate rats for eating up their rice. On the other hand, they worship rats in the belief that they are highly intelligent. In Yongkang, local people believe that rats prepare weddings for their daughters at night and that householders should allow them to carry out the ceremonies. In the story, two neighbours find out that their rice stocks are decreasing and they suspect each other of stealing. Finally, they learn that the rats are eating their rice. Since they revere rats as intelligent spirits, they dare not kill them but simply hope the rats would leave their homes and move to the neighbour's.

The poor peasants in Eastern Zhejiang work very hard and know their place. They bear hardship and share their reverence for farm work. The author associates the harm done to crops by rats with local people's disputes, exposing the peasants' selfishness. When explaining the rats' supposed intelligence, Lu Yan uses a humorous tone.

They (rats) are born smart. They steal oil by inserting their tails into the oil bottles. They use a clever way to steal eggs: one rat hugs an egg and lies on its back; others drag its tail and move both the egg and their companion home.<sup>273</sup>

To the local people, rats bring amusement to their daily life. But they are simple-minded

---

<sup>273</sup> Wang Luyan, "Rats' Teeth", 6 June, 2006. <<http://book.ayinfo.ha.cn/mjwj/ll/luyan/zdz/018.htm>>.

about how to solve the problem of lost food.

In the countryside, farming customs are connected with the patriarchal clan system. Peasants regard their patriarchal clans and blood ties as being as important as agriculture itself. In the story “A Back Road”, Lu Yan writes about the vendetta between Yuan Village and Wu Village, which share a common ancestral hall containing an altar to the bodhisattva Guanyu 关羽. To pray for rain, the peasants in the two villages come together at Guanyu’s altar. But then they quarrel about Guanyu’s itinerary: which village should Guanyu go to first? The villagers start fighting inside the hall and some of them are killed. They aim to find out which village is more powerful.

The hall becomes a battlefield instead of a place for common worship. Fei Xiaotong said that in rural communities blood relationship regulates almost all social activities, such as competitions among different villages for local supremacy. Close relationships only exist among family members and relatives. Whether members of a village can be united as one depends on human relationships.<sup>274</sup> In “A Back Road”, local peasants overvalue the power of patriarchy and the sacred status of the bodhisattva Guanyu. They believe that their patriarchal clans and blood ties are as important as agriculture; therefore, villagers fight for Guanyu’s itinerary and only the male can serve the rite of praying for rain before Guanyu’s altar.

Lu Yan was familiar with these folk customs, which he saw as an ideological system. Local customs determine people’s personality and decide their fate. At the same time, these customs are good material for Lu Yan’s stories. This paradox reveals Lu Yan’s contradictory attitude toward his hometown: criticising ignorance and superstition and cherishing human nature. In Lu Yan’s eyes, local villagers’ thinking is backward and their life is humble because they stick to their folk customs.

---

<sup>274</sup> Fei Xiaotong, *Xiangtu Zhongguo: shengyu zhidu* 乡土中国：生育制度 [Rural Life in China: Family Planning] (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1998), pp. 70, 127-28.

## ● Small Town Oppression

In 1930s coastal China, due to the invading forces of industry and capitalism, the structure of the rural economy was changing. In rural areas of Eastern Zhejiang, peasants began to engage in small trade and business; a new class emerged, including small landowners and businessmen. Lu Yan recorded these changes in his short stories and depicted the experiences of the new bourgeoisie. Outwardly, their lives are much better than peasants', but their standard of living is much lower than that of urban people's. Moreover, under the influence of industrial civilisation, they gradually lose their innocence and human relationships become more complicated. As Mao Dun summarised, they are disturbed by suspicion and jealousy and governed by their material desire.<sup>275</sup>

Uncle Rushi's experience in the story "Gold" represents the rural middle class' typical way of life. A retired official in a village faces some economic difficulties at the end of the year. Because his son in Ningbo does not give financial help on time, Rushi is oppressed by rumours among his neighbours. He and his wife suffer slander, bullying and scorn from their fellow villagers. Rushi believes that he cannot solve the financial problem by himself as he has lost his job and his only hope of help is from his son, who is too far away. The story narrates that "Uncle Rushi's heart is filled with sorrow".<sup>276</sup> Moreover, Rushi is ashamed to let others know his predicament and even conceals the truth from his wife. Poverty causes Rushi to fear an uncertain future. This fear is suffocating:

Uncle Rushi and his wife felt breathless as if there were a heavy rock pressed on their hearts. Were they really poor? No, certainly not. Their house was better-furnished than other villagers'; they had more fields and more good furniture. How could they be called poor? But these things could not be sold. Their fellow villagers would be watching them. If they knew that they had become poor, they really would be poor fellows, even poorer than beggars. Villagers never bully beggars. But if you in the middle class are found to be

---

<sup>275</sup> Mao Dun, "Wang Luyan lun" 王鲁彦论 [On Wang Luyan], in *Xiaoshuo yuebao* 小说月报 [Short Story Monthly], no. 19 (January, 1928): 1.

<sup>276</sup> Wang Luyan, "Gold", in *LXXJ*.

poor, everyone dares to humiliate you.<sup>277</sup>

Furthermore, Rushi is tormented by a sense of resentment. He hates his mistreatment by the neighbours but he cannot express his grievances. Rushi's beloved dog is killed cruelly by the butcher Ah Hui for stealing a bone at the slaughterhouse. His daughter cries that they should seek revenge for the dog, but Rushi says that "there is no other way. It is just because we have become poor; otherwise, he would not dare."<sup>278</sup> Rushi and his family all sense that the villagers no longer respect them. They are afraid of being humiliated and do not have the courage to fight back. Finally, Rushi even hates himself, feeling bitter about his impotence.

Realistically portraying the psychology of small-town people in a changing society, Lu Yan satirised the hypocrisy and snobbishness of the locals. At the end of the story, Rushi receives a letter from his son in the city, informing him that he has wired two thousand dollars and will soon send a box of gold as well. The same villagers come swarming to fawn on Rushi. Lu Yan portrayed the inconstancy of human relationships in the countryside. With the development of industry and capitalism, rural ethics are declining. People have become more concerned about money and throw away the traditional values. They cheat and outwit others for a better life.

Lu Yan tried to analyse small town attitudes to life in his early story "Zili" 自立 [Support Yourself] (1925). Two brothers fall out over a legacy and go to court. They both spend a great deal of money to win the lawsuit but no one gets any benefit. The local court effortlessly reaps the spoils of the contest between them. In this story, Lu Yan pointed out people's character flaws. To earn money, they become snobs, treating others meanly. Local government officials do not serve the people but profit from them. At a time when some writers believed that only rural people still embodied the precious parts of human nature, Lu Yan displayed the countryside through a new lens. In the countryside, there is no pastoral ideal, only fighting for more money.

In the story "Xu shi buzhiyu ba" 许是不至于罢 [Perhaps It Won't Come to That]

---

<sup>277</sup> Wang Luyan, "Gold", in *LYXJ*.

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid.*

(1925) Lu Yan appealed for a reassessment of value systems among the people of rural China by using black humour in the psychological portrayal of the propertied class. In the story, Lu Yan depicts a wedding feast bustling with noise and excitement. It is held by the local landlord Wang Eyu for his third son. But during the happy event, Wang Eyu feels anxious. “The rich man put on a smile but his heart was filled with secret worries.”<sup>279</sup> He knows that he should be happy and proud, especially when local villagers compliment him on his prosperity. But he regards his life as a humble one. During the wedding feast, although he is surrounded by others’ joy and excitement, he worries that local robbers may snatch his daughter-in-law on her way to his family. He bears the anxiety alone and cannot find anyone to share his oppression. To his relief, nothing untoward happens during the wedding. But some of his property is stolen by thieves that night. The flurried sound of drums at midnight represents the palpitation in Wang Eyu’s heart, and once again he is alone with his fear.

Lu Yan described people’s selfishness and their indifference to others.

Robbers were the poorest of people. It was reasonable for them to snatch away those rich landlords’ money. Local people did not agree with this point of view. They hated robbers. They respected rich men as they had to borrow money from them. But they agreed on one principle: look out for Number One!<sup>280</sup>

The rich man Wang Eyu does not resent his fellow villagers. He is satisfied if only others do not cheat him. He even shows gratitude at his neighbours’ hypocritical show of friendship. He is ashamed of his wealth. As his name “Eyu” satirically suggests,<sup>281</sup> his villagers and relatives offer nothing for him but flattery.

Lu Yan indirectly displayed changing human relationships in the story “Under the Roof”. Here he does not describe the broader society of the countryside but expounds the psychological interplay between a woman and her daughter-in-law. Bende has endured all kinds of hardship to support her family. Her daughter-in-law Ah Zhi also shoulders hard

---

<sup>279</sup> Wang Luyan, “Perhaps It Won’t Come to That”, in *LYXJ*.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid.

<sup>281</sup> The pronunciation of the name “Eyu” 阿虞 is the same as the pronunciation of the word *eyu* 阿谀, which means fawning on.

work and is filial to her mother-in-law. Both the women regard family as the most important thing in their lives. They should get on well with each other. But their good relationship eventually breaks down due to misunderstandings. Lu Yan does not impute the unhappy ending to the different personalities of the two women but analyses the social roots of the tragedy. Old Bende has gone through many difficulties and is always cautious of social change. Although she is industrious and thrifty in managing the household, its standard of living deteriorates because of inflation. In the context of the family's dire straits, Bende wrongly accuses her daughter-in-law of being a spendthrift.

In rural peasants' eyes, people of the town led happy and comfortable lives. Influenced by industrial civilisation, social life in Eastern Zhejiang changed rapidly during the 1930s. All the social changes reflected in Lu Yan's stories, such as the inconstancy of human relationships, small businessmen's bankruptcies and contradictions among family members, are related to developments in the economy in rural areas.

### ● Legendary Style with Symbolism

In the preface to *The Compendium of New Literature of China* (Vol. 4), Lu Xun commented that Lu Yan expressed in his stories his dislike for the destruction of a formerly ideal pastoral existence,<sup>282</sup> indicating that his writing style was different from the realistic narrative of native soil literature. When describing the natural environment and social change in Eastern Zhejiang, Lu Yan gave readers a realistic picture. But his stories are not simply realistic. He delicately portrayed the psychology of local people in his hometown, using a legendary style and some philosophical symbolism. The legendary style of Lu Yan's stories first means that they are similar to legends told by grandparents to their grandchildren. These stories are unverified but handed down from earlier times, especially those popularly believed to be historical.

Lu Yan always preferred to begin his narration through a spectator's eyes. Here is the

---

<sup>282</sup> Lu Xun, Preface to *Zhongguo xinwenxue daxi* [The Compendium of New Literature of China], ed. Zhao Jiabi, Vol. 4: Fiction 2, ed. Lu Xun (Shanghai: Liangyou tushu gongsi, 1935), p. 10.

first paragraph of the story “Perhaps It Won’t Come to That”:

Would you like to hear a story about the rich man Wang Eyu? Please hear it in the words of a grandmother of his village.

Listen, Ah Mao! Wang Eyu must have two hundred thousand dollars! His house near Wang Bridge on the east bank of the river is very big. The boundary walls are high. The house has several courtyards, verandas and countless large-sized rooms. If an old woman entered the house, how could she find the way out?<sup>283</sup>

The author conveys Wang Eyu’s wealth through a grandmother’s envious relation to her grandson Ah Mao.

Secondly, Lu Yan liked to use children as the narrators of his stories. Unlike his other stories that expose the dark side of life in the countryside, in the story “Tongnian de beiai” 童年的悲哀 [Sadness in Childhood] (1931) Lu Yan uses the first-person narrative to praise a young peasant Ah Cheng, who is warm-hearted and versatile. Ah Cheng always defends the little boy “I” against any injustice. He is good at playing *huqin* 胡琴<sup>284</sup> and teaches the boy singing. Although local people regard him as a rascal, he is a hero in the boy’s eyes. Ah Cheng dies in an accident and after that the boy feels that he has lost his happy childhood. The image of Ah Cheng evokes readers’ association with many characters in Fei Ming’s stories. However, through children’s eyes, life remains simple. They symbolise a gleam of hope for the grey countryside.

In the story “A Little Heart”, Lu Yan deals with the custom of selling children in some poor families along the coast of Zhejiang. A young boy Ah Pin is sold from Ningbo to a rich family in Xiamen. He gets on very well with his private teacher in the new family. But the father who adopts Ah Pin worries that the tutor may discover the truth if he stays with the boy for long, and he finally takes Ah Pin away to South Asia. Lu Yan praises the innocence of the boy, which represents the traditional values of the countryside. Both in the stories “Sadness in Childhood” and “A Little Heart”, the author uses first-person narrative with the

---

<sup>283</sup> Wang Luyan, “Perhaps It Won’t Come to That”, in *LYXJ*.

<sup>284</sup> A general term for certain two-stringed bowed instruments.

intention of recording narrators' observations. His attitude toward his hometown is complicated. On the one hand, he misses the simple life in the countryside; on the other hand, he feels sorrow and sympathy for the ignorant villagers.

In the early story "A Pomelo", the author also expressed his feelings freely through a spectator's eyes. The narrator "I" travels to Hunan and sees a convict being beheaded. Instead of recording the bloody moment, Lu Yan describes the head as looking like a pomelo. Local people's lives are as worthless as pomelos. Yang Yi summarises Lu Yan's writing style in the story "A Pomelo" as "*fenmen er you tianzhen de shuqing*" 愤懑而又天真的抒情 [an angry yet innocent lyricism].<sup>285</sup>

Another important characteristic of Lu Yan's short stories is his adaptation of the writing style of fairy tales. He once commented in the postscript to a collection of translated foreign short stories that using a legendary style in novels or novellas need not be for children, but for a deeper meaning. He called the method "putting new wine in an old bottle".<sup>286</sup> The mode and the content of the stories are legendary but the themes are social concerns. In the story "Xiao que'er" 小雀儿 [A Little Sparrow], Lu Yan expressed his understanding of social problems in China by depicting a sparrow's journey in the world. The story is similar to a fable, by means of which the author criticises government bureaucracy and mocks some of the new thinking Chinese people have learned from the West.

In another story "Xinghua dapao" 兴化大炮 [A Cannon from Xinghua], Lu Yan tells a legend about planting *longyan* 龙眼 trees. An old peasant in Xinghua village transplants seedlings of wild *longyan* in his courtyard and harvests the fruit. In local villagers' eyes, the *longyan* has mysterious healing qualities. The *longyan* tree is an Asian evergreen tree (*Euphobia longan*), having yellowish-brown fruit with white, juicy and edible flesh. Its Chinese name *longyan* literally means dragons' eye. In this story the author uses the name

---

<sup>285</sup> Yang Yi, *Zhongguo xiandai xiaoshuo shi* 中国现代小说史 [A History of Modern Chinese Fiction], Vol. 1 (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1986), p. 433.

<sup>286</sup> Lu Yan, Postscript to *Shijie duanpian xiaoshuo ji: Yuegui* 世界短篇小说集·月桂 [A Collection of International Short Stories: The Laurel] (Shanghai: Yadong tushuguan, 1928).



*longyan* to indicate what Chinese people have seen in a changing society. They are sold both at home and abroad, and the old peasant profits from big sales. However, his sons and grandsons fight with each other for the profits and finally split the family. Lu Yan reviewed social changes in the countryside by telling a legendary story. Villagers abandon their traditional values and only believe in money. Here the legendary *longyan* tree represents their innocence which has already been lost. It seems that Lu Yan does not care about pastoral ideals any more. He changed the content of his stories from worrying about the existence of a pastoral paradise into examining the real life of rural people.

### ● Summary

Mao Dun believed that the descriptions of folk customs, local conditions and natural scenery in native soil literature were a kind of distraction which could only satisfy readers' curiosity; good writers should also show at the local level the suffering of the nation as a whole.<sup>287</sup> In his short stories, Lu Yan not only described local conditions in Eastern Zhejiang, but also recorded social and economic changes in the countryside from the 1920s to the 1930s. To those Chinese folklorists of the Republican period, peasants were the only people who still embodied the precious parts of rural innocence which have been long lost among "civilised" urban dwellers.<sup>288</sup> Lu Yan showed in his stories that peasants in Eastern Zhejiang were losing their traditional values and the countryside was no longer a pastoral paradise because of the influence from urban areas. But he did not criticise the urban influence directly; instead, he portrayed the negative parts of local society, focusing on the experiences of its members, evoking a depressing impression for readers. In his stories, the myth of rural innocence is shattered. The theme is different from those stories about one's native land by other writers, such as Fei Ming and Shen Congwen, who described their hometowns as idyllic paradises.

---

<sup>287</sup> Mao Dun, "Guanyu xiangtu wenxue" 关于乡土文学 [About Native Soil Literature], in *Wenxue* 文学 [Literature], no. 2 (February, 1936): 6.

<sup>288</sup> Hung Chang-tai, *Going to the People: Chinese Intellectuals and Folk Literature 1918-1937* (Cambridge, Mass.: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University Press, 1985), pp. 13-14.

As a young man, Lu Yan was influenced by local culture and his writings embodied the local temperament. Cao Juren summarised the geographical characteristics of Eastern Zhejiang as a hilly country cultivated by small landholders. Few landlords, even the richest, had more than two hundred acres [*liangbai mu* 两百亩].<sup>289</sup> The main topic of Lu Yan's stories is not conflicts between peasants and landlords, as was common in many stories during the 1920s and the 1930s, but the lives of smallholders and the local middle class.

Although Lu Yan exposed the negative aspects of his hometown, he cherished his experiences there, as did most young writers of the time who left their rural hometowns and went to urban areas. Their rural childhood became valuable material for their writing. In their works, readers can sense their passion for their hometowns, positively or negatively. Xu Qinwen, another famous native soil writer of Eastern Zhejiang, claimed in a preface: "I used lots of materials from the life of my hometown once I began to create fiction. I love my hometown; I hate it too."<sup>290</sup>

#### **Section 4, Portrayals of Rural Life Compared: Fei Ming vs Lu Yan**

Compared to Fei Ming (see Section Two above), rural life from the 1920s to the beginning of the 1940s is displayed differently in Lu Yan's stories. The former author gives readers a picture of a traditional peaceful realm while the latter describes an unstable society in which tradition has lost its priority.

##### ● Looking Back on the Countryside

During the first decade of development of New Literature, from the 1920s, many students and young scholars in big cities began to write about life in rural areas. The majority of them have a similar family and educational background: they usually came from a gentry family in

---

<sup>289</sup> Cao Juren, *Wo yu wo de shijie* 我与我的世界 [My World and I] (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1983), p. 38.

<sup>290</sup> Xu Qinwen, Preface to *Xu Qinwen xiaoshuo ji* 许钦文小说集 [A Collection of Xu Qinwen's Fiction] (Hangzhou: Zhejiang wenyi chubanshe, 1984), p. 4.

the countryside and went to the big city to receive modern education around the age of twenty. They look back on the life in their hometowns and their memories of experiences in their childhood are the main source for their literary creation. In this case, there is a distance between these writers and the target of their descriptions. This distance contains three dimensions. First, it is a temporal distance: rural life in the stories originates from the writers' memories and they usually describe what happened in the past in their hometowns. Secondly, it is a spatial distance: the writers have left the countryside scenes of their stories and have settled down in urban areas. Thirdly, it is a cultural gap: the writers had already entered a new social environment. Gradually under the influence of urban civilisation, some of the beliefs formed in rural childhood began to change. Also, they were able to use what they had learned in cities to re-examine the life of their hometowns. These three levels of distance produced complicated feelings toward the countryside. On the one hand, the writers emotionally cherished the memories of rural life; on the other hand, they rationally criticised the backwardness of rural areas.

Furthermore, writers were faced with a psychological crisis during their early days in big cities. They felt doubts about their identities in urban areas and could easily believe that they were closer to the countryside although they lived in cities. Unlike Fei Ming, Lu Yan does not place his hope in the countryside. The rural life he portrays in Eastern Zhejiang is full of misfortune and ignorance rather than pastoral ideals. He hated the reactionary mindset of the countryside and sought to encourage people to escape from the violence and apathy of village life. Over time his writings became even more critical, especially from the end of the 1920s. In his stories the relationships among local people were changing because of the influence of foreign capitalism. He was deeply opposed to these changes.

Among writers of rural life during the Republican period, there are two main groups: the *Jingpai* 京派 [Peking school] in north China and the *Jiangnan zuojia qun* 江南作家群 [hereafter JZQ] a group of writers from the Jiangnan region which included Zhejiang. Reflected in their works, rural life in the two regions has geographical and cultural differences. As a representative of the Peking school, Fei Ming described a pastoral realm in

which idyllic scenery and innocent villagers are in perfect harmony. Rural areas in Fei Ming's stories are still controlled by the traditional patriarchal clan system; rural people's relationships remain simple and unsophisticated; and the settings are remote from urban chaos. Influenced by Lu Xun's early works about his hometown, writers of the JZQ, such as Lu Yan, criticised backwardness in rural areas and re-examined rural life in their hometowns, especially the suffering of the peasants in a morbid society.

Moreover, rural areas in the north stayed traditional in both social and economic structures. There were two ideal types of village at that time: the lineage community type and the religious community type. In the first type kinship provided the framework for membership and determined the shape of the polity while authority was channelled through religious organisations in the second.<sup>291</sup> In the economies of both types of villages small-scale farming predominated. Fei Ming mentioned local religious practices and folk customs frequently in his stories. In the south, foreign capitalism and industrial civilisation had corroded the local economy, reshaping the composition of the social classes and changing people's thinking. Especially in the small towns between cities and farming communities, so many conflicts happened in a short period that local people felt perplexed about their future. The psychology of small-town folk is Lu Yan's focus.

To the peasants, attachment to the land is at the centre of their lives, and the inroads of urban civilisation threaten to destroy not only their livelihood but also their ethical and moral universe. On the other side, the rural economy is splitting and local economic indicators are gradually determined by industry and commerce from urban areas. Contradictions between the old and the new thus emerge. In Lu Yan's stories, the old has lost its superiority and is finally being replaced by the new; meanwhile, the characters' ambiguous attitude toward social changes makes Eastern Zhejiang dismal and dull. This is the second difference between Lu Yan's stories and those of Fei Ming, in which the old thinking remains dominant.

---

<sup>291</sup> Prasenjit Duara, *Culture, Power and the State: Rural North China, 1900-1942* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), p. 115.

## ● Language Style

Like the idyllic life in Fei Ming's stories, which appears leisurely and carefree, his language style is full of peaceful rhymes. Fei Ming is good at displaying the beauty of nature through ordinary scenes and events. His attitude toward the countryside is realistic: he implies the gradual disintegration of a traditional patriarchal society; however, his realistic tone is delicate, as in the language style of the novel *Bridges*. To describe an ideal realm without the author's personal preference, he looked back on his hometown romantically, but his romantic expressions are calm. Although the characters in his stories are hidden in isolated villages, they enjoy and even esteem rural life. The author revealed his appreciation of the pastoral life through simple and lyrical language patterns. Even when he is describing local people's misfortune and tragedies, such as death, or some decisive contradictions, such as the conflict between human nature and the Confucian ethical code, his tone is gentle and his subjective feelings are mute. Jin Xi's death in the story "The Monk of the Fire Deity Temple" and the third daughter's tragedy in "A Story of the Bamboo Grove" are both depicted tranquilly and indirectly.

Edward Gunn and Shu-mei Shih have discussed Fei Ming's writing style in detail. Both emphasise how Fei Ming used Western literary techniques and Chinese classical forms in his fiction. Shih characterises Fei Ming's aesthetics as "mutual implication", meaning that his writings contain traditional storytelling conventions while his stories are composed in a modernist style that is disjunctive, free-associational, and yet stoically non-urban in content.<sup>292</sup> In this chapter, I have focused on the influence of the theories and conventions of traditional Chinese poetry and prose on Fei Ming's writing. When his style of language was criticised as too simple to be understood, he retorted by explaining a metaphor in his story "Yangliu" 杨柳 [Willows]. In the story, he described eyes with tears as two willow balls moistened by dew and thought it easy to catch the meaning.<sup>293</sup>

---

<sup>292</sup> Shu-mei Shih, "Writing English with a Chinese Brush: The Work of Fei Ming", in *The Lure of the Modern: Writing Modernism in Semicolonial China, 1917-1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), pp. 192-93.

<sup>293</sup> Feng Wenbing, "Willows", in *FWXJ*, p. 321.

To expose the dark side of rural society, Lu Yan not only displayed local villagers' ignorance but also criticised the unenlightened cultural background of Eastern Zhejiang. He tried to show a realistic picture of the countryside. He never expressed nostalgia for an idyllic past, nor did he mention any hope for the future. His focus is rural people's lives in the present and he assumed the responsibility of reporting it to his audience in every detail. In his early works, readers can sense his imitation of Lu Xun's works in the townspeople's apathy and numbness, as in the story "A Pomelo". It seems that Lu Yan was inspired by a hope that writers could awaken the people's consciousness of the possibility of saving themselves and saving the nation through exposing social morbidity and human distress in their literary works. Lu Yan's language also has its own special characteristics. Lu Yan criticised the backwardness of the countryside because he felt worried about his fellow villagers. But he did not compose his stories as critical realism; rather his critical thinking and indignant feelings are expressed in the style of legend. Sometimes, his tone is naive and full of childlike innocence, evoking sympathy for the local villagers rather than disgust for them.

Mao Dun and Su Xuelin (1897-1999) both commented that Lu Yan was good at describing the psychology of the smallholders and the rural middle class.<sup>294</sup> His analysis of their mentality reveals the influence of industrial civilisation on the rural economy and is filled with black humour. Although these small landowners and businessmen have accepted new thinking from urban areas, some shortcomings in their natural disposition remain the same: selfishness, short-sightedness and rigidity. Local people's depressed feelings and depressing life are portrayed vividly. Their rustic and countrified personality is displayed with local flavour.

### ● Mild Disposition vs Intense Self-examination

With most *xiangtu zuojia* 乡土作家 [Native Soil writers], two contradictory feelings

---

<sup>294</sup> Su Xuelin, "Wang Luyan he Xu Qinwen" 王鲁彦和许钦文 [Wang Luyan and Xu Qinwen], in *Xiandai* 现代 [Modern Time], V, no. 5 (June, 1934): 5-6. Also see Mao Dun, "Wang Luyan lun" 王鲁彦论 [On Wang Luyan], in *Xiaoshuo yuebao* 小说月报 [Short Story Monthly], no. 19 (January, 1928): 12-13.

co-exist in their stories: negating the backwardness in the countryside but at the same time, repelling urban chaos. They all cherish their rural childhood. As Lu Yan said in the story “Sadness in Childhood”, “I am willing to return to my lovely childhood, a dreamlike period full of floating clouds. [...] If I cannot go back, please let my memories fly back to that miserable corner (his hometown) and my sad dreams enrich me temporarily!”<sup>295</sup> In Fei Ming’s stories, nostalgia for traditional village life is expressed more obviously. His stories always embody a kind of mild disposition and are set in a peaceful environment. The images which he believed could best represent the countryside are always gentle and pale in colour: a bamboo glade, a small river, a peach garden, an ancient tower, etc. The characters in his stories appear as immortals: they never struggle for a living in the secular world and never care about material things. Just as these characters are hidden safely in their utopia, Fei Ming hid himself from the turbulence of society in his stories.

Although these writers had become urban dwellers, they still regarded their cultural roots as being in the countryside. They sometimes felt uncertain about their new identities as modern urban young men. They lived in urban areas, but they never considered themselves as full members of urban society. They had left rural areas, but they never cut the connections with their hometowns. They hesitated to make a choice between urban culture and rural culture. Fei Ming had seen clearly that his pastoral realm was disappearing because of urban influence and local people’s rigid way of thinking. But he could not help extolling human nature and the simple sentiments of rural areas in his stories. With regard to traditional rural civilisation, Fei Ming abandoned the critical realistic mode and chose to describe the countryside as a paradise filled with his love for his hometown.

Conveying a spirit of self-examination, Lu Yan’s stories seem more sober and realistic, expressive of the author’s deep worries. He used many negative images to describe the natural environment in the countryside: sunset, “melancholy late spring”, desolate autumn, etc. He depicted many ignorant and superstitious folk customs, such as posthumous marriage and dream prognostication. The main content of his stories is the ordinary persons’ struggle

---

<sup>295</sup> Wang Luyan, “Sadness in Childhood”, in *LYXJ*.

in a changing society. His criticism of rural benightedness is not expressed directly, but the author's intense anxieties are obvious. Generally, Lu Yan's critical thinking on the countryside is displayed in three aspects.

First, he mentions many bad customs belonging to local folk culture. These customs, such as ghost marriage, sea-burial (river-burial) and the pawning of wives fully unfold the backwardness of rural areas. Secondly, through descriptions of these ignorant customs, Lu Yan re-examined rural people's cultural psychology. For example, Juying's wedding ceremony is positively appreciated by the local villagers. They all believe that to prepare a marriage for a dead person is fair and sensible. Lastly but most importantly, Lu Yan criticised the stubbornness of farming civilisation. Depending completely on their land and persisting in faith in agriculture, the peasants refuse to change their lifestyle and adjust their thinking to a new environment. Uncle Yixin's refusal to use machines for husking rice is a good example. Ziping in the story "Yige weixian de renwu" 一个危险的人物 [A Dangerous Person] (1927) is finally forced into a dead end by his fellow villagers just because he accepts the new thinking he has learned in cities and becomes incompatible with his neighbours.

In summary, both describing rural life, Fei Ming regards the countryside as his spiritual sustenance; while in Lu Yan's eyes, the traditional rural areas are the origin of sadness and misfortune. Fei Ming tries to lead people to adhere to the traditional patriarchal society through his poetic description of an idyllic realm while Lu Yan adopts a resentful tone and tries to persuade people to leave the benighted countryside.



## Chapter 4: Pastoral Fiction with Local Colour

### Section 1, Developments in Cultural Ethnology

Before the 1980s the development of Chinese studies in anthropology was greatly influenced by Western approaches, the Soviet model and Mao Zedong Thought. Anthropological sciences developed in the nineteenth century in the West in the context of the European global expansion. The term “anthropology” was first introduced into China at the beginning of the twentieth century but in a Japanese mold. This was a common pattern in the first two decades of that century. As Japan was on its way of modernisation, Japanese people adopted the Western social sciences and then passed them on to their East Asian neighbours. During the first decade of the twentieth century, Chinese scholars borrowed Japanese terms to describe new concepts, including the terms for sociology, ethnology and evolution.<sup>296</sup> It was in the year of 1916 that the term *renleixue* 人类学 [human race studies] was used by Sun Xuewu for “anthropology”.<sup>297</sup>

Anthropological studies in China continued to develop during the Republican period. However, many social problems during wartime slowed down studies in social anthropology; opportunities for studying abroad were curtailed. From the 1950s Marxist-Leninist theories became the core of social sciences and the closing of the country to Western academic circles compressed Chinese studies in anthropology into a narrow scope. Chinese studies of anthropology started to develop again in the 1980s. It seems that what Maurice Freedman (1920-1975), a pioneer in social anthropological studies of China, did from the 1950s to the 1970s is our only source for Western scholars’ studies on Chinese anthropology of that period.

Western scholars’ studies on anthropology in the Chinese field flourished in the 1990s. Examples of the recent compilations on field anthropology in China are Hugh D. R. Baker

---

<sup>296</sup> Gregory Eliyu Guldin, *The Saga of Anthropology in China: From Malinowski to Moscow to Mao* (Armonk, N. Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1994), p. 24.

<sup>297</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

and Stephan Feuchtwang's co-edited book *An Old State in New Settings: Studies in the Social Anthropology of China in Memory of Maurice Freeman* (1991)<sup>298</sup> and Liu Xin's compiled book *New Reflections on Anthropological Studies of Greater China* (2004).<sup>299</sup> The history of anthropological studies in China has been well documented in Guldin's book *The Saga of Anthropology in China: From Malinowski to Moscow to Mao* (1994). What has not been adequately explored is the influence of cultural anthropological studies on fiction writing in modern China. How do literature and ethnology connect and what is modern Chinese writers' attitude toward the culture of their hometowns?

Anthropology, more specifically applied anthropology, as Fei Xiaotong understands it, is a science concerned with the transformation of human society through knowledge of social sciences.<sup>300</sup> According to another definition, anthropology is a scientific study of the origin, the behaviour, and the physical, social and cultural development of humans, and it covers four fields: archaeology, anthropological linguistics, socio-cultural anthropology and physical anthropology.<sup>301</sup> This chapter focuses on the socio-cultural scope of anthropology, including ethnology, ethno-history, folklore and minority studies, especially ethno-regional identities and minority cultures in modern China. I will analyse the descriptions of the concept of "hometown" [*guxiang* 故乡] in modern Chinese fiction and discuss the influence of these stories on ethnic identities. I will use Shen Congwen's early fictional writings from the 1920s to the 1930s about his native land West Hunan, representing the culture of the Miao/Tujia 苗/土家 nationalities; and, for reference, Wang Zengqi's short stories from the 1940s to the early 1980s about his hometown Gaoyou, representing the Han culture.

Modern China includes many ethnic nationalities spread over a vast territory. Each of them was formed and developed through long historical processes and has specific features

---

<sup>298</sup> They went further Freeman's research on different lineages, customs and local religions in rural China.

<sup>299</sup> In 2002, the centre for Chinese studies of University of California at Berkeley held its annual symposium, discussing problems and shortcomings and foreseeing future trends in China's anthropological studies, and Liu Xin compiled all the speeches into the book.

<sup>300</sup> Fei Hsiao-t'ung, *Toward a People's Anthropology* (Beijing: New World Press, 1981), p. 3.

<sup>301</sup> Gregory Eliyu Guldin, *The Saga of Anthropology in China: From Malinowski to Moscow to Mao* (Armonk, N. Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1994), p. 2.

in language, locality and economy. Studies on the relationship between the Han people, who compose ninety-two per cent of the nation's population, and the other fifty-five minorities have become important since the People's Republic of China was established. The term "ethnology" refers to the science that analyses and compares human cultures, in, for example, social structure, language, religion and technology. Currently, "ethnology" is defined as cultural anthropology: a branch of anthropology that deals with the origin, distribution and characteristics of human racial groups.<sup>302</sup> The Chinese equivalent term is *minzuxue* 民族学 [the study of nationalities]. Wei Yi and Lin Shu used the term *minzhong xue* 民种学 [the study of nationalities and races] in 1903 in their translation of an English article "Ethnology", which was itself a 1900 translation of the original German.<sup>303</sup> Fei Xiaotong, who undertook fieldwork and investigations on China's non-Han peoples immediately after the founding of the PRC, first proposed that ethnic identification in China deals with the composition of China's nationalities, their differentiation and identification and questions related to ethnic study.<sup>304</sup> This proposal indicated one form of the ethnography of minority peoples in China. It treats a minority as a cultural isolate and delineates cultural and linguistic differences among ethnic groups.<sup>305</sup>

The term "minority" embraces a group of people who differ in a number of specific characteristics from the majority of the population of a country whose territory they inhabit. These characteristics may derive from race, language, religion, customs, morals, traditions, dress, social organisations, etc.<sup>306</sup> Because the population of minority is much smaller than that of majority, people and their culture may need more help and protection. Ethnic identity has become advantageous psychologically to establish a profile that distinguishes the minority from its powerful majority (rival). Chinese anthropologists of the early generation, such as Fei Xiaotong, Lin Yaohua and their colleagues carried out investigations and

---

<sup>302</sup> The American Heritage, *Dictionary of the English Language*, 4th ed. (Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), 16 October, 2005. <<http://dictionary.reference.com/search?q=ethnology>>.

<sup>303</sup> Li Shaoming, *Minzuxue* 民族学 [Ethnology] (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1986), pp. 28-29.

<sup>304</sup> Fei Hsiao-t'ung, *Toward a People's Anthropology* (Beijing: New World Press, 1981), pp. 12, 89.

<sup>305</sup> Erik Mueggler, *The Age of Wild Ghosts: Memory, Violence, and Place in Southwest China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), pp. 18-19.

<sup>306</sup> Thomas Heberer, *China and Its National Minorities: Autonomy or Assimilation* (Armonk, N. Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1989), p. 7.

fieldwork and drew a general description of the minorities' geographical, social and economic conditions. It was not until the 1990s that Chinese scholars began to turn their focus to the cultural field, for example adapting anthropological theories into literary analyses (Ye Shuxian) and studying the minorities' culture and literature (Ma Xueliang, a linguist who wrote many books about the languages of China's minorities).

Until recently Western scholars' studies on the relationship between the Han people and ethnic minorities in China focused on the political policies of the national government and social changes in minority groups, such as the social fabric of the PRC, the Cultural Revolution, the impact of Marxism and the market-oriented economic policies introduced in the late 1970s. From the middle of the 1990s, scholars began to show an interest in the different ethnic groups in their own right include Colin Mackerras' *China's Minority Cultures: Identities and Integration* (1995) and Mary Rack's *Ethnic Distinctions, Local Meanings: Negotiating Cultural Identities in China* (2005).

### ● The Development of Ethnological Studies in China

The development of ethnological studies in China can be divided into three stages which followed political developments because of government sponsorship: the first lasts from the beginning of the twentieth century to 1949; the second is from 1949 to 1978; and the third is from the 1980s to the present. The first and second stages will be reviewed below. It is obvious that ethnological studies before 1949, regarded as a branch of social anthropology since its initial growth in China, was derived from a number of Western schools. Among these different schools, including German evolutionism and various Marxist perspectives, Chinese ethnology was most influenced by British functionalism.

The May Fourth Movement around 1919 was of great importance in pushing the early stages of folklore studies, especially the oral traditions of rural areas. When early folklorists were gathering folk songs in southwest China, they also began to notice the courtship and kinship of different villages among many nationalities of Yunnan, Guizhou and Guangxi. During the 1920s, the Japanese continued to be an important source for anthropological

sciences, as Japan was the most popular destination for Chinese students who wished to study abroad at that time. The inaugural issue in 1925 of the Japanese periodical *みんぞく* [Nationality 民族] provided good explanations of the ethnological and evolutionary approaches and quickly caught the attention of Chinese students. Nearly at the same time, Cai Yuanpei wrote an article entitled “Shuo minzuxue” 说民族学 [On Ethnology] which was published in the Shanghai magazine *Yiban* 一般 [General]. The term “ethnology” finally received its Chinese linguistic confirmation.<sup>307</sup> According to Cai’s definition of ethnology, it was a broad science embracing raciology, archaeology and history, and had close connections to linguistics, sociology, psychology, the arts and literature.<sup>308</sup> From 1907 to 1910, Cai had studied philosophy, literature, psychology and ethnology in Leipzig. Influenced by the German evolutionary school’s quest for the origins of social customs, on his return to China, Cai advocated fieldwork in southwest China to search for the origins of the cultural practices among the rural people there. He was thus one of the scholars who first set a high value on investigating social and cultural practices of the non-Han nationalities.<sup>309</sup>

By the middle of the 1930s, anthropology (mainly socio-cultural anthropology) was recognised in Chinese universities and courses in ethnology were provided at Peking, Tongji, Jinling, Zhongyang, Tsinghua (Qinghua) and Yanjing universities.<sup>310</sup> Wu Wenzao and his two students Fei Xiaotong and Lin Yaohua began to use Western theories to understand Chinese society. Their efforts in adapting British functionalism to research and fieldwork in rural China were the model for ethnological studies in China during the first half of the twentieth century.

Fei Xiaotong (1910-2005), a student of Bronislaw Malinowski, got his PhD degree in social anthropology from the London School of Economics and Political Science in 1938. After 1938, he went back to China and established himself at Yunnan University to apply the

---

<sup>307</sup> Gregory Eliyu Guldin, *The Saga of Anthropology in China: From Malinowski to Moscow to Mao* (Armonk, N. Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1994), pp. 26, 30.

<sup>308</sup> Chen Yongling and Wang Xiaoyi, “Ershi shiji qianqi de Zhongguo minzuxue” 二十世纪前期的中国民族学 [Chinese Ethnology of the Early Twentieth Century], in *Minzuxue yanjiu* 民族学研究 [Studies on Ethnology], ed. Chinese Ethnology Society, Vol. 1 (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 1981), pp. 252-55.

<sup>309</sup> Long Pingping, “Jiu Zhongguo minzuxue de lilun liupai” 旧中国民族学的理论流派 [The Theoretical Schools of Old China’s Ethnology], in *Zhongguo minzu lishi yu wenhua* 中国民族历史与文化 [History and Culture of the Nationalities of China] (Beijing: Zhongyang minzu xueyuan chubanshe, 1988), p. 193.

<sup>310</sup> Li Shaoming, *Minzuxue* 民族学 [Ethnology] (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1986), p. 32.

functionalist perspective to Chinese community studies and to conduct fieldwork. He claimed in the preface to the English language collection of his articles *Toward a People's Anthropology* that his major interest was the study of China's fifty-five minorities. He was one of the first Chinese anthropologists to complete an introductory survey of China's national minorities, to analyse the characteristics of the smaller compact communities of minority peoples living within the Han communities and to help launch the process of social reform and modernisation in the minority areas.

Fei classified his many articles and books before 1949 into two categories: theoretical and investigatory. Representative of the former is *Earthbound China* (1945) and representative of the latter is *Peasant Life in China* (1939).<sup>311</sup> In his 1989 interview with Guldin, Fei stressed that he was a functionalist and his strength was in fieldwork, but he was not like Bronislaw Malinowski, because he had also been influenced by Robert Park, Robert Redfield and Sergei M. Shirokogoroff.<sup>312</sup> However, Malinowski's functionalist analysis dominated research and scholarship in ethnology before 1949. During the Second World War some of occupied China's famous universities fled the Japanese and reformed together in Kunming as Southwest Associated University and Yunnan became the centre of social science in China.

Lin Yaohua (1910-2000) was recommended by Wu Wenzao to A. R. Radcliffe-Brown to study anthropology and got his PhD in anthropology from Harvard University in 1940. Responding to Wu Wenzao's advocacy of *shequ yanjiu* 社区研究 [community studies], Lin later (1941?) conducted fieldwork in a village near Fuzhou to study clan structure, where he analysed the data from a "functionalist's viewpoint" as his mentor had recommended.<sup>313</sup> His most influential work is *Liangshan Yijia* 凉山彝家 [The Yi People in Liang Mountain Area] (1943).

Although during the War period many Chinese scholars were pushed further into the

---

<sup>311</sup> Fei Xiaotong, *Zaxie ding ji* 杂写丁集 [The Fourth Collection of Essays] (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 1986), p. 62.

<sup>312</sup> Gregory Eliyu Guldin, *The Saga of Anthropology in China: From Malinowski to Moscow to Mao* (Armonk, N. Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1994), pp. 45, 65.

<sup>313</sup> Chiao Chien, "A Note on the Yao Programme of the Chinese University Anthropology Department", in *Hong Kong Anthropology Bulletin*, no. 1 (June, 1987): 7-8.

Chinese interior, and places like Yunnan and Guangdong became centres of anthropological studies, more foreign studies also entered China. Marxist-Leninist ethnology began to develop in China after 1949. In Duara's summary of the two broad historical processes in the first half of the twentieth century, one process is early anthropologists' efforts to deepen and strengthen the nation's command over rural society.<sup>314</sup>

From the 1950s, as the CCP conducted some policies which claimed to strengthen each minority's inner unity and relations with other minorities, many scholars worked within the *Zhongyang minzu fangwen tuan* 中央民族访问团 [the CCP Centre's Nationality Inspection Group], which was organised in accordance with the government's advocacy of outreach to the minority nationalities in 1950. Although only a little fieldwork was carried out by the Inspection Group in some south-western areas such as Yunnan, Guizhou, Sichuan and Tibet, some important reports on the basis of these surveys were published, such as Lin Yaohua's *The General Situation of Tibetan Society* (1954), Li Youyi's *Tibet Today* (1951) and Fei Xiaotong's *Brother Nationalities in Guizhou* (1951).<sup>315</sup> During that time, as ethnology was viewed as one of the materialist sciences that could aid in the party's construction of socialism, a historical materialist approach was institutionalised.<sup>316</sup> Many scholars worked in southwest China, participating in the important project *Minzu shibie* 民族识别 [Nationalities Classification] from 1953 to 1956, which was sponsored by the government.<sup>317</sup>

Another model that influenced China's ethnological studies during the 1950s and the 1960s came from the Soviet Union. Although Guldin pointed out that some Soviet experts came to China not to teach but to do their own research and thus the only contribution they made to China's ethnological studies was offering a model of how to be both Marxist and anthropological,<sup>318</sup> many of Stalin's works about linguistic and historical problems among different nationalities were translated into Chinese. In Kunming, the social history project

---

<sup>314</sup> Prasenjit Duara, *Cultural, Power, and the State: Rural North China, 1900-1942* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), p. 1.

<sup>315</sup> Jason Shaw, "Current Trends of Ethnology", in *Ethnicity and Ethnic Groups in China*, ed. Chien Chiao and Nicholas Tapp (Hong Kong: Special Issue of *New Asia Academic Bulletin*, 1989), p. 43.

<sup>316</sup> Gregory Eliyu Guldin, *The Saga of Anthropology in China: From Malinowski to Moscow to Mao* (Armonk, N. Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1994), pp. 95, 99.

<sup>317</sup> Jason Shaw, "Current Trends of Ethnology", in *Ethnicity and Ethnic Groups in China*, ed. Chien Chiao and Nicholas Tapp (Hong Kong: Special Issue of *New Asia Academic Bulletin*, 1989), p. 43.

<sup>318</sup> Gregory Eliyu Guldin, *The Saga of Anthropology in China: From Malinowski to Moscow to Mao* (Armonk, N. Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1994), pp. 114, 119.

started in 1956. Ethnologists rethought the tasks of fieldwork, and in their eyes, fieldwork could also be combined with in-field discussion of theoretical and practical problems, rather than simply gathering the data for writing up reports. A good case was Fei Xiaotong and Lin Yaohua's jointly written work *Zhongguo minzuxue dangqian de renwu* 中国民族学当前的任务 [The Main Tasks of China's Ethnology Today] (1957), replying to Mao Zedong's call for ethnologists to "rescue the backward" among the minorities.<sup>319</sup>

During the period of the Anti-Rightist Campaign, reading foreign books was treated as reactionary, but Fei Xiaotong recalled that they could still read foreign books on ethnology.<sup>320</sup> Thanks to the Twelve Year Plan for National Scientific Development launched in 1956, which especially singled out ethnology for support, some important foreign books were translated into Chinese, including Sir James Fraser's *Golden Bough*.<sup>321</sup> Guldin described the impact of the Cultural Revolution as "the elimination of ethnology";<sup>322</sup> however, the Cultural Revolution did not blot out consciousness of ethnicity. There were some attempts to assimilate or to protect the ethnic minorities, and at least the minorities and their territories were no longer marked as "special" or "backward".<sup>323</sup> The serious problem existed in the studies of the minorities' cultures. During the first stage of the Cultural Revolution some attempts were made to abolish officially the minorities' languages, scripts, customs and manners; moreover, minority songs, dance, movies, folk tales, operas and the like were called "feudal, capitalist, revisionist and poisonous weeds".<sup>324</sup> In the mid-1970s, after the death of Lin Biao, encouragement and revival of folkloristic studies were obvious to some extent.

After the Cultural Revolution, the influence of Western anthropological studies returned and foreign models, especially the British social anthropological tradition of the 1920s and

---

<sup>319</sup> Lin Yaohua and Jin Tianming, "Cong lishi fazhan kan dangqian woguo minzuxue de duixiang he renwu" 从历史发展看当前我国民族学的对象和任务 [A Look at Chinese Ethnology's Object and Task from the Perspective of Its Historical Development], in *Minzu yanjiu* 民族研究 [Studies on Nationalities], no. 2 (1980): 52.

<sup>320</sup> Burton Pasternak, "A Conversation with Fei Xiaotong", in *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 29, no. 4 (1988): 650.

<sup>321</sup> Gregory Eliyu Guldin, *The Saga of Anthropology in China: From Malinowski to Moscow to Mao* (Armonk, N. Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1994), p. 148.

<sup>322</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 187.

<sup>323</sup> Thomas Heberer, *China and Its National Minorities: Autonomy or Assimilation* (Armonk, N. Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1989), p. 17.

<sup>324</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26.



the 1930s once again flourished. However, the new trend in Chinese ethnology was no more a simple process of imitating foreign sources, but gradually developed Chinese characteristics. Guldin named the development of ethnological studies from the 1980s in China as a process of “sinicization”; he believed that the impact of Marxism-Leninism retained its important status and sinicisation had a tendency of going back to Wu Wenzao’s efforts in the 1930s: allowing Chinese scholars to study Chinese society.<sup>325</sup>

Although Chinese anthropologists emphasized applied research as a key for their fieldwork and actively studied the nationalities, they lacked consensus on the definitions of anthropology and ethnology. Because of the short history of anthropological studies in China, anthropology and ethnology are still not classed as independent disciplines. Scholars have already noted this in the 2002 annual symposium at the Centre for Chinese Studies in the University of California, Berkeley, but few practical suggestions have appeared.

The most serious problem of the development of ethnological studies from the late 1970s is anthropologists’ emphasis on placing anthropology and ethnology in historical context. In the 2002 symposium at Berkeley, Rubie Watson pointed out that during the 1970s and the 1980s, beginning with the work of Maurice Freedman in the West and Fei Xiaotong in China, anthropologists working in China became involved in studying and writing history and in collaborating with historians. Most Chinese anthropologists were engaged in the study of changes in family and kinship patterns or religious practices.<sup>326</sup> However, to some extent, this trend reveals a rebirth of cultural interests in ethnological studies and Chinese ethnologists began to have the consciousness of marking off social and cultural aspects in ethnology. For instance, from the end of the 1970s, Fei Xiaotong started his research on the process of industrialisation in small towns (*Xiao chengzhen siji* 小城镇四记 [Four Notes on Small Towns], 1985) and the social transformation and modernisation of China’s national minorities (“Modernisation and National Minorities in China”, a speech made at McGill University, 1979). He stated that his work from then on was more related to social and

---

<sup>325</sup> Gregory Eliyu Guldin, *The Saga of Anthropology in China: From Malinowski to Moscow to Mao* (Armonk, N. Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1994), pp. 232, 241.

<sup>326</sup> Rubie Watson, “Short Comments”, in *New Reflections on Anthropological Studies of (Greater) China*, ed. Liu Xin (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, 2004), p. 55.

economic problems than to the cultural field. A new generation of Chinese anthropologists has now emerged, who actively devote their studies to cultural and literary concerns, combining studies in traditional and minorities' literature, linguistics, folklore and popular religion with ethnology itself. Their leader is Ma Xueliang (1913-1999).

Ma Xueliang, a linguist and an ethnologist, first conducted research on the languages of China's minorities and published the book *Sani liyu yanjiu* 撒尼俚语研究 [Studies on the Slang of the Sani (a tribe of the Yi)] early in the 1940s. He also translated the Sani folk tale *A Shi Ma* 阿诗玛 and *Miaozu shishi* 苗族史诗 [The Epic of the Miao People] into Chinese. Later on, he admitted in the preface to the book *Zhongguo shaoshu minzu wenxueshi* 中国少数民族文学史 [A History of the Literature of China's Minorities] that he was influenced by Hu Shi's understanding of vernacular literature which should be easy to follow and appreciated by the common people,<sup>327</sup> and thus enthusiastically involved himself in studying the culture and literature of different minorities. From the 1980s, many of his books about the minorities' folk culture and literary heritage, especially the Yi 彝 and the Miao people in Yunnan, were completed, such as *Yizu wenhuashi* 彝族文化史 [Cultural History of the Yi People] and *Yunnan Yizu lisu yanjiu wenji* 云南彝族礼俗研究文集 [A Collection of Studies on Folk Customs of the Yi People of Yunnan]. He was one of the editors of *A History of the Literature of China's Minorities*, which provides a systematic description of the development of different minorities' literary traditions from tribal society to the modern period, including myths, epics, folk songs and folk tales. From Ma Xueliang onwards, more scholars became interested in studying the minorities' cultures and Ma's efforts also offer an inspiration for modern Chinese writers.

### ● Connections between Cultural Ethnology and New Literature

People of different ethnic groups often bear a strong desire to determine an identity which can distinguish them from larger and powerful neighbours. When modernisation spreads over rural areas such as the minorities' areas in China, it threatens both their tradition and

---

<sup>327</sup> Ma Xueliang, Preface to *Zhongguo shaoshu minzu wenxue shi* 中国少数民族文学史 [A History of the Literature of China's Minorities], ed. Ma Xueliang, Liang Tingwang and Zhang Gongjin (Beijing: Zhongyang minzu xueyuan chubanshe, 1992), p. 5.

identities. The quest for ethnic identity in China since the beginning of the twentieth century has been elaborated by Colin Mackerras (1995) and William Safran (1998). In some modern Chinese writers' literary works, minorities' cultural heritage seems superior to the Han Chinese and in some particular works, it even sublimates into an ideal pattern of culture which is innocent and vigorous (See the second section: Shen Congwen's regional fiction). However, it must be considered whether the revivals of tradition in modern literature express writers' nostalgia for the past; whether in those writers' eyes, the minorities' culture becomes attractive and novel in the context of modern industrial civilisation; or whether they would like to embrace the traditional elements in their works as an act of defiance to the modern influence.

Many Chinese ethnologists since the early twentieth century have worked diligently to help the minorities participate into the whole nation's economic and social construction, emphasising how the Han can help them develop from a subsistence economy, from matriarchy or slave society into the pattern of Chinese socialism. The national government tries to assimilate them to Han Chinese ways. In the eyes of the minorities, however, the statement that support from the Han is helpful and necessary sometimes appears doubtful. However, links between the nation and the minority people in literary works appear contradictory, as in Shen Congwen's stories and essays, which first brought the region of West Hunan to the attention of the public. In Shen's works, the Miao people represent a rebellious and vigorous culture which has been long lost in the Han community, natural but on the verge of ruin.<sup>328</sup> The culture of minority peoples has become fashionable, and in Shen's works they gain psychological comfort that they are the centre of the nation, not marginalised or disdained.

Down to the middle of the twentieth century, the main literary expression among the minorities was oral. Folk lyric and long poems were favoured forms, with the content of the former being love, physical environment, labour and everyday life; the latter focused on

---

<sup>328</sup> Mary Rack, *Ethnic Distinctions, Local Meanings: Negotiating Cultural Identities in China* (London: Pluto Press, 2005), p. 49.

myths, love and other stories, national heroes and tales of the minority's ethnic origin.<sup>329</sup> In academic circles, Ma Xueliang compiled and translated different minorities' folk lyrics and epics, and in literary circles, Shen Congwen adapted the mountain songs [*shan'ge* 山歌] of the Miao into his fiction. Later, the religions and customs of the minorities became a popular research topic, as scholars believe that they are a most important cultural site that can represent feelings of national essence and consciousness. For example, religion is a major cause for celebrations, festivals, songs and dance. To some scholars, minority dance appears to fulfil an urban fantasy of free sex and can provide a way of demonstrating one's "underground self".<sup>330</sup> Village life in China and religious rituals and beliefs have become important fields for investigation since the late 1980s. Students and colleagues of Maurice Freedman have made a good contribution.

Some main forms of religion among China's minorities, such as polytheism, ancestor worship and Buddhism of various types are in fact influenced by Han popular religion. Mackerras has pointed out that Miao religious practices were heavily influenced by the Han to the extent that over half were of Han derivation.<sup>331</sup> Tracing the history of the Miao, Rack writes that in West Hunan, some Han families "became Miao" during the Ming dynasty after arriving in the area from the East.<sup>332</sup> From these studies, it can be seen that descriptions of minority people in literary works as cultural isolates, let alone any suggestions of cultural superiority, are illusory. Although the Miao/Tujia born writer Shen Congwen regards the people of the minorities in West Hunan as heroes in his fiction, he actually contributed very little to the roots and development of the minorities, but rather to China as a whole, and from an urban elite point of view.

Modern Chinese writers who introduced or adapted minorities' cultures in their works were trying to deny the elite's desire to prove the existence of an urban homogeneous

---

<sup>329</sup> Colin Mackerras, *China's Minority Cultures: Identities and Integration Since 1912* (Melbourne: Longman Australia Pty Ltd., 1995), p. 88.

<sup>330</sup> Mary Rack, *Ethnic Distinctions, Local Meanings: Negotiating Cultural Identities in China* (London: Pluto Press, 2005), p. 61.

<sup>331</sup> Colin Mackerras, *China's Minority Cultures: Identities and Integration Since 1912* (Melbourne: Longman Australia Pty Ltd., 1995), p. 29.

<sup>332</sup> Mary Rack, *Ethnic Distinctions, Local Meanings: Negotiating Cultural Identities in China* (London: Pluto Press, 2005), p. 28.

and superior civilisation. As early as the May Fourth Movement, rural “hometowns” became a popular theme in literature. However, in the context of cultural ethnology, the urban dwelling writers’ experiments did not achieve their original intention. The images of their hometowns still referred to particular topographies rather than serving as means for the expression of cultural identity. During the 2002 symposium at Berkeley, Susan Brownell said that she felt that anthropological studies in China were in a transitional moment between the rigid discipline of the past, which was dominated by research done mainly in rural field sites, and a more interdisciplinary future that combines multi-sited research, much of which is in cities and which pays more attention to mass-mediated forms of popular culture.<sup>333</sup> To study locality appropriately and display the local colour of hometown in literary works, writers should consider how to combine traditional anthropological categories, such as oral heritage, kinship and religion with mass-mediated popular culture, such as food and drink, clothing, architecture and festivals. If they wish to express their appreciation of local culture in their works, the best way is to regard oneself as a member of the locality, not simply standing by and writing about their memories of the homeland.

After Shen Congwen, Wang Zengqi began to write about his hometown in short stories from the 1940s. Without the contradictory feeling about his hometown and the ambiguous description of non-Han people’s culture as in Shen’s fiction, Wang seems to hold an objective attitude toward the local culture of Jiangsu. His stories convey more local taste and less concern for ethnic identity. Mary Rack mentions that in the academic field of cultural ethnology, scholars may think again about the contradictions between the Han and the minorities. Is each minority a part of the Chinese nation within which it can represent an element of heritage? Or do minorities identify with a shared sense of distance from secular leadership and a need for an alternative form of authority?<sup>334</sup> Critics may need to think about this question in literature too. Which part do modern Chinese writers who write about local cultures really want to express: feelings and memories of their hometowns or efforts to find

---

<sup>333</sup> Susan Brownell, “Longer Contemplation”, in *New Reflections on Anthropological Studies of (Greater) China*, ed. Liu Xin (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, 2004), p. 79.

<sup>334</sup> Mary Rack, *Ethnic Distinctions, Local Meanings: Negotiating Cultural Identities in China* (London: Pluto Press, 2005), p. 127.

themselves?

Finally, I would like to discuss a new trend in literary theories of China: using knowledge in cultural anthropology to analyse literary works or themes, motifs and cultural phenomena within literary works. This direction in studying literature, known as *wenxue renleixue* 文学人类学 [literary anthropology] appeared in China in the late 1980s and became a popular methodology in literary studies from the 1990s. One of its pioneers is Ye Shuxian (b. 1954).

Ye graduated from the Chinese department in Shanxi Normal University in 1982 and then continued his postgraduate studies majoring in World Literature at Beijing Normal University. Interested in Northrop Frye's archetype criticism, he began to do research in theories of art and Western aesthetics. By 1997 he had published many papers and first proposed a new direction for the study of China's traditional heritage with reference to cultural anthropology. His book *Wenxue renleixue tansuo* 文学人类学探索 [Explorations in Literary Anthropology] (1998) provides an introduction to the origin and history of cultural anthropological studies in the West, especially how to use theories of anthropology to analyse literary works, and makes some suggestions on how to adapt these Western theories and methodologies in anthropology to the study of Chinese literature and culture.

In the first part of his book, Ye affirms the importance of studies in mythology and folklore, which he regards as two sub-branches of anthropology, in modern China's literary arena. He endorses some modern Chinese scholars' views on using theories in mythology to study literature, for example Wen Yiduo's suggestions on poetry studies in his book *Shenhua yu shi* 神话与诗 [Myth and Poetry] (1938) and Zheng Zhenduo's advice on using materials in folklore and mythology in his essay "Tang zhu pian" 汤铸篇 [How Tang Cast Himself] (1932).<sup>335</sup> The new way that Ye wished to explore includes two different modes. The first is the borrowing of Western anthropological theories to study cultural heritage from the historical texts of ancient China, especially the classics. The second is to embrace Chinese ethnologists' studies of primitive society and different ethnic groups to analyse individual

---

<sup>335</sup> Ye Shuxian, *Wenxue renleixue tansuo* 文学人类学探索 [Explorations in Literary Anthropology] (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 1998), p. 44.

literary works. In the second part of the book, Ye studied individual cases which conveyed his two modes, such as his re-interpretations of *Laozi* 老子 [The Book of Master Lao], *Zhuangzi* 庄子 [The Book of Master Zhuang] and the Confucian *Shixue* 诗学 [Poetics] from the anthropological aspect.

However, Ye's contributions to literary studies focus on traditional literature and cultural heritage, and are barely related to modern Chinese literature. With the aim of promoting the studies of *guocui* 国粹 [national essence], Ye and his colleagues conducted the academic project "Modern Explanation of Chinese Classics" [*Zhongguo gudian de xiandai chanshi gongcheng* 中国古典的现代阐释工程]. Inspired by Ye's second mode, in this chapter, I wish to adapt the theories of cultural anthropology and ethnology to the analysis of Shen Congwen's fiction, not only studying Shen's use of mountain songs of the Miao, but also his demonstration of the folk archetypes and a primitive psychology. In search of local identity and as a remedy for homesickness, Shen actually idealised the minorities' life with a romantic belief in love and fate. Embracing an ethnological perspective, we may see more clearly in Shen's stories his expression of a negative attitude toward modern Han culture and his suggestion of isolation from the dominant Han. I will use Wang Zengqi's short stories as a contrast to display another way of seeking local identity.

## Section 2, West Hunan in the Regional Fiction of Shen Congwen

Shen Congwen (1902-1988) was born in Fenghuang, West Hunan, a township inhabited by several minority nationalities. He went to Beijing in 1922 and first published his work in *Chenbao fukan* 晨报副刊 [Morning News Supplement] in 1924. He suffered two years of poverty and loneliness in Beijing. During that time he was neither admitted by any university nor accepted into any literary circle. His early writing mainly focused on his native region, West Hunan [*Xiangxi* 湘西], and contained memories and sketches of scenes and events there. In this section I will discuss these early fictional writings, which span the mid 1920s to the late 1930s.

Shen Congwen's nostalgic description of West Hunan makes him an important writer exploring the trope of the homeland in modern Chinese fiction. Many scholars have studied and categorised his early writings; for example, David Der-wei Wang called them "native soil fiction" and summarised their two main characteristics as "critical lyricism" and "imaginary nostalgia". In Wang's definition, native soil fiction is characterised by its accounts of rustic figures, provincial customs, festive conventions, rituals and so on.<sup>336</sup> In Jeffrey Kinkley's eyes, Shen dealt in the "little traditions" of West Hunan: local dialect, folklore, religious customs and the mountain folk. He expressed an urban modern delight in local aboriginal culture.<sup>337</sup> In my opinion, Shen described the regional folklore in West Hunan to make comparisons between rural life and urban life, primitive tradition and modern civilisation, human nature and social laws and the past and the present. Eleven stories will be studied below, from "Shangui" 山鬼 [The Mountain Spirit] in 1927 to "Guisheng" 贵生 [Guisheng] in 1937.

West Hunan was a place in which the primitive culture of the ethnic minorities still determined people's thinking and values. This place was first celebrated in *Chuci* 楚辞 [Songs of the South] during the Warring States period (340BC-227BC) as a world in which ghosts, demons and spirits thrived and interacted with human beings. In the Eastern Jin period (317-420), Tao Qian's "Taohuayuan ji" 桃花源记 [Peach Blossom Spring] is also set in a utopia where the people have separated themselves from the chaos of outside society and lead a simple and happy life. This primitive place became a dreamland for Shen Congwen when he was enduring poverty and suffering from misunderstanding and loneliness in his early time in Beijing.

Shen Congwen went to Beijing with ambitions to build a literary career, but his writing ability was at first not recognised by any literary society. He did not have any referee to introduce his works to publishers. As he mentions several times in his autobiography *Congwen zizhuan* 从文自传 [Congwen's Autobiography], "I felt (that I was) lonely 我感

---

<sup>336</sup> David Der-wei Wang, *Fictional Realism in Twentieth Century China, Mao Dun, Lao She, Shen Congwen* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), p. 251.

<sup>337</sup> Jeffrey C. Kinkley, *The Odyssey of Shen Congwen* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), pp. 111-12.



到我是寂寞的。”<sup>338</sup> Urban civilisation shocked him, a young man from the countryside. He criticised modern urban civilisation and recast West Hunan's violence and primitiveness romantically, as a manifestation of folk mores.

In his early fiction, he wrote about the customs and beliefs of ethnic groups like the Miao 苗 and the Tujia 土家. The Miao are the major ethnic group in Shen's regional fiction, and their lives and their relationship to the Han 汉 are main themes. Shen idealised the folk culture of the Miao, who had been oppressed by the Han people for a long period. Folk culture became Shen's force of resistance against modern and urban culture.

The regional fiction of Shen Congwen from the middle of the 1920s to the later 1930s is written in the form of folktales from West Hunan that masquerade as a personal-experience narrative. The folk elements in these stories function as observed by William Bascom: they enable people to “escape in fantasy from repressions imposed on them by society”,<sup>339</sup> whether these repressions are sexual, resulting from taboos on incest or polygamy, or of another nature entirely.

### ● Mountain Songs in West Hunan

The Miao and other minority aboriginal peoples of West Hunan are known for their extemporised songs. This may relate to the mountain area where they live. Because of the small population in such a vast region, it is convenient for people to communicate with each other by singing rather than the usual method of speaking, so that words can be heard over great distances. Without losing much of the folksongs' original flavour and beauty, the local people were able to adapt them into their daily conversation. Folklorists find a world of freedom, love and delight in these songs, which are generally rather short, simple and improvised. The oral tradition in West Hunan, especially these mountain songs, are one of the main streams feeding Shen Congwen's regional fiction.

The majority of the songs are sung by the mixed Sino-Miao-Tujia villagers of the small

---

<sup>338</sup> Shen Congwen, *Congwen zizhuan* 从文自传 [Congwen's Autobiography] (Shanghai: Kaiming shudian, 1948), p. 24.

<sup>339</sup> William Bascom, “Folklore in Cultural Context”, in *Folkloristics: An Introduction*, ed. Robert A. Georges and Michael Owen Jones (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 189.

town Zhen'gan (another name for Shen's native Fenghuang), so the language is mixed Chinese-Miao-Tujia. The Miao and the Tujia people are the aborigines of West Hunan. From the Qing dynasty (1644-1912) onwards, the Han people immigrated to that area and it became a multi-national region. Shen Congwen's mother was a local Miao-Tujia woman. Shen heard different varieties of mountain songs when he was a child, and inserted them into his fiction to display a picture of the aboriginal peoples' life. In 1926, when Shen was in Beijing, he wrote an essay named "Ganren yaoqu" 竿人谣曲 [Songs of the Zhen'gan People] and translated some of the mountain songs into Chinese.

A large number of the songs are four or five lines long with seven syllables each line in the original Chinese, adopting an A-A-B-A or A-A-B-C-A rhyme. According to Kinkley, there are three categories of these songs among local villagers: work songs sung by peasants while tending the cows, cutting firewood or preparing fodder for the pigs; lovers' songs, and songs whose words are few but sustained, sung to eulogise the gods or convey bereavement.<sup>340</sup> There are demarcation lines of rhymes and tunes among different local areas but the boundaries of the content are fluid. Most of them are sung either by workers or farmers to encourage themselves or by young people with good voices at times of greeting, parting, during festivals and rites of passage, or to measure each other's personalities and present teasing challenges, dares and rebuffs to a potential sexual partner. Modern Chinese writers are fascinated by such minority festivals as the Moon Dance [*tiaoyue* 跳月] of the Miao.<sup>341</sup> Although the mountain songs differ in occasions and regions, singing in such antiphonal style is a primitive method to select a suitable match. It is both a sexual instinct and a contest between the two sexes.

Mountain songs are usually practised in groups: girls and boys line up on facing mountainsides to sing in unison and then pair off to have sex under the sky, after gauging the partner's wit through the inventiveness of the lyrics he or she has put to the standard

---

<sup>340</sup> Jeffrey C. Kinkley, *The Odyssey of Shen Congwen* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), p. 152.

<sup>341</sup> Hu Shi explained the Moon Dance in his article "Miaoren de tiaoyue" 苗人的跳月 [The Miao People's Moon Dance] as a festival occasion performed under the moonlight, during which young men and women met, danced, drank, sang and often to the amazement of outsiders, courted each other freely. Quoted by Hung Chang-tai, *Going to the People: Chinese Intellectuals and Folk Literature, 1918-1937* (Cambridge, Mass.: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1985), p. 172.

melodies. Examples heard by Shen Congwen as a child can be found in two stories “Long Zhu” 龙朱 (1928) and “Yue xia xiaojing” 月下小景 [Under the Moonlight] (1932).

O boastful girl from the Colourful Kerchief tribe,  
From now on you will never boast again.  
If you are willing to be the bride of the slave of Long Zhu,  
He asks you to come and meet his master and your man.<sup>342</sup>

Because Long Zhu is too perfect to be a real man, he cannot find a lover although he is as beautiful as a god. This is the song by the clever Long Zhu, pretending to be his own slave, to express his love to the girl from the Colourful Kerchief tribe of the Miao.

With their wings birds fly into the sky,  
Without wings I fly into your heart.  
I shall not ask where Paradise is,  
For I am sitting at its gate.  
My body needs the strongest arms,  
And my soul needs the sweetest songs.<sup>343</sup>

In this song, a young man expresses his love for his girlfriend and his sadness for their fate. It relates to the traditional custom of the aboriginal people, which causes the lovers' dilemma: one must not marry the person to whom one has lost one's virginity.

Another practice of mountain songs comes at festival time, among these mountain villagers who may otherwise be hard pressed to gather in one place. Festival times can become romance and marriage fairs. Girls may prepare some small gifts they have made themselves, such as handkerchiefs or colourful small bags, given to boys when singing and dancing together. It is a sign of love and marriage selection. Shen's story “Shenwu zhi ai” 神巫之爱 [The Shaman's love] (1929) details the customs. One song repeated several times goes as follows:

---

<sup>342</sup> Shen Congwen, “Long Zhu” 龙朱, in *The Chinese Earth: Stories by Shen Congwen*, trans. Ching Ti and Robert Payne (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 146.

<sup>343</sup> Shen Congwen, “Under the Moonlight” 月下小景, in *The Chinese Earth: Stories by Shen Congwen*, trans. Ching Ti and Robert Payne (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 92.

When Paradise's gate opens to a fool,  
He moves around with a fidgety heart.  
If the song is a key to open the lock of love  
He is ready to sing for one year under the stars.<sup>344</sup>

The third type of mountain songs is related to a primitive religious practice known as the *Nuo* 雩 ceremony. *Nuo* originally means a ritual to drive out ghosts and ill luck. It is early recorded in *Lunyu* 论语 [The Analects of Confucius, c. 500 BC]. Lin He believes *nuo* originally was a kind of mysterious bird which serves as a totem of many minority tribes in southern China. The *Nuo* ceremony is an interaction between the bird god, who is regarded as the Miao's ancestor, and the priest.<sup>345</sup> The *xiaoshen* 霄神, literally Celestial Gods, are the major gods in the *Nuo* rites. These gods are thought to love music and to be mischievous. When displeased, they steal or wreck household objects until propitiated. In his youth, Shen Congwen saw these ceremonies in the countryside, magnificent torch-lit occasions with hundreds in attendance.

In the unfinished novel *Fengzi* 风子 (chapters 1-9 written 1932, chapter 10 in 1937) Shen recorded the songs used by shamans in rituals to pay respects to the bird god.

Do not ask me my direction,  
Eagles and sparrows each have their own nests.  
Even the sun will fall when the night is coming,  
Do you ask the moon 'will you come tomorrow evening?'<sup>346</sup>

This song resembles classical poetry in form, but has simplicity and a concreteness of expression that recall folksongs. The language is popular and easy to understand. The images in this song, such as eagles, sparrows, the sun and the moon, are all related to peasants' farm work and their daily life. The logic between human feelings and the way of expression is gracefully interpreted using parallels from nature. Wai-fong Loh, who studied the folk songs

<sup>344</sup> Shen Congwen, "The Shaman's Love" 神巫之爱, in *Sheng Congwen wenji: xiaoshuo juan* 沈从文文集·小说卷 [Literary Works of Shen Congwen: Fiction], 8 vols. (Hong Kong: Shenghuo, dushu, xinzhì, san lian shudian, 1982-85); in the following cited as *SCWWJ*.

<sup>345</sup> Lin he, *Zhongguo wu nuo shi* 中国巫雩史 [A History of Chinese Shamans and Witchcrafts] (Guangzhou: Huacheng chubanshe, 2001), p. 242.

<sup>346</sup> Shen Congwen, *Fengzi* 风子 [Fengzi], in *SCWWJ*.

of the Zhuang 壮 people of Guangxi, said that folk songs by tribal people matched the quality, both of style and content, of the poems in *Shijing* 诗经 [The Book of Songs].<sup>347</sup>

Shen's adaptation of mountain songs of West Hunan can be shown to have two functions in his fiction. First, these songs take the role of personal narratives in locating Shen Congwen himself and validating his life and experience in West Hunan. Secondly, through these songs, readers can more completely understand the symbolic meanings in Shen's fiction and the collective psychology of the Miao. They can be regarded as a "paradigm for understanding the community and for determining and developing individual behaviour and personality in that community."<sup>348</sup>

### ● The Miao Romance

David Der-wei Wang and Jeffrey Kinkley both believe that Shen Congwen held a romantic view of West Hunan. Wang writes that Shen cherished the power of love and sexuality, which symbolised a healthy and beautiful form of life, as opposed to "civilized" social mores.<sup>349</sup> Kinkley suggested that the picture of the aboriginal people's life in Shen's fiction is derived from his romantic vision of West Hunan as a cauldron of different ethnic groups.<sup>350</sup> Many of Shen's stories describe young people's romance, especially among the Miao, such as "Meijin baozi he na yang" 媚金、豹子和那羊 [Meijin, Baozi and the Goat] (1928), "Long Zhu" (1928), "Yu hou" 雨后 [After the Rain] (1928), "The Shaman's Love" (1929), "Xiaoxiao" 萧萧 [Xiaoxiao] (1929), "Under the Moonlight" (1932) and *Biancheng* 边城 [The Border Town] (1933-1934). However, Shen's description of Miao romance holds its own characteristics. Each of these stories has two motifs: love/sexuality, and life/death. The author praised love and human nature, but this love usually contains a

---

<sup>347</sup> Wai-fong Loh, "From Romantic Love to Class Struggle: Reflections on the Film Liu Sanjie", in *Popular Chinese Literature and Performing Arts in the People's Republic of China 1949-1979*, ed. Bonnie S. McDougall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 171.

<sup>348</sup> Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Traditions and the Verbal Arts: A Guide to Research Practices* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 128.

<sup>349</sup> David Der-wei Wang, *Fictional Realism in Twentieth Century China, Mao Dun, Lao She, Shen Congwen* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), p. 235.

<sup>350</sup> Jeffrey C. Kinkley, *The Odyssey of Shen Congwen* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), p. 9.

flavour of primitiveness and cruelty and is vulnerable and transient in reality.

These love stories are narrated as if by a traditional storyteller, like authentic legends Shen may have heard as a child. They also describe strange customs and incorporate dialect rarely heard by the Han Chinese. To the Miao, love is controlled by primitive beliefs, and may be cruel and violent. The story “Meijin, Baozi and the Goat” explains the origin of such strange customs as the taboo on goat meat, the use of goats as betrothal presents, and the significance of a pair of deities, named Meijin and Baozi, originally a young Miao couple who are now worshipped at the cave where they committed suicide. The tribal people are much less inhibited about sexual intercourse among young people than the Han. Extravagant, far-fetched metaphors and indirect reference to oneself are true features of Miao formal and singing discourse.

Baozi meant to bring the girl a young mountain goat as a present, for it was the first time; he wanted to exchange a white kid for the red blood of her virginity. Even if their tryst was wrong, it was as if the gods themselves had given their assent.

Lovers today still offer their mistresses a small white kid to express their loyalty and the strength of their love and they always say that the kid is descended from the one Baozi brought for Meijin all those years ago.<sup>351</sup>

It is as if Shen is recording a real event that every young person of the Miao will experience when he or she chooses a lover; to explain the primitive custom: the tribal people regard goats as a symbol of love. Moreover, the young couple, Meijin and Baozi, cherish their love so greatly that they would rather kill themselves to defend the nobility of true love than keep living but lose it, although the cause is a misunderstanding between them. After their death, they are respected as two deities by the Miao, and considered models for young lovers.

In “Under the Moonlight”, the boy and girl choose to commit suicide to confront the dilemma that one cannot marry the person with whom one has lost his or her virginity. The

---

<sup>351</sup> Shen Congwen “Meijin, Baozi and the Goat”, in *Imperfect Paradise*, trans. Caroline Mason (Honolulu: The University of Hawaii Press, 1995), pp. 83-84.

Miao are famous for their oral tales about love suicides by star-crossed lovers. *The Epic of the Miao People* [*Maozu shishi*, 苗族史诗] records the fight against authority by the tribal people's ancestor to win his independence and love in "The Song of Butterflies" and "The Flood":

The only thing he cares for is his "little sister",  
Like the last tablet of silver and the last bamboo pipe.  
Nothing can drive them apart.<sup>352</sup>

The young people in Shen's stories believe that their fate is controlled by higher powers. They believe in reincarnation and fate: good will be rewarded with good; and evil with evil. This is another motif in Miao romance.

When winter comes a new white pagoda is completed. But the young man whose serenading in the moonlight made Emerald's heart soar up lightly in her dreams has not come back to Chatong.

He may never come back. Or he may come back tomorrow.<sup>353</sup>

The above lines from *The Border Town* express the co-existence of love and death less violently and more indirectly than the story "Meijin, Baozi and the Goat", but the meaning is similar. Emerald cherishes her tragic love, because of her uncertainty about her lover's reappearance. To her, love is close to the danger of death, and she cannot change her fate but only wait for the outcome. In the author's eyes, the Miao people are inclined to choose death as the completion of love. The fate of their romance sometimes does not have a good result and their love sometimes loses the battle against reality; however, it is worth the sacrifice for their faith in love. In writing these stories in Beijing, Shen Congwen was able to alleviate his loneliness and express his belief in love.

---

<sup>352</sup> Ma Xueliang and Jin Dan, trans. and annot., *Miaozu shishi* 苗族史诗 [The Epic of the Miao People] (Beijing: Zhongguo minjian wenyi chubanshe, 1983), p. 9.

<sup>353</sup> Shen Congwen, "The Border Town", in *The Border Town and Other Stories*, trans. Gladys Yang (Beijing: Chinese Literature Press, 1981), p. 101.

In Shen's stories, when these tribal people face different choices, instinctive human nature is highlighted while social laws and ethical codes are downplayed. The young women in "Under the Moonlight", "Long Zhu", "Xiaoxiao" and "The Shaman's Love" all choose their lovers by instinct, expressing a kind of primitive vitality. In Shen's eyes, their free choice in love and death is a triumph, challenging Han marriage customs, which emphasise the social and economic suitability of the two families and are subject to society, authority and status. This "victory" of the tribal people, the uneducated villagers over the educated Han people in urban areas, seems to criticise the elite values of self-cultivation.

### ● Idealisation of Miao Life

The tribal people in Shen's regional fiction live in a paradise separated from the outside world. Their daily lives appear rich in the creativity of untamed thinking and direct aesthetic apprehension of the world. Shen recreated West Hunan and the aboriginal people there that he had known in childhood. The tribal people are embellished, idealised and symbolised in Shen's writings.

Kinkley supports the view that it is Shen Congwen's imagination, his intuitive grasp of psychology and his understanding of ethnic minorities that allowed him to create such lifelike portraits of country people being unselfconscious about sex.<sup>354</sup> The tribal people are godlike heroes with beautiful bodies in Shen's writings, like legendary figures in fairy tales. Readers may question the authenticity of these descriptions. How can Shen's descriptions be lifelike if they are also embellished and idealised? Do the tribal people really lead a simple and rich life; or are they prettified and presented as an ideal against the Han?

A large number of Shen's stories about tribal people were written in the early period of his life in Beijing. It was the first time that Shen lived in a dominant Han community, where the Miao and Tujia cultures were remote others. In his stories, these minorities become the dominant ethnic groups, whose people are described as being as pure as young girls or as powerful as gods:

---

<sup>354</sup> Jeffrey C. Kinkley, *The Odyssey of Shen Congwen*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987, p. 138.



He was as strong as a lion and as tender as a lamb; the ideal of all the youths of the place, the most gifted, the most wise. He was so beautiful that a sorcerer had once, in a fit of jealousy, attempted to cut off his nose, but finally he acknowledged the youth's beauty and paid homage to his charms.<sup>355</sup>

Meijin was a stunningly beautiful girl of the White-faced tribe. She and a boy from the Phoenix tribe, who was very handsome and of exemplary character, paired off while exchanging songs across mountain valleys.<sup>356</sup>

The above paragraphs are typical descriptions of the beauty of the Miao people. The Miao are also described as brave heroes or mythical sorcerers and sorceresses in other stories, such as “The Shaman’s Love” (1929), “Qi ge yeren he zuihou yi ge yingchunjie” 七个野人和最后一个迎春节 [The Seven Barbarians and the Last Spring Festival] (1929) and *Fengzi* (1932-37).

These characters take pride in their daily routines and their dreams, and have their own sensitivity, sensibilities and a pure temperament, but they are very vulnerable in the modern world. For the young people in these stories suicide for the sake of love means courage and sacrifice on the one hand, but it also conveys their pessimism and vulnerability on the other. It is not that they do not care about what is happening in the outside world or are unwilling to join the modern society, but they are not brave enough and do not know how to do so. They seal themselves off and are ignorant about the outside.

The protagonist of “Xiaoxiao” wants to become a girl student and live in a town, although she never takes any steps to realise her dream. Moreover, the local villagers do not know urban life at all; all their knowledge comes from their own imagination and misunderstandings. To Xiaoxiao’s grandfather, female students are strange creatures:

They wore clothes without regard to the weather; they ate whether they

---

<sup>355</sup> Shen Congwen, “Long Zhu”, in *The Chinese Earth: Stories by Shen Congwen*, trans. Ching Ti and Robert Payne (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 137.

<sup>356</sup> Shen Congwen “Meijin, Baozi and the Goat”, in *Imperfect Paradise*, trans. Caroline Mason (Honolulu: The University of Hawaii Press, 1995), p. 83.

were hungry or full; they didn't go to sleep until late at night; during the day they worked not at all but sang and played ball or read books from abroad.<sup>357</sup>

Xiaoxiao's desire to escape from her hometown and go to the city shows the influence of modern thinking, but the local people all believe it to be a kind of impossible escape.

Although Shen gave Xiaoxiao a happy ending, this did not include her dream of being a student, and the story underscores her powerless situation. The tribal people in Shen's fiction regard their lives as subject to abstract fate or retribution. Shen's description of the dark side of village customs does not imply a wish to revive religion, but to find a modern substitute for it. This is how Uncle Yamao teaches Guisheng what fate is:

Everything that happens is fated, Guisheng. It's no use fighting fate. A fortune-teller predicted that Deng Tong would starve to death. To try to prevent this, the emperor gave him a copper-mine so that he could mint money; but he still starved in the end. Moneybags Wang in town started life as a dumpling pedlar. Then his luck turned. It rained for two weeks on end, and the wall of that little temple he lived in crumbled. He and his wife were nearly crushed to death, but when they burrowed their way out of the debris they found two vats of silver that had been buried there. ....What is that if not fate?<sup>358</sup>

The life of the tribal people is idealised and they themselves beautified in Shen Congwen's romantic recreation. They are not real figures in West Hunan, but symbols of the vitality of primitive life among the Miao. The point of the darker stories from the late 1920s and after, like "Xiaoxiao" (1929) and "Guisheng" (1937), is to connect people's conservativeness and vulnerability with modern civilisation, praising aboriginal culture and denigrating urban civilisation.

---

<sup>357</sup> Shen Congwen, "Xiaoxiao", in *The Border Town and Other Stories*, trans. Gladys Yang (Beijing: Chinese Literature Press, 1981), p. 106.

<sup>358</sup> Shen Congwen, "Guisheng", in *The Border Town and Other Stories*, trans. Gladys Yang (Beijing: Chinese Literature Press, 1981), p. 172.

## ● Homesickness: Primitive Psychology and Folk Archetype

In the same way that the tribal people are embellished by Shen Congwen, his native place, West Hunan, is a dreamlike image in his regional fiction, rather than a real place on the map of China. The portrait of West Hunan displays a contrast between reality and memory, geographical locus and textual landscape, and history and myth. Shen's works generally show little sense of the former in each of these pairs, but more of the latter. In Shen's fiction, the minority tribes living on the margins of Han settlement still have their own culture and are satisfied with their lives, although the outside world is experiencing great changes.

When Shen Congwen came to Beijing to find a new career, the contrast between the countryside and the cities entered his mind. In addition to his educational background in traditional Chinese culture, he had also acquired new ideas under the influence of the May Fourth Movement. On the one hand, he felt homesick, cherishing some primitive beliefs and describing his hometown as a paradise in his writings; on the other hand, his goal was to join the cultural renaissance that aimed to remake China's conceptions of truth, goodness and beauty. The new thinking became a part of Shen's philosophical beliefs, forming the third side of the triangle with his other two ideologies, traditional Han culture and West Hunan culture.

Shen talked a lot about West Hunan culture in his stories, from "Long Zhu" as a romantic legend to *The Border Town* as a nostalgic symbol. In Kinkley's eyes, Han culture characterised by Confucianism and urbanisation had gradually declined and reached a point of crisis by Shen's time. By contrast, the tribal people retained vitality through their marginal culture.<sup>359</sup> Shen tried to make his homeland the guardian of an ancient social ethos that united Han with Miao and city with country. He did not simply claim that the Han culture had declined; instead, with the experience of living in cities, Shen began to cultivate within himself the kind of thinking he associated with West Hunan culture, or, one might say, the collective unconsciousness shared by the tribal people. However, the impression he gave readers through his fiction is that he reacted against Han culture, and did not really desire

---

<sup>359</sup> Jeffrey C. Kinkley, *The Odyssey of Shen Congwen* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), p. 10.

unity. Because of his ambiguous attitude, the stories all convey the author's contradictory feeling, missing his hometown while seeking his identity in an urban area. A good example is the novel *Fengzi* that Shen wrote from 1932 to 1937 but never finished.

*Fengzi* deals with many things: the dying spirit of the Chinese countryside, the local character of West Hunan and its people, the inadequacies of art and the nature of God. Local folk customs are observed through the eyes of a young Han man from an urban area. The story of Long Zhu is also incorporated into *Fengzi*. The young man hears of "Long Zhu" as a symbol of the Miao people's social and spiritual burden. *Fengzi* also incorporates elements from *The Border Town*, such as the *Nuo* rituals. All the phenomena in *Fengzi* can be regarded as "phenomena that are collective or communal rather than individual or idiosyncratic".<sup>360</sup> According to the young man's experience in *Fengzi*, the power of primitive psychology among the tribal people and its influence on urban people support the idea that the Miao and the Han (the countryside and the city) traditions can be reconciled.

Another way in which Shen expressed his homesickness is by using folk archetypes in his tales. He did not just adapt or revise some specific legends or folktales, but wrote new stories with folk archetypes familiar to tribal people. In *The Border Town*, several archetypes were introduced: two brothers with different fates, falling in love with the same woman, totemic animal ancestors and man at the whim of fate.

In the story "The Mountain Spirit" (1927), Shen described an ideal man who is unsophisticated, simple and pure, although he has a mental disease. The local people believe that he is deranged because he has offended the *xiaoshen* [local celestial gods]. He is very brave, loves nature and regards himself as a part of nature. He treats himself and his friend not as human beings but as trees or animals. The theme of man's powerlessness towards his fate is not as pessimistic as might be expected. The deranged man's primitiveness expresses Shen's worship of nature and the triumph of the primitive over the modern, nature over humanity and the past over the present. Although the local people cannot change their fate, their personality indicates an unpolluted ideal origin. Shen Congwen used these folk

---

<sup>360</sup> Robert A. Georges and Michael Owen Jones, *Folkloristics: An Introduction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 225.

archetypes as the foundation of his stories, implying a process of removing things and ideas from historical contingencies and fitting them into a cultural pattern. His stories have no fixed historical setting.

Although the description of the West Hunan region is idealised, Shen gives us a new way to think about the relationship between primitiveness and modernity in which people are starting the process of urbanisation and are enthusiastic to learn some new modes from the West, such as industrialisation.

### ● Summary

There are more elements in Shen Congwen's early fiction than just the taste of native soil and the pastoral motifs which have been fully explored in David Wang and Jeffrey Kinkley's works. A wider concept is needed to include all the folk elements of West Hunan in his writings. Therefore, the term regional fiction is better than native soil fiction. In Shen's regional fiction, he emphasised the seclusion of the social environment in West Hunan. Because of this seclusion, the tribal people still lead a relatively primitive life and become representatives of pure and ideal humanity in a mythical age. At the same time, they lack a realistic understanding of life and are ignorant about the changes happening in other parts of China, so they do not know how to compete in the outside world and even are not conscious of controlling their own fate. These shortcomings are fully depicted in "The Mountain Spirit", "Xiaoxiao", *Fengzi*, *The Border Town* and "Guisheng". As Kinkley said, Shen Congwen displayed a paradise for readers, but the paradise was imperfect. If we acknowledge all the elements in Shen's style and in his folk idealism, his works also highlight "the savagery and disquiet that make his imaginary world far from perfect, even 'fallen'".<sup>361</sup>

Another group of Shen Congwen's fiction bears a closer resemblance to folktales; examples of these include "Long Zhu", "Under the Moonlight", "Meijin, Baozi and the Goat" and "The Shaman's Love". He used folk archetypes in narrating stories, described folk customs in West Hunan and analysed the primitive psychology shared by the tribal people.

---

<sup>361</sup> Jeffrey Kinkley, ed., *Imperfect Paradise* (Honolulu: The University of Hawaii Press, 1995), p. 6.

Through these folk elements, Shen tried to show that everyone (both the characters in his stories and the readers) participated in the tribes' literary heritage, so that the meaning of each narrative was effectively conveyed to all members briefly and without any sense of moralising.

Shen retold these folktales of his own community, inserting many "apostrophic pontifications" which established the truth and strength of the community's convictions.<sup>362</sup> These stories, which are familiar to everyone in the tribes, bring people together as the expressive basis for communal identity and collective action; or we may believe that the tribes are a potential reading public. They also reveal Shen's thinking on the national and the tribal, host and immigrant, and other intergroup contexts. Feeling himself excluded from China's urban literary milieu, Shen began to praise the virtues of his homeland and identify himself primarily as a barbarian from West Hunan.

In the preface to *The Border Town*, Shen Congwen mentioned that some old traditions in West Hunan were dying out and expressed his thinking on how to reconstruct moral values in the nation through comparing the past (the old) to the present (the new). I believe that this kind of thinking is one of the motives for his writing about West Hunan. He believed that the Han people should cherish primitive values, and that no one should cut themselves off from tradition. This conclusion sharply challenges the May Fourth advocacy of abolishing traditional values and establishing new thinking.

### **Section 3, Memories of the Homeland: Short Stories by Wang Zengqi**

After the Cultural Revolution, in 1980 Wang Zengqi (1920-1997) suddenly became famous as a writer in Shen Congwen's image. Born in 1920, Wang came from a gentry family in Gaoyou, Jiangsu. His father, a Confucian intellectual, held old-fashioned views on education and Wang was sent to a traditional-style private elementary school [*sishu* 私塾]. His father's talent for literature and classical scholarship had some impact on Wang's thinking and his

---

<sup>362</sup> Bruce A. Rosenberg, *Folklore and Literature: Rival Siblings* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991), p. 27.

happy childhood in Gaoyou was to provide him with lots of writing material. Studying under Shen Congwen as a creative writer at Southwest Associated University in the 1940s, Wang published one book of stories after the Sino-Japanese war, but it was banned for thirty years in the People's Republic of China. Having worked as a journal editor, and subsequently sentenced to labour reform as a Rightist, Wang turned his interest to Peking opera as a means of self-protection and remained within an opera troupe until his death in 1997.

Most of Wang's writings are short stories and essays. He explained in the preface to his complete works that he did not have the ability to compose longer works such as novels or long articles because of his temperament.<sup>363</sup> Since Wang depicted natural scenery and folk customs in his hometown, using anecdotes from childhood, it is easy to associate his work with Shen Congwen's description of man and the native land. But Wang's ideologies have more complicated origins.

Wang's writing career can be divided into three periods. The first is from 1940 to 1948, during which few of his works were published. The second lasted from 1949 to 1979, during which Wang was more like a worker than a writer. It was in the third period from 1980 that Wang gradually became known to the public and many of his works began to be appreciated by readers. Many scholars of modern Chinese literature regard Wang as belonging to the post-Cultural Revolution generation; however, Wang's short stories bear the characteristics of an older time. He expressed a romantic relationship between local folk and their land, revealing the life of ordinary people of the 1940s to 1960s, especially life in his hometown Gaoyou. Moreover, some of his stories are rewritings of those completed in the 1940s, such as "Yibing" 异秉 [Special Talents] (1948; 1980). His short stories are full of memories of his native land.

Wang's short stories represent an objective commentary on local people's life in his hometown, although expressed in a romantic fictional mode. On the one hand, he explored human nature in the countryside and examined rural people's traditional morality. The theme of the triumph of healthy and untrammelled country love over Confucian restrictions is

---

<sup>363</sup> Wang Zengqi, *Wang Zengqi quanji* 汪曾祺全集 [The Complete Works of Wang Zengqi], Vol. 1 (Beijing: Beijing shifan daxue chubanshe, 1998), p. 7.

familiar to readers from Shen Congwen's writings. Wang recreated it in his stories, such as the love legend between Qiaoyun and Shiyizi in "Da nao jishi" 大淖记事 [A True Story of Big Nur] (1981).<sup>364</sup> On the other hand, Wang felt helpless when he wrote about the ignorance of the local people. Wang stated that what he wanted to achieve in his writings was a sort of harmony rather than profundity.<sup>365</sup> Beauty and ugliness are balanced in his work and ordinary human feelings always depicted with delicate strokes.<sup>366</sup>

In every piece of Wang's works, half of the narrative deals with local customs, especially rich culinary traditions. Wang's hometown Gaoyou and the city Kunming, where he lived as a young man, are his two favourite places. Besides introducing the delicious food itself he wrote about traditional chefs and restaurants. Using a child's point of view, Wang depicted a class of people with some remarkable talents which make them local heroes, such as small businessmen, craftsmen and farmers. Thanks to them, life became interesting.

The value system of Wang's short stories is influenced by traditional Chinese culture. In an essay "I am a Chinese", Wang said that he was influenced greatly by traditional culture and ideology. Among Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism, Confucianism was the most influential on him.<sup>367</sup> In Wang's writings, religion always combines folk and secular concerns. Local people's religious beliefs focus more on human feelings and human sympathy than on religious seriousness and loftiness. Wang admitted that the emphasis of human nature in his stories followed Shen Congwen's idea of the author remaining in touch with his characters.<sup>368</sup> A good example is the story "Shoujie" 受戒 [Ordination] (1980). Minghai, a thirteen-year-old boy is ordained after four years as a novice. Then his

---

<sup>364</sup> Nur: Mongolian for "lake".

<sup>365</sup> Wang Zengqi, *Wang Zengqi quanji* 汪曾祺全集 [The Complete Works of Wang Zengqi], Vol. 1 (Beijing: Beijing shifan daxue chubanshe, 1998), p. 9.

<sup>366</sup> Wang Zengqi, "Liangqi zashu" 两栖杂述 [Rambling Thoughts from an Amphibian], in *Wo shi zenyang zou shang wenxue daolu de* 我是怎样走上文学道路的 [How I Came to Take the Path of Literature] (Nanjing: Jiangsu wenyi chubanshe, 1993), pp. 118-26.

<sup>367</sup> Wang Zengqi, *Wancui wentan* 晚翠文谈 [Literary Talks from My Late Blooming] (Hangzhou: Zhejiang wenyi chubanshe, 1988), p. 38.

<sup>368</sup> Jeffrey C. Kinkley, trans., "Wang Zengqi: We Must Not Forget Our Historical Roots", in *Modern Chinese Writers: Self-Portrayals*, ed. Helmut Martin and Jeffrey Kinkley (Armonk, N. Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1992), p. 159.



thirteen-year-old girlfriend, Yingzi, sweeps him off into the reed marshes in a boat to become his wife. As Jeffrey Kinkley commented, no strictures from “civilisation” could stop the consummation.<sup>369</sup>

### ● Local Flavour: Food and Drink

Although Wang was condemned as a Rightist in 1958 and suffered greatly until after the Cultural Revolution, life is always accompanied by beauty and compassion in his short stories. Wang did not lose enthusiasm; instead he enjoyed life, especially when recalling the delicious food of his hometown. In his descriptions, an ordinary dish, such as a bowl of bean-curd or a plate of radishes, can be the most delicious in the world. He wrote an essay “Guxiang de yecai 故乡的野菜 [Wild Greens of My Hometown], expressing his love for the fresh taste of the different kinds of wild vegetables in his hometown. Only when one is in a good mood and holds an optimistic attitude toward life can one enjoy every meal and consider alimentation as a joy. Wang Zengqi had a special weakness for dainty snacks and he considered Gaoyou’s culinary tradition to be part of its local charm.

There is a literary phrase in Chinese aesthetics named *renjian de yanhuo* 人间的烟火, which evokes the image of a smoking chimney and the smell of cooked food, associated with home and civilisation. To Chinese people, if a place has *renjian de yanhuo*, it must be a wholesome and happy place. A distinguishing feature of both Wang’s hometown Gaoyou and the city of Kunming where he lived during his youth was that they were both places with excellent local delicacies and therefore had a rich sense of *renjian de yanhuo*.

Wang spent time evoking the flavour and culture of local Chinese food. The joy he experienced from delicious food symbolised his search for goodness and perfection and his hedonistic wish to escape pain and indulge in pleasure. In the story “Huangyou laobing” 黄油烙饼 [Butter Pancakes] (1980), the little boy Xiao Sheng enjoys life with his grandmother in a village. After his grandmother dies, he moves to the city to live with his parents. In this

---

<sup>369</sup> Jeffrey C. Kinkley, “Shen Congwen’s Legacy in Literature of the 1980s”, in *From May Fourth to June Fourth: Fiction and Film in Twentieth-century China*, ed. Ellen Widmer and David Der-wei Wang (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 86

story Wang criticises the political oppression of 1960s China by describing the difference in the food between rural and urban areas from a child's point of view. When Xiao Sheng lived with his grandmother, steamed buns, fried fish, pancakes and bean-curd with shrimp sauce were the everyday dishes that they ate. They even had two boxes of butter made from fresh milk but Xiao Sheng's grandmother could not bear to use it because it was so expensive. When Xiao Sheng later enjoyed a butter pancake made by his mother, he wept as he recalled life with his grandmother. He had never imagined that urban life was so tough that even pancakes with butter were hard to come by.

Wang mentioned the organic poultry of his hometown Gaoyou in the story "Ji ya mingjia" 鸡鸭名家 [Poultry Experts] (1947). The peasants were experts in raising poultry and knew every detail about the rearing process, such as how to separate laying birds from those reared for their meat; they could look after the birds well for they regarded them as their friends rather than animals. These experts contributed to the local economy by encouraging competition and increasing the quality of poultry farming. Wang described these experts: "they mention every skill casually and are never pretentious. They feel pleased with themselves when talking to customers but there is a kind of self-deprecation in their tone."<sup>370</sup>

These experts enriched life for local people who enjoyed watching their bargaining and farming techniques. At the beginning of the story, Wang remembered his father's preparation of a poultry dish: "I love watching him washing duck offal and separating them with his white but masculine hands."<sup>371</sup> Because of these experts, local people learned how to select a good bird and how to cook it to bring out the flavour. For example, duck tastes better if it is throttled rather than decapitated.<sup>372</sup> The experts added fun and knowledge to local life.

When describing his native land, Wang did not hesitate to expose the reality of local people's lives. In the prosperous towns, famous for their fine food, people were also weary with work and living with little hope, even though they ate nice meals. The first part of the

---

<sup>370</sup> All the references to Wang Zengqi's works are from *Wang Zengqi quanji* 汪曾祺全集 [The Complete Works of Wang Zengqi], Vol. 1-3: Fiction (Beijing: Beijing shifan daxue chubanshe, 1998); in the following cited as *WZQJ*; variations are noted where relevant. I translated the sentences and paragraphs cited from Wang Zengqi's works.

<sup>371</sup> Wang Zengqi, "Poultry Experts", in *WZQJ*.

<sup>372</sup> *Ibid.*

story “Special Talents” is about the routine life of Wang Er, who owns a small restaurant selling smoked meat and bean-curd. He gets up early each morning to prepare the food and his wife takes care of their children at home. Every day local townspeople come to his restaurant after work to enjoy a plate of smoked meat and a glass of rice wine. Wang gives a detailed description of the food:

Wang Er sells smoked beef, smoked pork, meat wrapped in cattail bags and the local speciality, pot-stewed bean-curd, in his restaurant. Smoked beef is cut into slices with leeks and spicy sauce. Meat wrapped in cattail bags is a local snack. Pork is usually wrapped very tightly with some dried bean-curd and sweet-and-sour mince. The cattail bags with meat look like calabashes. They are steamed and cut into pieces.<sup>373</sup>

Because the smoked meat in Wang Er’s restaurant is more delicious than in other restaurants on the same street, it is always popular.

The author displays a peaceful life full of enjoyment in the first part of the story. In the second part, he recounts the casual chatting of the townspeople in Wang Er’s restaurant about persons with some special talents. In their imagination, a special group of people can always do a good job no matter what position they are in just because of their special talent for foreseeing fate. They give many examples in a mysterious tone and analyse Wang Er’s success in managing a restaurant. Life seems so peaceful and so regular that they have become bored with it. At a loss facing the future their dreams of special talents symbolise ineffable yearnings. Wang expressed his sadness and powerlessness toward these local people and satirised their naive thinking.

Wang expressed his sadness toward local people more deeply in the story “Zhiye” 职业 [Occupations] (1947).<sup>374</sup> It is about a special occupation in Kunming: dealers selling two kinds of local snacks along the street, *jiaoyan bingzi* 椒盐饼子 [pancakes with spicy salt] and *xiyang gao* 西洋糕 [Western-styled pastries]. In most cases, these retailers are children or teenagers. The narrative describes every detail of the local snacks in a light-hearted tone.

---

<sup>373</sup> Wang Zengqi, “Special Talents” (1980 version), in *WZQJ*.

<sup>374</sup> Wang Zengqi rewrote the story in 1982.

However, when describing the children calling their wares, Wang changes his tone. “You can sense a sort of satire, grievance, weariness, loneliness or more accurately these feelings combining together in their voices when they cry out for customers, it is difficult to explain.”<sup>375</sup> The author dashes the good humour he has created as readers understand (his sadness) that these little peddlers have lost their innocence and childhood. Under the surface of a peaceful and prosperous environment, life is accompanied by hardship.

Wang regarded local culinary traditions as one of the most characteristic aspects of his hometown. He filled his descriptions of local food with love and happiness. Both as a writer and a connoisseur of delicious food, Wang knew that sweetness was not the only flavour either of food or of life. The memory of his native land tastes sweet, sour, bitter and spicy. As Wang said at the end of the story “Butter Pancakes”, “pancakes taste sweet and teardrops salty.”<sup>376</sup>

### ● Special Professionals: Talented Folk

In the 1980s Wang Zengqi wrote several trilogies of short stories about his hometown. Some of the stories are revised versions of his writings of the 1940s, such as the story “Dai chejiang” 戴车匠 [Turner Dai] which was originally written in 1947. In these trilogies, most protagonists are local people who make a living from their special skills. Their habits and behaviour form a part of local culture; at the same time, their fate is destined by local customs. Although local people were experiencing many changes in the 1940s, traditional customs were too entrenched to be eliminated. To some extent, folk customs give rise to tragic fates for local people. Wang tried to praise the beautiful and innocent minds of talented ordinary people by displaying contradictions between the old and the new.

In the trilogy *Guli san Chen* 故里三陈 [The Three Chens Back Home] (1983), Wang wrote three short stories set in Gaoyou, each about a local character known for his special talent: “Chen Xiaoshou” 陈小手 [Small-hands Chen], “Chen Si” 陈四 [Chen Si] and “Chen Niqu” 陈泥鳅 [The Loach Chen]. Chen Xiaoshou is regarded as an unusual man by

---

<sup>375</sup> Wang Zengqi, “Occupations” (1947 version), in *WZQJ*.

<sup>376</sup> Wang Zengqi, “Butter Pancakes”, in *WZQJ*.

local villagers partly for his occupation as a male midwife and partly for his small and feminine hands. Everyone stares at him with curious eyes and despises him. “No man who studies medicine goes in for midwifery. Each of them would think it most shameful and would not ever consider it.”<sup>377</sup> According to traditional morals, men should follow an honourable business and women should serve men. Furthermore, pregnant women are considered to be dirty and unlucky. A man who takes care of pregnant women brings shame to the whole village. Thanks to such prejudice, Chen Xiaoshou’s tragedy is destined.

Local villagers have a strong belief in popular Confucian ethics. A married woman should keep a distance from all men except for her husband; yet Chen Xiaoshou touches pregnant women in the most intimate places when he is helping them give birth. Although the warlord expresses his gratitude to Chen Xiaoshou for saving his wife, Chen is shot for his familiarity with her. After the execution the warlord still feels wronged. “How dare he grope my wife’s body for such a long time? She is mine and no one else can touch her!”<sup>378</sup> the warlord shouts at the end of the story.

Chen Si’s life looks better than Chen Xiaoshou’s but his fate has a deeper sorrow. Chen Si is respected by local villagers as he has the special talent of stilt-walking in the part of Lord Xiang Rong 向榮 in religious performances. However, no one appreciates his profession as a craftsman. Villagers, including Chen Si, are too loyal to popular religion; they forget their roles in reality and neglect their social responsibilities. Self-respect turns into blind faith under the influence of popular religion. Human beings are both natural and social. Chen Si’s tragedy is that he loses his social role. Local villagers are unconcerned about social life and detach from each other as humans.

Chen Niqui is a warm-hearted young man and his story sounds a little brighter. He is good at swimming and can swim under water as freely as a loach. He saves a drowning woman without thought of reward but accepts some money to help a grandmother send her grandson to a clinic. It seems that villagers are willing to help each other. But Chen Niqui’s talent of swimming cannot solve all the problems in the village. He is too poor to help

---

<sup>377</sup> Wang Zengqi, “Small-hands Chen”, in *WZQJ*.

<sup>378</sup> *Ibid.*

Grandmother Chen Wu himself; otherwise he would not need to ask for money after rescuing the woman. Local people are struggling for a living. Even persons of special talent cannot change any of the poor conditions in the village.

In 1985, Wang rewrote the short story “Turner Dai” and put it with other three stories “Shou zizhi de laoren” 收字纸的老人 [The Old Wastepaper Collector], “Ruyi lou he deyi lou” 如意楼和得意楼 [The Teahouse Named Contentment and the Teahouse Named Success] and “Huaping” 花瓶 [The Vase] in the collection *Guren wangshi* 故人往事 [Old Friends and Past Times]. Through these stories, Wang investigated conflicts between the old and the new through the special gaze of the ordinary people of his hometown. Their persistent adherence to tradition created a difficult environment for the growth of new thinking.

The author expressed his regret for the loss of a special profession in his hometown in the story “Turner Dai”. Dai, who can make many varieties of wooden ware using a special knife on a lathe, has no apprentice to inherit his skills. Despite the fact that local people respect Dai’s abilities and admire his artistic skills, no one wishes to follow in Dai’s steps as they know that it is hard to make money as a turner. In the end, Wang describes a happy picture of children playing in Dai’s home with the wood-turned toys. But in real life, traditional craftsmanship is no longer competitive.

The fear that people will lose their traditional arts and values turns up again in the story “The Old Wastepaper Collector”. Lao Bai, an old man whose job is collecting the waste writing paper from every house in the town, complains about local people’s ignorance. Traditionally in China written or printed characters are sacred. To show reverence, people should not throw them away at will. Professionals like Lao Bai collect and ritually dispose of the wastepaper in the *Wenchang ge* 文昌阁, a temple dedicated to the God of Literature. The worship of writing symbolises the importance of Confucian learning. But with new values gradually influencing the old society people stopped caring about the traditional disposal of wastepaper. Lao Bai is peeved at the English words, graphs and charts with numbers and formulas he collects, regarding them as illiteracy. He burns such papers without ceremony as

he believes it is useless. The author ends the story as “Confucius and Euclid<sup>379</sup> perish together”.<sup>380</sup>

The story “The Vase” is about a mysterious vase and local people’s belief in fatalism. Workers in a chinaware factory suddenly find writing on a broken porcelain vase indicating that the vase was broken by rats. This mysterious story attracts local people’s interest in forecasting their fate. The author believes that although the story is superstitious, it is a part of local folklore. In the story “The Teahouse Named Contentment and the Teahouse Named Success” Wang praises the talents of the ordinary people and expresses his nostalgia for a traditional way of life. Local people’s leisurely style of life means they begin their daily enjoyment by drinking in teahouses in the morning and continue by taking a bath in the afternoon. Wang gives a detailed description of different kinds of tea, local snacks and bathhouse gossip. The boss of the teahouse named Contentment provides a better service for his customers than in the teahouse named Success. He is known as the model of all talented folk in town because of his kindness, enthusiasm and hard work.

Wang heard the stories about these talented folks with special skills in his childhood and youth. He cherished and missed the time he spent in Gaoyou and Kunming. Different factors combine together in his stories, giving readers a complete picture of his hometown. The most attractive point of Wang’s writing style is that he can always imbue local life with good humour and interest even when talking about hardship, misfortune and sufferings. Few negative expressions exist in his stories, despite the fact that local people have many different shortcomings.

### ● Popular Beliefs: Secularised Religion

Wang recalled that he had read a lot of Chinese philosophy when he was a child in Gaoyou. Religious beliefs make up an important part of local people’s thinking, but what they care about is life in the secular world rather than immortality or Nirvana. Wang’s two stories “Ordination” and “A True Story of Big Nur” are concerned with local folk beliefs in

---

<sup>379</sup> A Greek mathematician, the founder of geometry, here the name represents modern thinking.

<sup>380</sup> Wang Zengqi, “The Old Wastepaper Collector”, in *WZQJ*.

secularized religion and the competition between doctrine and emotions.

The story “Ordination” is set around a Buddhist temple named *Puti* 菩提 [pipal]. At the beginning of the story Wang explains the nickname of the temple, *Biqi* 荸荠 [water chestnut], created by local children because of its similar local pronunciation to *puti*. In Jiangsu, water chestnuts, as a local vegetable, are associated with secular, lowly and cordial memories of childhood. The Buddhist temple in the story turns out to be a warm and humane place, contrary to the usual implication of mystery, sobriety and gloom. The boy Minghai’s intention of becoming a monk arises not from religious faith but advantage. At that time monks could support themselves by studying Buddhism in temples. In Wang’s writings, life in Pipal Temple is similar to life in the outside world.

Prestigious monks in the temple are addressed not as abbots but as Father or Boss. Their main responsibility was to check every line and column of the temple’s accounts rather than to teach Buddhist Sutras to the young monks. Minghai’s second supervisor Renhai 仁海 got married, and his third supervisor Rencong 仁聰 often sings love songs sweetly. During festivals, the monks may eat meat and drink alcohol. Several times in the story elopements are mentioned. All in all, “there is no monastic rule in this temple and no one mentions it.”<sup>381</sup> It seems that the theme of the story is not the rites of ordination but how to evade them.

The most interesting part of the story is the relationship between Minghai and his sweetheart Yingzi, in which the author depicts love and sexuality very directly but also with a degree of innocence.

She went back home with a basket of water chestnuts on her arm, leaving a string of footprints across the soft field. Minghai just stood and stared at her footprints: five little toes, a flat sole and a slim heel. Minghai sensed a new feeling which he had never before. He felt a little itchy in his heart. The string of beautiful footprints disturbed the little monk’s peaceful mind.<sup>382</sup>

Wang provides a pastoral environment for Minghai and Yingzi. He described the field

---

<sup>381</sup> Wang Zengqi, “Ordination”, in *WZQJ*.

<sup>382</sup> *Ibid.*



around the temple idyllically. But without the strong vital urge which the two children represent life in this community appears somewhat sterile. Their courage in love and the power of their life force is Wang's ideal.

Wang gave an implicit ending for the love between Minghai and Yingzi: they dash off together into a reed marsh in a boat. Comparing it with the story *The Border Town* by Shen Congwen, Kinkley commented that the formal subject of each story is a rite of passage: Minghai's ordination and Cuicui (Emerald)'s awakening to sexuality.<sup>383</sup> The author mentioned the preparations for Yingzi's wedding by her mother and Yingzi doing handicraft work in her spare time. Girls in the countryside usually give handicraft work to their lovers. Here the handicrafts represent Yingzi's dream of true love. Kinkley believed that in "Ordination", the rites and preparations of the monk's life provided the rhythm for a greater rite of passage: Mingzi's belated discovery of his sexual being.<sup>384</sup> Kinkley may be right, but in the teenagers' eyes, love is more related to their feelings and interests. They are not sure about what can be called sexuality. The end of the story is Wang's ideal not only of love but also of a leisurely and carefree life.

Wang praised the beautiful minds of ordinary people in rural communities in "A True Story of Big Nur". It is a personal love story through which Wang once again emphasised that human nature could surpass any religious beliefs or ethical rules. The innocent love between porter's daughter Qiaoyun and tinsmith's apprentice Shiyizi is trampled on by a local militiaman. The melodramatic end, with Shiyizi's revival and the hope that the couple can at last live together is a triumph of healthy rustic love over religious restrictions and local power.

In "A True Story of Big Nur", tinsmiths and porters represent pristine moral communities that are, by virtue of residence on different sides of a lake spit, mutually distinctive and hierarchically defined.<sup>385</sup> Local villagers still maintain traditional ways of ranking social status but they hold a more lenient attitude toward young people's love and

---

<sup>383</sup> Jeffrey C. Kinkley, "Shen Congwen's Legacy in Literature of the 1980s", in *From May Fourth to June Fourth: Fiction and Film in Twentieth-century China*, ed. Ellen Widmer and David Der-wei Wang (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 86.

<sup>384</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.

<sup>385</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85.

even women's chastity.

Local women are careless about sexual affairs. It is quite normal for a young woman to have an illegitimate child before she is married. A married woman can have a lover. Most women ask for money from their lovers to buy flowers, but some give money to their lovers instead. The only standard for choosing a lover is willingness.<sup>386</sup>

The lives, customs and morals of these communities are different from those of townspeople. The first half of the story is devoted to introducing local customs, local villagers' popular beliefs and their natural instincts which serve as a background for the love between Qiaoyun and Shiyizi.

Wang also considered the characters' natural beauty as the centre of the story. The beauty of both the hero and heroine is exaggerated by others' reaction.

The old tinsmith was worried about his apprentice Shiyizi's future for he was too smart and too handsome. He had a slim and masculine body with a pair of big eyes and pink lips on his face. Local women came to see Shiyizi on the pretext of listening to a piece of folk opera sung by the tinsmith.

Qiaoyun grew up to be as pretty as a flower when she turned fifteen years old. If she went to the local market, no matter what kind of groceries she wanted to buy, she always got a better quality and a larger quantity than others who paid the same amount of money.<sup>387</sup>

Because of Wang's optimism, he seldom wrote about human evil or social impasses. Even bad people are capable of good acts, for example the militiaman who insults Qiaoyun pays compensation to the injured family.

Within this romanticised world, sufferings and pain form a small part of life. Qiaoyun and Shiyizi are both hurt in fighting for their love. However, under the surface of injury and powerlessness, readers can sense an inner happiness in the young couple. Wang's references

---

<sup>386</sup> Wang Zengqi, "A True Story of Big Nur", in *WZQJ*.

<sup>387</sup> *Ibid.*

to religion are dismissive. He described these local people's belief system as a secularised one which emphasised humans' natural disposition. The militiaman beat the young tinsmith Shiyizi nearly to death, but Shiyizi's lover Qiaoyun brings him back to health. Compared to Cuicui's love in *The Border Town*, Wang gave Qiaoyun and Shiyizi a bright ending. Shen Congwen composed the end of *The Border Town* as a supposition: "He may never come back. Or he may come back tomorrow." "Would Shiyizi recover?" Wang Zengqi assured that "no problem. Yes, of course he would!"<sup>388</sup>

### ● Genre Painting: Local Scenery

Wang attached importance to describing the atmosphere of every story. Even if he did not explain plots or analyse protagonists' personalities, he would use several paragraphs to paint folk backgrounds. The atmosphere of every story contains not only the author's views and emotions but also descriptions of local customs and natural scenes. Wang paid much attention to introducing local customs for he believed that readers could understand local people's temperament clearly from their customs and beliefs. There is a type of Chinese painting called genre painting which flourished in the Song dynasty (960-1279). It focuses on local scenes of people's daily life and usually is painted in quietly elegant colours and simply exquisite lines. A good example is the famous picture "Qingming shanghe tu" 清明上河图 [Scenes of the Upper (Reaches of the Bian) River during the Qingming Festival] by Zhang Zeduan (1085-1145). Wang's three trilogies about his hometown Gaoyou have similar characteristics.

In 1981 when Wang Zengqi was working in Beijing, he completed a trilogy named *Guli zaji* 故里杂记 [Miscellany of My Hometown], comprising three short stories: "Li San" 李三 [Li San], "Yushu" 榆树 [Elm Trees] and "Yu" 鱼 [Fish]. The story "Li San" is mainly a sketch of Li San's responsibilities as a guard for the local ancestral shrines and as a night watchman. Besides talking about what kind of work Li San has to do, Wang describes local customs, such as burning joss sticks before the village god, and funeral and festival customs.

---

<sup>388</sup> Wang Zengqi, "A True Story of Big Nur", in *WZQJ*.

In the story “Elm Trees”, Wang recorded the daily life of an old grandmother and her eight elm trees. Grandmother led a simple and poor life but she considered the eight elm trees as her children and never thought about selling the wood for money. Finally, the elm trees, which act as a symbol of the native soil and a simple mind, are taken by a businessman after grandmother’s death. Here, the author revealed a gleam of helplessness. The local traditional values are powerless when meet with modern urban civilisation. Wang wrote about a strange event that happened in a village and the locals’ reaction in the story “Fish”. Because of the danger of flooding, villagers decide to destroy a dam. When the waters flow into the river they are surprised to find lots of fish. They all bring basins and tubs to get the fish home and the butcher family Pang gets the most because they have more tubs than anyone else.

Wang created small troubles for the local folk in the three stories, creating waves in their peaceful lives. Through their reactions readers get a more objective and complete impression of the villagers. Country people were facing up to a crisis of losing their customs, due to rapid developments in the economy. This is Wang’s technique of using vernacular scenes and events to display rural life.

Wang expressed his understanding of country women in another trilogy *Wanfan hua* 晚饭花 [Wild Jasmine] (1982), containing three stories “Zhuzi deng” 珠子灯 [The Lamp with the Pearls], “San jiemei chujia” 三姐妹出嫁 [The Three Sisters’ Marriages] and “Wild Jasmine”. In these three stories, he portrayed natural scenes with local characteristics instead of explaining marriage customs and the fate of local women. The young woman in the story “The Lamp with the Pearl” is too dependent on her husband so that her life is as vulnerable as the dispersed pearls from a lamp. The lamp was a wedding gift and the pearls on it represent a wish for many children. In the traditional society, women could not lead an independent life let alone an independent mind. The dispersed pearls symbolise the woman’s shattered dream of being loved and respected by her husband if she could deliver a boy baby.

The technique of painting natural scenes can also be seen in the story “Wild Jasmine”. It is about Li Xiaolong’s dream of an ideal girl. In his eyes, his dream girl Wang Yuying was as

beautiful as the local wild jasmine which only blossomed at night. This is the picture of Wang Yuying in the young man's heart:

The wild jasmine blossoms abundantly. It comes out in all its strength, shouting as if crazy, lashing forth its bloom in the evening air. With lots of gaudy green leaves and blackish red buds like girls' rouge, the bushes are full of life but at the same time very desolate. They always keep silent. In front of these gaudily green leaves and carmine flowers sits the girl Wang Yuying.<sup>389</sup>

To Li Xiaolong, Wang Yuying loses her purity and vitality after she marries a profligate son of the rich. Xiaolong is bitterly disappointed as his dream about the ideal girl Yuying is smashed when he senses her satisfaction with the marriage. Xiaolong believes that the former innocent girl Wang Yuying no longer exists in this world.

Readers find it difficult to determine Wang Zengqi's attitude toward the characters in his stories. It seems that he only concerns himself with environments and always talks about stories in a detached tone. In 1985, the trilogy *Qiaobian xiaoshuo san pian* 桥边小说三篇 [Three Short Stories Told beside a Bridge] was published. In the story "Zhan dapangzi" 詹大胖子 [Fatso Zhan], Fatso Zhan discovers an illicit sexual relationship between the headmaster and a female teacher in a local primary school. The narrative does not appear to criticise anyone nor does it express any person's attitude. It merely records what Fatso Zhan saw, and in the end that after many years local villagers of Zhan's generation all passed away, including the headmaster and the female teacher, but the latter never married.

The sad sentiment is more obvious in the second story "Youming zhong" 幽冥钟 [The Bell from the Nether World]. It is about the legend of a local temple *Chengtian si* 承天寺 and the custom of tolling the bell there at night for women who die in childbirth. Again, Wang does not make any emotional comment on this custom. He gives a detailed description of the tolling sound of the bell:

There emerges a circle by the sound of the bell which looks like a

---

<sup>389</sup> Wang Zengqi, "Wild Jasmine", in *WZQJ*.

golden ring. The female ghosts in the nether world see the light. Happy expressions appear on their faces.  
'Clang-clang...clang-clang...clang-clang...', the golden circles become darker and darker. Another tolling rings out:  
'clang-clang...clang-clang...clang-clang...', making another golden circle. The rings are spreading one after another.<sup>390</sup>

The sad bell is not only for the dead women but also for the dead babies. The sound of the bell is sorrowful because the lost children represent the lost hopes of local villagers. Readers can find a sense of humanitarianism in the above description.

Wang ended this trilogy with the brighter story "Chagan" 茶干 [Dried Bean-curd with Soy Sauce]. It is about local villagers' love for a kind of vegetables and bean-curd pickled in soy sauce and the warm-hearted boss of the pickle store. Local villagers have much fun in the pickle store tasting the food and shooting the breeze. When the narrator went back to his hometown in the 1980s, he found that the store had closed and no one in the village produced this kind of bean-curd any longer. As Wang concluded, once a folk custom has disappeared it is hard to retrieve.

The attitude of Wang Zengqi in his descriptions of hometown scenery is, in a word, positive. The scenes of Wang's stories are all from his memories. He merely recorded them as authentically and in as much detail as he could. He never wrote about his native place with a cynical, critical or flattering tone. Wang said that this is influenced by Shen Congwen as Shen proposed the slogan "do not ever be cynical".<sup>391</sup> He even neglected the social function of fiction. In his eyes, local scenes were pictures imprinted in his mind. His only responsibility was to display them. Readers would reach their own understandings and impressions by independent thinking.

---

<sup>390</sup> Wang Zengqi, "The Bell from the Nether World", in *WZQJ*.

<sup>391</sup> Wang Zengqi, "Liangqi zashu" 两栖杂述 [Rambling Thoughts from an Amphibian], in *Wo shi zenyang zou shang wenxue daolu de* 我是怎样走上文学道路的 [How I Came to Take the Path of Literature] (Nanjing: Jiangsu wenyi chubanshe, 1993), pp. 118-26.

## ● Summary

As for literary nostalgia, Shen Congwen may again have been a major influence on Wang Zengqi. This can be seen in the harmonious relationships between settings, surroundings and characters in their stories. But their hometown memories are different. Wang held a more objective attitude toward his native place. In his descriptions, local people lead a peaceful life. They never entertain hopes beyond their abilities and are seldom disillusioned by mundane problems. They are sensible enough to know their social roles and try to be optimistic about the future. Unlike Shen's praise for his native land of West Hunan, Wang seldom reveals any personal likes or dislikes. Influenced greatly by his Confucian father, Wang followed the Doctrine of the Mean [*zhongyong* 中庸]. All he wants is a balanced world, in which people enthusiastically seek a happy life but know their place. The goals are harmony and peace, as with the young man in the story "Fuchou" 复仇 [Revenge] (1944), who gives up his revenge in exchange for freedom.

The characters' detachment from reality in Wang's short stories is learned from the Daoist doctrine of *wuwei* 无为 which literally means "inaction": letting things take their own course. Although Wang gives readers a vivid picture of secular life in his hometown, local people in fact stand aloof from the secular world. A good case is the old man Lao Bai in the story "The Old Wastepaper Collector": "after burning the wastepaper, he shut the door and sat alone. Outside his door, time flows by. Lao Bai died in good health at the age of ninety-nine."<sup>392</sup> Another case already mentioned is the end of "Fatso Zhan", a typical example of Wang's technique in story endings, "later on, Zhang Xuzhi died and Wang Wenhui died (she never married). Fatso Zhan died too. Many people in the town died."<sup>393</sup>

Wang mentioned local people's religious beliefs in his short stories, as in "The Bell from the Nether World", but readers may see clearly that Wang does not regard such beliefs as an important part of his native land. Religious beliefs only serve as a foil for an ideal life. Minghai and Yingzi in the story "Ordination" defy religious regulations to obey their natural instinct to seek happiness. To country folk, popular beliefs abide by human nature rather than

---

<sup>392</sup> Wang Zengqi, "The Old Wastepaper Collector", in *WZQJ*.

<sup>393</sup> Wang Zengqi, "Fatso Zhan", in *WZQJ*.

religious commandments.

In conclusion, Wang's philosophical thoughts are different from Shen's. Although they have a similar passion for their native lands, Wang is more clear-headed toward the concept of an ideal life. He can distinguish ideals from reality even though he is creating fiction. He confessed that some of his stories are not like stories or indeed are not stories; he does not like stories with fictional plots as he believes that stories will become less real if they have a fictional flavour.<sup>394</sup>

The most famous stories by Wang Zengqi are all from his memories of childhood in Gaoyou. In his eyes, stories are records of casual chats with friends about shared life experiences.<sup>395</sup> Luckily, life in Wang's native land is interesting. To him, short stories can express the author's philosophical direction, emotional pattern, indeed his wisdom.<sup>396</sup> At a time when most literature was preoccupied with the horrors of the Cultural Revolution and the backwardness of Chinese culture in general, Wang's idyllic portrayal of innocence and mundane religion was a welcome change of tone.<sup>397</sup>

#### Section 4, Descriptions of the "Homeland" Concept

The concept of "homeland" is a popular theme in modern Chinese literature. Writers will consciously or unconsciously reveal a feeling of belonging to their native places or regret at leaving their hometowns. Moreover, writers' descriptions and understandings of their homelands may influence readers. Some ignorant and cruel customs become natural and vital in fiction. "Homeland" in fiction embraces a broad spectrum. These places are pinpoints on maps as well as writers' mental memories. They are usually related to three aspects that writers care about: cultural identity, local people's life and experience and the differences

---

<sup>394</sup> Wang Zengqi, Preface to *Wang Zengqi duanpian xiaoshuo xuan* 汪曾祺短篇小说选 [Selected Short Stories of Wang Zengqi] (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1982), p. 3.

<sup>395</sup> Wang Zengqi, Preface to *Wancui wentan* 晚翠文谈 [Literary Talks from My Late Blooming] (Hangzhou: Zhejiang wenyi chubanshe, 1988), p. 4.

<sup>396</sup> Ibid.

<sup>397</sup> Bonnie S. McDougall and Kam Louie, *The Literature of China in the Twentieth Century* (London: Hurst, 1997), p. 372.



between rural areas and urban areas. Regarding the third aspect, the majority of descriptions of homelands in modern Chinese literature is about the countryside. Those writers whose hometowns are in rural areas always expressed a kind of cultural shock in their fiction when they began a literary career in big cities.

### ● An Idyllic Elegy and Homeland Rebuilding

An “elegy” is a musical composition that is melancholy or pensive in tone. Shen Congwen introduced in his fiction the exoticism of the Miao people and described the landscape and life of his homeland in West Hunan, which is remote in atmosphere from big cities.<sup>398</sup> Although West Hunan in Shen’s description is a paradise of pastoral ideals and characterised by a correct order in all aspects of social intercourse and absolute harmony between people and nature, his regional fiction is an idyllic elegy, which is desolate in content and melancholy in emotion. Shen’s student Wang Zengqi also depicted his homeland Gaoyou as a peaceful paradise, but he tried to rebuild the image of his hometown through elaborating upon the details of people’s daily life, which he called *fengsu* 风俗 [customs].<sup>399</sup> In his short stories, local people all return to the simplest way to think about their life. Wang’s short stories express a warm and tender feeling. However, Shen’s melancholy and Wang’s joy both are displayed in a light tone.

Shen’s childhood in a remote area, his drifting days in the army and his early depressing time in Beijing give him a chance to see the negative sides of society. After his return trip to his hometown in 1934, he wrote in the essay “Chenhe xiaochuan shang de shuishou” 辰河小船上的水手 [The Deck Hands of a Little Boat on Chen River] that “the nation is walking on a road of wars, evils, famine and natural disaster and I am watching how it is losing the simple models, taking excessive stress. It is no longer believable.”<sup>400</sup> Shen’s idealised description of West Hunan and his emphasis on human nature in such an undeveloped area

---

<sup>398</sup> Zbigniew Slupski, ed., *A Selective Guide to Chinese Literature, 1900-1949*, Vol. 2: The Short Stories (Leiden: Brill, 1988), p. 5.

<sup>399</sup> Wang Zengqi, “Tantan fengsuhua” 谈谈风俗画 [Talk about Genre Painting], in *WZQJ*, Vol. 5: Essays.

<sup>400</sup> Shen Congwen, “Chenhe xiaochuan shang de shuishou” 辰河小船上的水手 [The Deck Hands of a Little Boat on Chen River], in *Wenxue* 文学 [Literature], Vol. 3, no. 1 (1934): 260-74.

imply criticism of modern reality. He felt helpless in the face of the dark aspects of the cities; therefore, he found comfort in writing about remote rural places and cultural minorities. This can also be understood as a kind of *jingshen shengli fa* 精神胜利法 (“moral victorism” or “Ah Qism”, from Lu Xun’s short story “Ah Q zhengzhuàn” 阿 Q 正传 [The True Story of Ah Q]).

As for comfort seeking, the emotion of melancholy is shown unintentionally in Shen’s stories. It is displayed in two aspects. First, the pastoral environment is full of pessimistic images. In *The Border Town*, Shen gives readers an idyllic picture of the small town Chatong; however, all the natural descriptions convey a lonely and sad feeling. For example, “evening is coming. Cuicui sits under a white tower in a courtyard, looking at the sky being painted in peach red by the floating clouds”; “in this family, there are only three members: an old man, a girl and a yellow dog”; “hearing the noises from the ferry, I feel a little dreary”. As Shen Congwen said, “beauty always arouses melancholy”.<sup>401</sup> Secondly, the minority people’s life is desolate. Shen praises the tribal people’s courage to seek love and freedom and their primitive vitality. In his stories, the tribal people all look perfect both in appearance and in mind, but their fates are tragic. Long Zhu, Meijin and the shaman do not get a good result, which gives readers a sign of their demise: death. It seems that they are sacrifices for the development of modern civilisation.

Wang Zengqi presents the opposite case. He had a happy childhood. He confessed that “one’s childhood is a deterministic cause for whether one will go on the road of a literary career. First, one should feel interested in life and hold curiosity, using all the senses to go deep into life.”<sup>402</sup> Wang’s short stories about his hometown can be epitomised in one scene (from the story “Turner Dai”): a young boy sometimes acts like a spoiled child in his grandpa’s herb shop and sometimes plays in his father’s workshop. All in all, he always feels joyful and satisfied and appreciates every detail of daily life, such as small boats in a river, smoke from chimneys, Turner Dai’s lathe, Tinsmith Shiyizi’s hammer and the taste of the

---

<sup>401</sup> Shen Congwen, *Congwen zizhuan* 从文自传 [Congwen’s Autobiography] (Shanghai: Kaiming shudian, 1948), p. 24.

<sup>402</sup> Wang Zengqi, “Shen Congwen de jimo: qiantan ta de sanwen” 沈从文的寂寞—浅谈他的散文 [Shen Congwen’s Loneliness: Talk about His Essays], in *WZQJ*, Vol. 3: Essays.

local snakes. He enjoys the love and care of his family members. Wang narrated in the story “Turner Dai”, “turner Dai will make a big bow for his son as a toy every year. All the children are envious.”<sup>403</sup> In Wang’s descriptions, the young boy is like an angel and the small town Gaoyou is a paradise full of warmth and happiness.

Wang experienced many misfortunes after he left Gaoyou. He also suffered during the War period and the Cultural Revolution. What he felt he could do is to keep a distance from society and hold a peaceful mind. He felt at home wherever he was and was content with his lot through recollecting his childhood in his hometown and writing it down in stories. His remote childhood became a spiritual prop in turbulent days. As he wrote in a poem, “jin shi mohu yuan shi zhen 近事模糊远事真 [Old memories are clear; recent ones blurred.]”<sup>404</sup>

Although Wang Zengqi was not from a big city, his childhood and family background made him feel proud of his homeland. For identity, he never felt embarrassed but actually held a sense of superiority. During the War period, Gaoyou, a small town in the northern part of Jiangsu, was filled with turmoil. However, Wang rebuilt the image of his homeland at that time according to his happy memories. In his short stories, readers can find that the author seldom mentions any bloody scene and always covers up evils. This does not mean that Wang had not experienced misfortune but that he tried to achieve purity and peace; as in the story “Small-hands Chen”, the author did not intend primarily to criticise the local warlord for his cruel killing but to express people’s helplessness in tradition and to praise Chen Xiaoshou’s magnanimity when faced death.

Stories such as “Poultry Experts”, “Ordination” and “A True Story of Big Nur”, the latter two both written in the early 1980s, embody a sincere joy. After the Cultural Revolution, Wang’s stories offered readers a new taste. His intention of reviving and rebuilding an ideal spiritual homeland after tough times is expressed obviously. However, his sincere joy only lasted for a short period. His later fiction holds more desolate emotion, such as the two trilogies *Wild Jasmine* and *The Three Chens Back Home*. In the latter story Chen Si, tired and bored in his daily work as a craftsman, can only feel happy and satisfied once a

---

<sup>403</sup> Wang Zengqi, “Turner Dai”, in *WZQJ*.

<sup>404</sup> Wang Zengqi, “Qishi shuhuai” 七十抒怀 [A Lyric in Seventy], in *WZQJ*, Vol. 3: Essays.

year when he is performing in the local religious celebration, Wang finds a sense of happiness and comfort when writing about his hometown. In his later writings, Wang tried to be realistic and impartial.

As for identity, Shen Congwen appears confused about his place. Shen's Miao/Tujia extraction justifies his categorisation as a minority author, even though his father regarded himself as belonging to the Han. But as Colin Mackerras has pointed out, Shen actually contributed very little to the identity of his own minority, but rather to that of the Han.<sup>405</sup> In Beijing, Shen's self-pity reveals his imbalanced complex of belonging to nowhere. Although in his fiction urban civilisation is inferior to rural innocence, the countryside contains blood, cruelty and ruthlessness. In the unfinished novel *Fengzi*, the young man from West Hunan feels hopeless about his life and leaves Beijing for Qingdao. Through the young man's memories and metaphors of his homeland, the author expresses thoughts about his cultural identity and the lost rural beauty. The novel is a reflection of Shen Congwen's own experiences and contradictory identification.

#### ● Characteristics of the Homelands: Wildness vs Leisure

A chief characteristic of West Hunan in Shen Congwen's fiction is unruliness. Shen highlighted the wild nature of the region in his writings, where it is manifested in three sectors: natural environment, local people and local life and customs. Shen Congwen confessed in his autobiography that his beautiful childhood was closely related to water. [...] The image of water influenced his thinking and his exploration of beauty.<sup>406</sup> When describing the natural environment of West Hunan, his favourite scenes are rivers, brooks and ferries. He used the image of running water to indicate purity, freedom and flexibility. It seems that in those small mountain villages surrounded by small rivers, local tribal people lead an untamed life. Ferries add a flavour of uncertainty and farewell, which give the

---

<sup>405</sup> Colin Mackerras, *China's Minority Cultures: Identities and Integration since 1912* (Melbourne: Longman Australia Pty Ltd., 1995), p. 102.

<sup>406</sup> Shen Congwen, "Wo du yiben xiaoshu tongshi you du yiben dashu" 我读一本小书同时又读一本大书 [I Read a Small Book and a Big One at the Same Time], in *Congwen zizhuan* 从文自传 [Congwen's Autobiography], 7 April, 2006.

<<http://www.xys.org/xys/ebooks/literature/prose/Shen-Congwen/autobiography.txt>>.

wildness of nature a gloomy foundation.

Shen has done a bold experiment in choosing protagonists for his stories. In his fiction, minority people, peasants, soldiers, sailors and even prostitutes and bandits are heroes and heroines. They are no longer separated or marginalised. Some of them are uneducated peasants and tribal people; some of them are travellers or sojourners, soldiers and sailors and some of them live more or less outside the law. The wildness of nature is elaborated through these protagonists' language, movements and thoughts. Even when describing young girls, Shen emphasised a kind of wild beauty; for instance, Cuicui in *The Border Town*:

Wind and sun have tanned the growing girl's skin, her eyes that have seen only green hills are as clear as crystal. Nature is her mother and teacher, making her innocent, lively and untamed as some small wild creature. She has the gentleness of a fawn and seems not to know the meaning of cruelty, anxiety or anger. Should a stranger on the ferry stare at her she fixes her brilliant eyes on him as if ready to fly at any instant to the mountains; but once she knows no harm is meant she finishes her task calmly.<sup>407</sup>

Human nature determines the tribal people's life and customs. They express their love freely and directly. The social rules and ethical codes which control the Han people and urban life lose their power in Shen's hometown. As for instance in "Meijin, Baozi and the Goat",

Meijin stood on the southern slopes of the valley, Baozi on the northern slopes, and they sang from morning to night. [...] When the contest was over, Meijin confessed that she had been defeated by the boy, and therefore she would offer herself to him to dispose of as he pleased.

Baozi woke up late the next morning. He had forgotten to meet his beloved, and he had forgotten the goat. He ran to the caves, where Meijin had waited the whole night and found her dead with a dagger in her breast. He took the

---

<sup>407</sup> Shen Congwen, "The Border Town", in *The Border Town and Other Stories*, trans. Gladys Yang (Beijing: Chinese Literature Press, 1981), p. 7.

dagger and plunged it into his own side and fell down dead.<sup>408</sup>

Death and sacrifice add a bloody colour for love and make the life of the tribal people dramatic and cruel. At the same time, the tribal people are never fettered in Shen's fiction. The wildness of nature here means that body and soul are liberated in a pastoral realm.

Unlike the characters in Shen Congwen's fiction, the protagonists in Wang Zengqi's short stories are all inclined to take part in various enjoyments. They lead leisurely lives in the small town of Gaoyou and can easily catch every opportunity for joy and happiness. In introducing the local life of his homeland, Wang spent much energy on describing food and drink. Local people take delight in ordinary lives: chatting in a teahouse, eating a nice meal, cooking at home and bargaining on the market. Small shop owners, craftsmen and housewives stand on the bottom rungs of society, but through their experiences readers see a vivid community in which people lead healthy physical and spiritual lives.

Influenced by his father's Confucian values, Wang Zengqi kept a tender and amiable disposition and his aim of displaying healthy leisurely lives was to provide relief from the stress of turbulent modern days. He was able to adapt himself to different circumstances and went on writing even after his long period of incarceration and exile as a Rightist. His later homeland stories have a sad or wistful air. But sadness is not the keynote of his fiction. As he wrote himself, "the inherent mood of my stories is happy."<sup>409</sup> Even when relating sufferings, he would use a bantering tone as if to mock them; for example, he describes toothache as a flower blooming in his mouth.<sup>410</sup> Because of his tender disposition, Wang's stories all appear peaceful and harmonious. To emphasise the characteristic of leisureliness of his hometown, Wang is tolerant to his fellow townspeople and restrains his emotion when narrating good or evil. The actions of soldiers and warlords often change local people's fates in Wang's stories, such as with Commander Liu in "A True Story of Big Nur" who destroys Qiaoyun's future and Shiyizi's hope, and the local warlord in "Small-hands Chen" who murders the male

---

<sup>408</sup> Shen Congwen, "Meijin, Baozi and the Goat" (The White Kid), in *The Chinese Earth: Stories by Shen Congwen*, trans. Ching Ti and Robert Payne (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), pp.103-04. I modified some words of the translation.

<sup>409</sup> Wang Zengqi, "Guanyu 'Shoujie'" 关于〈受戒〉 [About the Story "Ordination"], in *WZQJ*, Vol. 6: Essays.

<sup>410</sup> Wang Zengqi, "Ya teng" 牙疼 [Toothache], in *WZQJ*.

midwife. However, Wang depicted these evil aspects casually. At the end of the story “Small-hands Chen”, he offers an excuse for the warlord’s cruelty: “the commander felt wronged.”<sup>411</sup> The author conceals the bloody scenes through highlighting calmness and human reason. This technique is different from Shen Congwen’s direct description of the barbarism and bloodthirstiness of garrison towns.

### ● Attitudes toward the Homelands: Sensibility and Sense

Shen Congwen criticised modern civilisation and urban life and expressed a hope of returning to his native land. In contrast, Wang Zengqi intentionally sought strength from local tradition to free himself from the predicaments of reality. As David Wang has pointed out, native soil writers come forth to write about what they fail to experience in reality.<sup>412</sup> Some of Shen’s stories are from his imagination about an ideal life in West Hunan. But Wang’s stories are more closely related to his experiences in childhood. Shen Congwen believed in his own sensibility and perception. In his eyes, human emotion and feelings are more powerful than social conduct and reason.<sup>413</sup> He showed an extreme esteem for sensibility as he confessed, “I need an absolute soul so that I can see the gods.”<sup>414</sup> What he had been converted to is his sensibility and “the gods” are the metaphor of the ideals. Therefore, he displayed a beautiful and natural life which never goes against human nature in his fiction.

Readers see an idealised West Hunan in Shen’s fiction. The idealised part lies in Shen’s description of the primitive customs, the wild nature and the simple beauty of that region. These characteristics gave urban readers in the 1930s a cultural shock: West Hunan became an exotic realm of enchanting attraction and Shen’s fiction brought fresh air to the 1930s literary arena. Wang Zengqi mentioned that his teacher Shen Congwen once saw a fat

---

<sup>411</sup> Wang Zengqi, “Small-hands Chen”, in *WZQJ*.

<sup>412</sup> David Der-wei Wang, “Imaginary Nostalgia: Shen Congwen, Song Zelai, Mo Yan, and Li Yongping”, in *From May Fourth to June Fourth: Fiction and Film in Twentieth-century China*, ed. Ellen Widmer and David Der-wei Wang (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 109.

<sup>413</sup> Shen Congwen, “Shui yun” 水云 [Water and Cloud] (1942), 9 April, 2006.

<<http://www.chineseliterature.com.cn/xiandai/scw-syj/002.htm>>.

<sup>414</sup> Ibid.

woman in her middle age walking across a bridge and suddenly felt sorry.<sup>415</sup> In Shen's eyes, an ideal scene should be a pretty young girl walking across a bridge. Like the minority people in Shen's fiction, he is vulnerable when faced with reality. Because of his sensibility, Shen Congwen's homeland of West Human is his spiritual sustenance.

Wang Zengqi also regarded his hometown as his spiritual foundation, but his attitude is more objective and rational. In his short stories, Wang offered a picture of a young boy's happy childhood in a peaceful town. But this is not a complete picture of his homeland. To some extent, Wang always kept a clear head when he was creating stories. Some of the characters, such as Minghai, Yingzi and Qiaoyun, lead an idyllic life in a pastoral realm. Some, such as Li Xiaolong in "The Wild Jasmine" and Chen Si, struggle in a tough society and their sufferings are expressed soberly or casually without interference from the author's point of view. Gaoyou is not a utopia in Wang's works but a human community in the north part of Jiangsu.

Wang's stories give readers an impression of an old man talking gently about tremendous changes in the world. He raised his teacher Shen Congwen's belief in literary fiction without cynicism to a higher level of anti-cynicism and anti-critical realism. He tried to portray characters and their experiences in the simplest way and omit comments and unnecessary details. Wang held an amoral attitude toward good and evil in his stories. He appreciated human nature and country sites like the Pipal Temple in "Ordination", but at the same time he understood the dark and pessimistic parts of the society and people's minds. An idyllic village is beautiful and moving but ordinary people's struggle, hesitation and depression can arouse readers' resonance more easily. Because of Wang's sense that he could balance the realistic and ideal sides of his homeland in his fiction, local people and life appear cordial, while yet his stories convey substantial content.

---

<sup>415</sup> Wang Zengqi, "Shen Congwen xiansheng zai xinan lianda" 沈从文先生在西南联大 [When Mr. Shen Congwen at Southwest Associated University], in *WZQJ*, Vol. 3: Essays.



## Chapter 5: Conclusion

### Achievements and Functional Considerations

The May Fourth generation of writers and reformers who aimed to create a new literature in China had several goals, including using the vernacular language to reach a national audience and describe contemporary life. Their achievements also lie in their stance on different schools of literary criticism, which gradually developed as different literary trends. Guo Moruo's romantic aesthetics and impressionism, Yu Dafu's pan-aesthetic criticism, Jiang Guangci's theory of revolutionary literature, Mao Dun's realism and Marxist theory of literature and Liang Shiqiu's new humanism were adopted by different writers and advocated by different literary societies during the first half of the twentieth century. The young Chinese writers who set out to carry out literary reform drew a clear line between traditional heritage and modern literature. Their attitudes toward Chinese tradition and the classics were negative or at least ambiguous. However, the six Chinese writers discussed in this research project have provided readers with several other aspects of twentieth century Chinese literature besides the rejection of tradition. In their works, an anthropological concern combines with their literary expression, especially in their adaptation or reuse of Chinese myths and in their allusion to folkloric and ethnological materials. Moreover, traditional elements and modern thought co-exist harmoniously in their works, offering another way for us to see the relationship between tradition and modernity in the modern canon of Chinese literature.

In aspects of anthropological concern, the six Chinese writers' works are analysable as three major types: myth, folklore and locality (or "regional"). Each type later gains popularity both in literary creation and in anthropological study. Another discovery of this research project is the use of myth and legend to describe rural and minority areas and introduce local life and customs. These have proved to be significant in the six writers' works and have also stood out as important themes in modern Chinese literature.

Besides the literary study of the six modern Chinese writers and their works, this research project has conducted a critical overview of the development of studies on Chinese mythology, the May Fourth folklore movement and the development of cultural ethnology. Study into these three sub-categories is in the initial stages in China and requires more detailed research. The connections between these three fields and modern Chinese literature as shown in the core chapters echo Professor Myron L. Cohen's suggestions for studying traditionalism in literature: traditionalism in literature reveals writers' appeal to traditional verities.

In Chapter Two, Xu Dishan and Mao Zedong are representatives of the myth adaptation type. Xu's early writings, including stories and essays, contain mythic elements from different sources from home and abroad, such as legends, fables and religious stories. The mythic elements are extant as fragments and excerpts in his works and do not embody any intentional social function. Xu presents his understanding of contemporary life in a mythic setting, revealing his melancholy criticism: struggling in silence and giving vent to his grievances in a resonant symbolism. Conversely, Mao Zedong is not a writer of New Literature. His poetry is traditional both in form and language, and was unusual in the age of New Poetry. Unlike Guo Moruo, who used mythic elements to allude to the romantic content of his New poems, Mao's adaptation of historical, philosophical and mythic elements carried social functions and reflected his personal ambition in the political arena.

In Chapter Three, Fei Ming and Lu Yan were introduced as the first generation of writers to employ rural settings and describe rural life before the 1940s. In their short stories, folk elements such as local custom, popular religion and superstition form the main characteristics of China's countryside. Folkloristic studies, which are a marginal field of cultural studies in China, first came to public attention in these two writers' literary works. Furthermore, they represent two distinctive styles of fiction: Fei Ming's pastoral and romantic was opposed to Lu Yan's critical and realistic depiction. Their stories also reveal the cultural differences between the north and the south: Fei Ming belongs to the Peking School and Lu Yan to the Jiangnan writers' group.

In response to Fei Ming and Lu Yan's descriptions of the countryside, in Chapter Four, Shen Congwen and his student Wang Zengqi went further, building on this pastoral fiction by including folk and local elements. Among the many different indicators suggesting a concept of the homeland, "local colour" is one of the most prominent characteristics in the two writers' works. Local colour embraces folklore, ethnicity and lifestyle. Shen and Wang elaborated on these three aspects in an attempt to present a complete picture of their hometowns. The authenticity of the local area may have been distorted by the authors' memories and subsequent presentation, but from Shen Congwen onwards, the literary trend of describing one's hometown and searching for one's roots was established.

However, just as anthropological study in China is in its infancy, the six writers' literary works contain shortcomings in language, theme and style. Xu Dishan's use of language in his essays may reveal that Chinese literature before the 1930s needed a standard for using the vernacular and indicate that integration of the vernacular into literature was still in a transitional stage. Mao Zedong adopted common spoken language and dialect in his poetry, but he presented it in a form that was in accordance with the classical poets. This is true despite the fact that he expressed a negative attitude towards the rewriting of traditional poems during the period of New Poetry. In another example, Fei Ming's obscure use of language in his fiction alienated him from large numbers of readers.

Lu Yan's short stories present themes that emphasise the darkness and backwardness of rural life, reminiscent of Lu Xun and Mao Dun's descriptions of the countryside. Conversely, Shen Congwen put minority people and their customs in the central arena and held their culture up as an example of superior human nature in his ideal realm of West Hunan. Because of the absence of social mores and restrictions, women could become the main earners in a family, exemplified by the wife in the story "Zhangfu" 丈夫 [The Husband] (1929), and they could express and pursue love, as accomplished by the minority girls Cuicui, Meijin and Xiaoxiao. However, from a Han intellectual's standpoint, Shen gave them all a tragic end. Despite aspirations towards it, human nature never gained superiority in Shen's fiction. Influenced by Shen Congwen, Wang Zengqi elaborated on folk customs and brought

local colour into his stories, but folk culture could not surpass the Confucian value system. Therefore, Chen Xiaoshou died and Chen Si never attained happiness.

More research may need to be done on the relation of tradition and modernity in modern Chinese literature. This study has excluded, for example, modern Chinese drama containing mythological and folk elements. Additionally, in expounding the trend of adapting Chinese myths, the romantic poet Guo Moruo and his poems could be studied further. Besides some of Mao Zedong's poems, literature from the 1950s to the 1970s has also not been included, especially literature from the Cultural Revolution era. Mao Zedong's poetry has been highlighted as a special case in this research project. The language and form of his poetry drives him out of the modern canon of Chinese literature and causes his work to stand apart. At the same time, his poems reflect the goal that he advocated: that literature should serve political ends.

The most important discovery of this research may be that different varieties of realism or romanticism do not dominate literary writing in modern China. Conversely, an attention to anthropological fields, such as mythology, folklore and ethnology, have been connected to modern Chinese literature as early as the first two decades of the twentieth century.

In Archer Taylor (1890-1973)'s study of the relationship between folklore and literature, interpreted at the end of Chapter One and in the first section of Chapter Three, the two disciplines are interlinked. It is difficult to discriminate clearly between folklore and literature; moreover, literature embraces elements of folklore and writers imitate folk genres.<sup>416</sup> Taylor emphasised that literature came from the folk and folklore had impacts on literature. His opinions are also applicable in the connections between mythology and literature and between ethnology and literature. However, writers' creativity in regard to their literary concerns is overlooked. They do not only identify folk elements or imitate folk genres but also demonstrate them in their literary works consciously or unconsciously.

The six writers showed some common techniques in their writings, such as elaborating a traditional theme in a new work and re-portraying mythic and legendary figures in their

---

<sup>416</sup> Archer Taylor, "Folklore and the Student of Literature", in *The Study of Folklore*, ed. Alan Dundes (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1965), pp. 40-41.

works. Xu Dishan, Fei Ming and Wang Zengqi offer readers an unconscious mode; Mao Zedong, Lu Yan and Shen Congwen a conscious mode. Therefore, the main interest of the former three writers may lie in their understanding and appreciation of myths, folk customs and local essence because of their personal experiences and educational backgrounds. The latter three authors care most about the use of mythic, folk and ethnological elements in their literary works and use these elements to lend innovation to their expression and narration.

Xu Dishan's interest in mythology, folklore and religion influenced his aesthetic standards and outlook on life. Explaining his understanding of life in his works, Xu discussed it in relation to mythology, folklore and religion. Fei Ming and Wang Zengqi are similar in this regard. In their descriptions of their homelands, they unconsciously reveal their emotional attachment to local folk customs and lifestyles. Lu Yan and Shen Congwen actually recreated their hometowns in their works. In displaying the sharp contrast between rural and urban areas, Lu Yan implied his likes and dislikes and leaked his personal approval and disapproval into his stories. To recover from the cultural shock caused by discord between the Han and the minorities, Shen rebuilt an ideal realm of West Hunan in his fiction. Mao Zedong held an ambition of promoting a new legend of himself and acclaiming the Party and the Army's legendary achievements through his poetry.

Because of the development of folkloristic and ethnological studies during the Republican era, writers share the same belief as scholars that folklore is an important part of the life of every community. In search of innocence and unsophistication and calling for the return of human nature, folk elements are the best materials for literary creation. Some of the six writers conducted significant research in the fields of mythology and folklore, such as Xu Dishan and Shen Congwen. Mao Zedong went further and gave folk literature a higher status: professional writers and artists were obliged to use the common people's form of literature as a basis from which to proceed.<sup>417</sup> This allows them to present contemporary life in a more appreciative way.

Beyond developing a national essence as an alternative to imitating Western culture, the

---

<sup>417</sup> Bonnie S. McDougall, *Mao Zedong's "Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art": A Translation of the 1943 Text with Commentary* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, The University of Michigan, 1980), p. 17.

six writers wanted to express their identities and introduce the local or remote areas where they grew up to the urban readers. Shen Congwen and Wang Zengqi both portrayed a complete system of elucidating their hometowns, cultivating a style of their own. Although the presentation of local culture presented in their works remains as a special topography, and while the relationship between locality and nationality need more cautious attention, Shen and Wang have provided important experimental contributions towards this style.

### **Literary History and Genres**

Both Chinese and Western scholars have believed that realism dominated the literary canon of the twentieth century China. Bonnie McDougall has pointed out that it was Mao Dun (Shen Yanbing) in the early twenties who described the slogan “literature as a reflection of life” as a “universal slogan in the West” and his opinion achieved some credence among Chinese realists.<sup>418</sup> Although McDougall doubted Mao Dun’s assumption and regarded the slogan as Marxist dogma, the Chinese advocates of the New Culture Movement believed that since the middle of the nineteenth century, realism had been the main current in Western literature. Introducing realism in literature into China and writing literary works in a realist mode was an important part of the New Culture Movement. Hu Shi and Chen Duxiu both advocated realism in literature, opposing sentimentality and decorative writing.<sup>419</sup> Marián Gálík in 1980 completed research into different directions of modern Chinese literary criticism and he isolated the different categories of realism and different derivatives of realism, such as Leftist theory and revolutionary and proletarian realism, as the main sections. Wen Rumin wrote a book about the development and changes in realism in China’s New Literature (*Xinwenxue xianshizhuyi de liubian* 新文学现实主义的流变 [Development and Changes in Realism in China’s New Literature], 1988), in which he defined realism as the mainstream of modern Chinese literature by comparing realist and romantic literary works. Xu Dishan’s style of expressing his understanding of life is regarded as one type of realism

---

<sup>418</sup> Bonnie S. McDougall, *The Introduction of Western Literary Theories into Modern China, 1919-1925* (Tokyo: The Centre for East Asian Cultural Studies, 1971), p. 79.

<sup>419</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 87, 147-48.

which has been named *rensheng pai* 人生派 [School of Life]. The first generation of the native soil literature, such as Lu Yan, wrote their fiction in a critical realist mode. Some scholars gave some new labels for these realist writers; for instance, David Der-wei Wang defined Shen Congwen's works as a kind of "fictional realism".

After analysing the six writers' works, we will see that although a large number of modern Chinese literary works were composed in a realist mode, there was no deterministic genre. No "X-realism" could completely describe modern Chinese literature. We can find the concept of personal liberation in Xu Dishan's works, which reveals a romantic spirit and humanism. Fei Ming's stories were composed in a melancholy tone and could be considered self-indulgent in content. His language style reminds us of impressionism. Shen Congwen's fiction about his homeland shows a tendency towards fantasy. Because of Mao Zedong's speeches at the Yan'an Forum on literature and art, revolutionary literature and socialist or proletarian realism became popular from the 1940s. However, Mao himself wrote poems in a classical style and the mythic elements he used in his poems made them quite romantic.

Scholars have agreed that it was difficult to discriminate among different genres, summarise the characteristics of every genre and pinpoint a mainstream in modern Chinese literature. In the early twentieth century, the Creationists expressed political and social concern in their writings, although they advanced the slogan "art for art's sake". Realists and romantics were both conscious of their political and social role. The realists' objective representation of social reality indicates their idealistic and subjective nature. As McDougall summarised, during the first two decades of the twentieth century, i.e. 1900-1919, it was difficult to find anyone not taking part in political struggles or social reform movements; therefore, the Chinese writers at that time preferred a kind of idealistic approach and shared an optimistic faith in their eventual victory in the struggles.<sup>420</sup> Literary terms, such as realism, romanticism, mainstream and marginal or avant-garde genres, were introduced or borrowed from Western literary theories. They have nothing to do with traditional Chinese aesthetics but they are advocated by the May Fourth generation to carry out the literary

---

<sup>420</sup> Bonnie S. McDougall, *The Introduction of Western Literary Theories into Modern China, 1919-1925* (Tokyo: The Centre for East Asian Cultural Studies, 1971), pp. 259, 261.

reform and help compose New Literature.

There will be little advantage gained by analysing the literary works under the guidance of these Western literary theories any more. That is why in this research I tried to discuss the six writers' works in accordance with some theories in anthropological studies. The six writers' works have some common characteristics: native traditional heritage (Chinese aesthetics as an example) continues; folk and local culture is highlighted; and mythic and legendary elements are elaborated. Modern Chinese literature can be regarded as a stage on which writers fulfilled their dream of liberation from tradition. Different varieties, styles and schools contend on their liberated stage. Western literary theories developed, while native Chinese literary tradition continued. From the 1920s to the 1930s, Xu Dishan and Fei Ming delivered their confessional and lyrical descriptions when many writers believed that literature should objectively express or reflect life. From the 1930s to the 1940s, when critical or cynical ways of speech became popular and social and political concern was considered as the central theme, Shen Congwen and Lu Yan displayed a realm of their hometowns with their own imagination, memories and commentary. From the 1950s to the early 1980s, because of Mao Zedong's speech at the Yan'an Forum on literature and art and the Cultural Revolution, socialist realism and "revolutionary realism combined with revolutionary romanticism" dominated the literary discourse, Mao Zedong and Wang Zengqi gave readers exceptions in their poems and stories.

### **Influences and Future Trends**

Xu Dishan, Mao Zedong, Fei Ming, Lu Yan, Shen Congwen and Wang Zengqi should be accorded high status in the canon of modern Chinese literature, not only because they have established a new tradition connecting literature with mythological, folkloristic and ethnological studies, but also because of their initiation of literary trends and their significant influence on contemporary writers.

Xu Dishan and Mao Zedong have given readers a model for adapting mythic elements in their literary writings. From the 1980s onwards, the literary trend of using elements,



themes and archetypes in myths re-flourished. The critic Wang Qingming said that fiction writing in China during the 1980s extricated itself from a difficult position because writers had been inspired by the theory of the mythical archetype.<sup>421</sup> Many works contained mythical elements, described mythical themes and explained mythical archetypes, such as Chen Zhongshi's *Bailu yuan* 白鹿原 [White Deer Plateau] (1992), Zhang Chengzhi's *Hei junma* 黑骏马 [Black Steed] (1982), Zheng Yi's *Lao jing* 老井 [Old Well] (1987) and Mo Yan's *Hong gaoliang* 红高粱 [Red Sorghum] (1986). Their use of mythical figures, such as the white deer and the black steed, to symbolise the culture and spirit of the local area or the uncomplaining common people is not very original. Their fiction is a mixture of many elements, with myths and legends combining with tales of grotesque cruelty and barbarousness. It seems that they were very keen to re-establish and reassess China's traditional heritage. Bonnie McDougall and Kam Louie believed that writers from the 1980s like their predecessors during the May Fourth period were fascinated by Western ideas and ways of life.<sup>422</sup> I do not subscribe to this point of view: even in some of the 1980s' literary works, we can sense authors' anti-Western attitudes or at least their wish to enhance the Chinese national essence. These contemporary writers provided a new development of the literary trend which appeared as early as Xu Dishan's generation.

Recently, Su Tong (b. 1963) has published a novel *Binu* 碧奴 [Green Maid] (2006), which is a retelling of the legend "Meng Jiang Nü". Su Tong has joined the international project of "Revisiting Myths" 重述神话 and become one of the representatives of Chinese writers in this tradition. Recently there have been three significant books by Western writers in this vein: the British writer Karen Armstrong's *A Short History of Myth*, the Canadian writer Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad: The Myth of Penelope and Odysseus* and the British writer Jeanette Winterson's *Weight: The Myth of Atlas and Heracles*. It was reported

---

<sup>421</sup> Wang Qingming, "Xin shiqi xiaoshuo de shenhua yuanxing" 新时期小说的神话原型 [Mythical Archetypes in the Fiction of New Age], in *Dangdai wentan* 当代文坛 [Contemporary Literary World], no. 2 (1997): 9.

<sup>422</sup> Bonnie S. McDougall and Kam Louie, *The Literature of China in the Twentieth Century* (London: Hurst, 1997), p. 419.

that Mo Yan and Yu Hua will join the project to rewrite Chinese myths soon.<sup>423</sup> In the novel *Green Maid*, Su Tong does not focus on the mythical story that Binu (Meng Jiang Nü)'s tears finally crumbled the Great Wall, but elaborates on Binu's different ways of crying. He offers many descriptions of tears and depicts Binu's experiences along the long journey to seek her husband. Just as the author gave the legendary figure Meng Jiang Nü the new name Binu, the story embraces contemporary thinking with metaphors, symbols and innuendoes. Su Tong confesses in the preface that he believes the legend of Meng Jiang Nü is a story of optimism rather than a tragedy. Meng Jiang Nü's tears not only end the journey to seek her husband but also extricate Chinese people from dire straits: should we hold firmly to our faith if we will meet many difficulties and much misunderstanding.<sup>424</sup>

Unlike Lu Xun, Mao Dun, Yu Dafu or Guo Moruo, Fei Ming is not considered a prominent writer of his time, but his intention of creating a pastoral realm, his descriptions of folk culture and his use of traditional Chinese and Western literary techniques had a great influence on contemporary and subsequent writers. Lu Yan, a representative of the first generation of native soil literature, also delivered his impact but in a critical mode: his mild satire and subtle exposure of the dark side of rural areas and his legendary style. From the 1980s, the so-called "root-seeking" school appeared and quickly became popular. The writers were usually educated urban youth who had experience of living and working in the countryside during the Cultural Revolution. They were familiar with rural life and at the same time interested in Western philosophy and literature. They tried to recollect and reassess traditional Chinese culture by writing stories.

There were generally three groups of writers at that time. The first type held an optimistic attitude toward traditional heritage and wished to re-explain folk elements, with Ah Cheng (b. 1949) as an example. The second tried to understand traditional Chinese culture in a worldwide context or even tried to compare Chinese culture with other nation's

---

<sup>423</sup> Bu Changwei, "Mo Yan Yu Hua chongshu Zhongguo shenhua; Shoupi tushu quanqiu tongbu faxing" 莫言余华重述中国神话; 首批图书全球同步发行 [Mo Yan and Yu Hua Retell Chinese Myths; The First Collection of Books Published Worldwide] (23 January, 2006), 17 November, 2006. <<http://read.lnd.com.cn/read/shutong/200601/2335220060123.htm>>.

<sup>424</sup> Su Tong, Preface to *Green Maid*, 17 November, 2006. <<http://book.sina.com.cn/nzt/sal/binu/1.shtml>>.

cultures, with Zhang Chengzhi (b. 1948) as a representative. The third, such as Han Shaogong (b. 1953), criticised the dark sides of contemporary society and explored the national psychology by analysing folk culture in their literary works.

In my view, Ah Cheng was influenced by Fei Ming in many respects. We may take two stories as examples: “Qiwang” 棋王 [The King of Chess] (1984) and “Haiziwang” 孩子王 [The King of Children] (1985). In “The King of Chess”, the protagonist Wang Yisheng functions as a symbol of traditional Chinese culture. Like the characters in Fei Ming’s stories, he is good at maintaining a peaceful mind. His mentor taught him the secrets of chess using language borrowed from Daoism, which reminds us that Fei Ming favoured Zen concepts and Daoism. In “The King of Children”, the narrator is an educated youth and the protagonists are children. Their relationship and lives described are similar to those in Fei Ming’s story *Bridge*. Ah Cheng’s tone is as gentle as Fei Ming’s, his style is poetic, and he also portrays a peaceful realm for his characters.

Han Shaogong can be regarded as a follower of Lu Yan. In the story “Ba Ba Ba” 爸爸爸爸 [Pa Pa Pa] (1985), the setting is a remote mountain village in the border area of West Hunan and Sichuan, in which folk customs, popular religion and superstitious rites and rituals still control people’s life. The story traces the decline of the village through the life of the protagonist Bing. The author criticised the backwardness of the folk culture and the ignorance and apathy of the villagers. Local villagers are enduring economic troubles and even cannibalism cannot help them to escape. Han’s gently ironic tone and language style are similar to Lu Yan’s. Their attitudes toward rural areas are the same: on the one hand, cherishing traditional culture; on the other hand, hating the dark sides that can be revealed there. Another interesting point is that Han Shaogong wrote the story using magical realism with bold imagination. It seems that writers during the 1980s regarded magical realism as avant-garde and practised it many times in their literary creation. Jia Pingwa’s style is another case in point. In literary structure, these writers considered modern Western literary techniques charming indeed.

Writers of the “root-seeking” school believed that the Chinese essence they explored in

their literary works could gain international popularity as well. Another group of writers since the 1980s have held similar beliefs, that local culture could have a more wide-reaching appeal. They believed that the local culture or minority culture they described in their works could be appreciated by the whole nation. Shen Congwen was one of the pioneers of minorities as protagonists and their culture as the main focus in fiction writing from the 1920s. Wang Zengqi has offered a good model in introducing local colour and the local traditional style of life in his stories. This trend developed further from the 1980s. Zhang Chengzhi's novella *Black Steed* is set in Mongolia. Like Shen Congwen who described his Miao and Tujia characters as heroes without faults and their culture superior to the Han, in *Black Steed* Zhang Chengzhi praised a hard-working, good-natured and honest Mongolian woman and expressed his love and longing for his second homeland, Inner Mongolia. He developed "great Mongolian mother" images and associated them with his extolment of the great Mongolian culture in his other stories, such as "Qishou weishenme gechang muqin" 骑手为什么歌唱母亲 [Why Herdsmen Sing about Mother] (1978).

In 1988, Huo Da (b. 1945) published her novel *Muslimin de zangli* 穆斯林的葬礼 [Muslim Funeral] and won the sixth Mao Dun Literature Prize. The story depicted a Muslim family conducting jade business in Beijing and focused on three generations' tragic love. The author traced the history and development of the Hui 回 [Muslim] ethnic minority in China and introduced their customs and life. Through exploring the protagonists' psychology, the author also expressed her understanding of the relationship between the Han and the Hui: the fusion and the clash between the Han culture and the Islamic culture.

Since the 1980s, Chinese traditional heritage has again been closely linked with modern literature. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the May Fourth generation and their followers did not entirely destroy connections between literary creation and traditional culture, nor did they go to the extreme of their anti-Confucianism and anti-traditional attitudes. Meanwhile, the six writers in this research project have provided us with three experimental trends in the anthropological field: mythology, folklore and ethnology.

Chinese traditional heritage will remain as a popular theme in contemporary literature.

Other aspects, such as Chinese philosophy, Chinese painting, calligraphy, traditional Chinese drama and traditional Chinese music, can also find their way into literary works and combine with modern concepts and content to form different literary trends in the future. These may be the fields in which scholars will focus future research. Up until now, critics have held an encouraging attitude toward those contemporary authors who have chosen to write about traditional elements. This should be tempered by a sharper critical analysis; this study has endeavoured to bring these concepts into focus.

## Glossary

### Glossary of Names

Ah Cheng 阿城

Ba Jin 巴金

Bai Dizhou 白澌洲

Bian Zhilin 卞之琳

Cai Yuanpei 蔡元培

Cao Juren 曹聚仁

Chen Duxiu 陈独秀

Chen Yuanzhu 陈元柱

Chen Zhongshi 陈忠实

Ding Fan 丁帆

Duan Chengshi 段成式

Fan Boqun 范伯群

Han Shaogong 韩少功

He Sijing 何思敬

Hu Shi 胡适

Huo Da 霍达

Ma Jibin 马济彬

Fei Ming 废名 (Feng Wenbing 冯文炳)

Fei Xiaotong 费孝通

Feng Menglong 冯梦龙

Feng Xuefeng 冯雪峰

Ge Hong 葛洪

Gu Jiegang 顾颉刚

Guo Moruo 郭沫若

Guo Shaoyu 郭绍虞

Jia Pingwa 贾平凹  
Jiang Guanyun 蒋观云  
Jiang Guangci 蒋光慈  
Li Jiarui 李家瑞  
Li Jinghan 李景汉  
Li Youyi 李有义  
Liang Qichao 梁启超  
Liang Shiqiu 梁实秋  
Lin Shu 林纾  
Lin Yaohua 林耀华  
Lin Yuesen 林月森  
Lin Zhiyi 林志仪  
Ling Chunsheng 凌纯声  
Liu Bannong 刘半农  
Liu Jingshu 刘敬叔  
Lu Xun 鲁迅  
Lu Yan 鲁彦 (Wang Luyan 王鲁彦)  
Lu You 陆游  
Ma Changshou 马长寿  
Ma Xueliang 马学良  
Mao Zedong 毛泽东  
Mao Dun 茅盾 (Shen Yanbing 沈雁冰)  
Mo Yan 莫言  
Pu Ren 蒲仁  
Qu Qiubai 瞿秋白  
Rong Geng 容庚  
Rong Yuantai 容元胎  
Rui Yifu 芮逸夫

Shen Congwen 沈从文  
Shen Yinmo 沈尹默  
Su Tong 苏童  
Su Xuelin 苏雪林  
Sun Fuyuan 孙伏园  
Sun Xuewu 孙学武  
Tan Zhengbi 谭正璧  
Tang Tao 唐弢  
Tao Qian 陶潜  
Wang Guowei 王国维  
Wang Zengqi 汪曾祺  
Wei Jinzhi 魏金枝  
Wei Shaochang 魏绍昌  
Wei Yi 魏易  
Wen Rumin 温儒敏  
Wen Yiduo 闻一多  
Wu Wenzao 吴文藻  
Wu Zuguang 吴祖光  
Xia Zengyou 夏曾佑  
Xu Dishan 许地山 (Luohuasheng 落花生)  
Xu Qinwen 许钦文  
Xu Xusheng 徐旭生  
Yan Yu 严羽  
Yang Yi 杨义  
Yao Yizhi 姚逸之  
Ye Shuxian 叶舒宪  
Yu Dafu 郁达夫  
Yu Hua 余华



Yu Simu 余思牧  
Yuan Ke 袁珂  
Zang Kejia 臧克家  
Zhou Zuoren 周作人  
Zhang Chengzhi 张承志  
Zhang Henshui 张恨水  
Zhang Zeduan 张择端  
Zhao Xiaohuan 赵晓寰  
Zheng Yi 郑义  
Zheng Zhenduo 郑振铎  
Zhong Jingwen 钟敬文  
Zhu Donglin 朱栋霖  
Zhu Xiaojin 朱晓进  
Zhu Ziqing 朱自清  
Zhuang Shangyan 庄尚严

#### Glossary of Places

Beijing (Peking) 北京  
Chatong 茶桐  
Changsha 长沙  
Fenghuang 凤凰 (Zhen'gan 镇竿)  
Fuzhou 福州  
Gaotang 高唐  
Gaoyou 高邮  
Guangdong 广东  
Guangxi 广西  
Guangzhou 广州  
Guizhou 贵州

Huangmei 黄梅  
Huichang 会昌  
Hubei 湖北  
Hunan 湖南  
Jiangnan 江南  
Jiangsu 江苏  
Jiangyin 江阴  
Jinggang Mountain 井冈山  
Kunming 昆明  
Liupan Mountain 六盘山  
Loushan Pass 娄山关  
Lushan 庐山  
Miaofeng Hill 妙峰山  
Nanjing 南京  
Ningbo 宁波  
Rongcheng 容城  
Shandong 山东  
Shaoshan 韶山  
Sichuan 四川  
Suzhou 苏州  
Tainan 台南  
Taiwan 台湾  
Tibet 西藏  
Xiamen 厦门  
Xinghua 兴化  
Xinfan 新繁  
Yan'an 延安  
Yongkang 永康

Yunnan 云南

Zhejiang 浙江

Zhenhai 镇海

## Bibliography

### Primary Sources:

Fei Xiaotong 费孝通. *Zaxie ding ji* 杂写丁集 [The Fourth Collection of Essays]. Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe 天津人民出版社, 1986.

Fei Ming. See Feng Wenbing.

Feng Wenbing 冯文炳 [Fei Ming]. *Feng Wenbing xuanji* 冯文炳选集 [Selected Works of Feng Wenbing]. Ed. Feng Jiannan 冯健男编辑. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe 人民文学出版社, 1985.

——. *Qiao* 桥 [Bridges]. Shanghai: Kaiming shudian 开明书店, 1932. 10 June, 2005. <<http://www.sinology.cn/main/book1/mjwj/ff/feiming/q/index.html>>.

——. *Zao* 枣 [Jujubes]. Shanghai: Kaiming shudian 开明书店, 1931. 10 June, 2005. <<http://www.bwsk.com/xd/f/feiming/000/021.htm>>.

Gu Jiegang, ed. 顾颉刚编辑. *Minsu* 民俗 [Folklore]. Guangzhou, no. 49-50 (March, 1929).

Lin, Nancy T., trans. *Reverberations: A New Translation of Complete Poems of Mao Tse-tung with Notes by Nancy T. Lin*. Hong Kong: Joint Publishing Co., 1980.

Lin Zhiyi, ed. 林志仪编辑. *Zhongguo xinwenxue dashi mingzuo shangxi: Xu Dishan Zheng Zhendu* 中国新文学大师名作赏析·许地山、郑振铎 [Analysis of Masterpieces by Modern Chinese Writers: Xu Dishan and Zheng Zhenduo]. Taipei: Haifeng chubanshe 海风出版社, 1990.

Liu Bannong 刘半农. *Liu Bannong wenxuan* 刘半农文选 [Selected Works of Liu Bannong]. Ed. Xu Ruiyue 徐瑞岳编辑. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe 人民文学出版社, 1986.

Lu Xun 鲁迅. *Gushi xinbian* 故事新编 [Old Tales Retold]. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Shanghai: Shanghai wenhua shenghuo chubanshe 上海文化生活出版社, 1936. The version used in this thesis is from *Lu Xun quanji* 鲁迅全集 [The Complete Works of Lu Xun]. Vol. 2. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe 人民文学出版社, 1963. 303-411.

Lu Xun, ed. 鲁迅编辑. *Zhongguo xinwenxue daxi* 中国新文学大系 [The Compendium of New Literature of China]. Ed. Zhao Jiabi 赵家璧主编. Vol. 4: Fiction 2 第四卷·小说二集. Shanghai: Liangyou tushu gongsi 良友图书公司, 1935.

Mao Dun, ed. 茅盾编辑. *Zhongguo xinwenxue daxi* 中国新文学大系 [The Compendium of New Literature of China]. Ed. Zhao Jiabi 赵家璧主编. Vol. 3: Fiction 1 第三卷·小说一集. Shanghai: Liangyou tushu gongsi 良友图书公司, 1935.

Mao Zedong. *Mao Tse-tung on Literature and Art*. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1960.

Mao Zedong 毛泽东. *Mao zhuxi shici quanji* 毛主席诗词 (全集) [The Complete Poetry of Chairman Mao]. 10 October, 2006.

<<http://www.mzdthought.com/sc/scindex.htm>>.

——. *Mao Zedong shici xuan* 毛泽东诗词选 [Selected Poems of Mao Zedong]. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe 人民文学出版社, 1986.

Mao Zedong. *Poems of Mao Zedong*. Trans. Wong Man. Hong Kong: Eastern Horizon Press, 1966.

Shen Congwen 沈从文. “Chenhe xiaochuan shang de shuishou” 辰河小船上的水手 [The Deck Hands of a Little Boat on Chen River]. *Wenxue* 文学 [Literature]. Vol. 3, no. 1 (1934): 260-74.

——. *Congwen zizhuan* 从文自传 [Congwen's Autobiography]. Shanghai: Kaiming shudian 开明书店, 1948.

Shen Congwen. *Imperfect Paradise*. Ed. Jeffrey Kinkley. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1995.

Shen Congwen 沈从文. *Sheng Congwen duanpian xiaoshuo xuan* 沈从文短篇小说选 [Selected Short Stories of Shen Congwen]. Hong Kong: Wenjiao chubanshe 文教出版社, 1978.

——. *Shen Congwen wenji: xiaoshuo juan* 沈从文文集·小说卷 [Literary Works of Shen Congwen: Fiction]. 8 vols. Hong Kong: Shenghuo, dushu, xinzhi, san lian shudian Xianggang fendian 生活·读书·新知三联书店香港分店, 1982-85.

——. “Shui yun” 水云 [Water and Cloud], 1942. 9 April, 2006.

<<http://www.chineseliterature.com.cn/xiandai/scw-syj/002.htm>>.

Shen Congwen, *The Border Town and Other Stories*. Trans. Gladys Yang. Beijing: Chinese Literature Press, 1981.

——. *The Chinese Earth: Stories by Shen Congwen*. Trans. Ching Ti and Robert Payne. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.

- Su Tong 苏童. “Xuyan” 序言 [Preface] to *Binu* 碧奴 [Green Maid]. Chongqing: Chongqing chubanshe 重庆出版社, 2006. 17 November, 2006.  
<<http://book.sina.com.cn/nzt/sal/binu/1.shtml>>.
- Wang Luyan 王鲁彦. *Lu Yan xuanji* 鲁彦选集 [Selected Works of Lu Yan]. Shanghai: Wanxiang shuwu 万象书屋, 1936.
- . *Lu Yan xuanji* 鲁彦选集 [Selected Works of Lu Yan]. Shanghai: Zhongyang shudian 中央书店, 1937.
- . “Houji” 后记 [Postscript] to *Shijie duanpian xiaoshuo ji: Yuegui* 世界短篇小说集·月桂 [A Collection of International Short Stories: The Laurel]. Shanghai: Yadong tushuguan 亚东图书馆, 1928.
- . “Shu ya” 鼠牙 [Rats’ Teeth]. *Youzi* 柚子 [A Pomelo]. Beijing: Beixin shuju 北新书局, 1926. 6 June, 2006.  
<<http://book.ayinfo.ha.cn/mjwj/ll/luyan/zzz/018.htm>>.
- Wang Zengqi 汪曾祺. *Wancui wentan* 晚翠文谈 [Literary Talks from My Late Blooming]. Hangzhou: Zhejiang wenyi chubanshe 浙江文艺出版社, 1988.
- . *Wancui wentan xinbian* 晚翠文谈新编 [A New Version of Literary Talks from My Late Blooming]. Beijing: Shenghuo, dushu, xinzhi, san lian shudian 生活·读书·新知三联书店, 2002.
- . *Wang Zengqi duanpian xiaoshuo xuan* 汪曾祺短篇小说选 [Selected Short Stories of Wang Zengqi]. Beijing: Beijing chubanshe 北京出版社, 1982.
- . *Wang Zengqi quanji* 汪曾祺全集 [The Complete Works of Wang Zengqi]. 8 vols. Beijing: Beijing shifan daxue chubanshe 北京师范大学出版社, 1998.
- . *Wo shi zenyang zou shang wenxue daolu de* 我是怎样走上文学道路的 [How I Came to Take the Path of Literature]. Nanjing: Jiangsu wenyi chubanshe 江苏文艺出版社, 1993.
- Wen Yiduo 闻一多. *Wen Yiduo quanji: shenhua pian, Shijing pian (shang)* 闻一多全集·神话篇·诗经篇（上） [The Complete Works of Wen Yiduo: Myths, The Book of Songs (Part 1)]. Vol. 3 第三卷. Ed. Sun Dangbo and Yuan Jianzheng 孙党伯、袁霁正编辑. Wuhan: Hubei renmin chubanshe 湖北人民出版社, 1993.
- Xu Dishan 许地山. *Kong shan ling yu* 空山灵雨 [The Rain of the Soul in the Empty Mountain]. Beijing: Zhongguo wenlian chuban gongsi 中国文联出版公司, 1993.

Xu Dishan 许地山. *Xu Dishan wenji* 许地山文集 [Literary Works of Xu Dishan]. Ed. Gao Wei 高巍编辑. 2 vols. Beijing: Xinhua chubanshe 新华出版社, 1998.

——. *Xu Dishan xuanji* 许地山选集 [Selected Works of Xu Dishan]. Taipei: Liming wenhua shiye 黎明文化事业, 1976.

Xu Qinwen 许钦文. *Xu Qinwen xiaoshuo ji* 许钦文小说集 [A Collection of Xu Qinwen's Fiction]. Hangzhou: Zhejiang wenyi chubanshe 浙江文艺出版社, 1984.

Yu Simu 余思牧. *Zuojia Xu Dishan* 作家许地山 [The Writer Xu Dishan]. Hong Kong: Xianggang liwen chubanshe 香港利文出版社, 2005. 2 October, 2006. <[http://www.gmw.cn/02blqs/2005-12/07/content\\_362855.htm](http://www.gmw.cn/02blqs/2005-12/07/content_362855.htm)>.

Zhou Sisong, and Xiang Yunxiu, ed. 周俟松、向云休编辑. *Xu Dishan* 许地山 [Xu Dishan]. Hong Kong: San lian shudian xianggang fendian 三联书店香港分店, 1982.

Zheng Zhenduo 郑振铎. “Tang zhu pian” 汤铸篇 [How Tang Cast Himself]. *Zheng Zhenduo gudian wenxue lunwen ji* 郑振铎古典文学论文集 [Works of Zheng Zhenduo on Traditional Literature]. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe 上海古籍出版社, 1984. 100-30.

#### Secondary Sources:

Baker, Hugh D., and Stephan Feuchtwang, ed. *An Old State in New Settings: Studies in the Social Anthropology of China in Memory of Maurice Freeman*. Oxford: Jaso, 1991.

Berlin, Isaiah. *The Roots of Romanticism*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1999.

Bian Zhilin 卞之琳. “Xuyan” 序言 [Preface] to *Feng Wenbing xuanji* 冯文炳选集 [Selected Works of Feng Wenbing]. Ed. Feng Jiannan 冯健男编辑. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe 人民文学出版社, 1985. 1-15.

Birrell, Anne. *Chinese Mythology: An Introduction*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993.

Bowes, Pratima. *The Hindu Religious Tradition: A Philosophical Approach*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978.

Bu Changwei 卜昌伟. “Mo Yan Yu Hua chongshu Zhongguo shenhua; Shoupi tushu quanqiu tongbu faxing” 莫言余华重述中国神话; 首批图书全球同步发行 [Mo Yan and Yu Hua Retell Chinese Myths; The First Collection of Books Published Worldwide] (23 January, 2006). 17 November, 2006. <<http://read.lnd.com.cn/read/shutong/200601/2335220060123.htm>>.

Burne, Charlotte S. *The Handbook of Folklore*. London: Sidgwick & Jackson Ltd., 1914.

Cao Juren 曹聚仁. *Wo yu wo de shijie 我与我的世界 [My World and I]*. Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe 人民文学出版社, 1983.

Chen, Jerome. *Mao and the Chinese Revolution*. London: Oxford University Press, 1965.

———. *Mao Papers: Anthology and Bibliography*. London: Oxford University Press, 1970.

Chen Yongling, and Wang Xiaoyi 陈永龄、王晓义. “Ershi shiji qianqi de Zhongguo minzuxue” 二十世纪前期的中国民族学 [Chinese Ethnology of the Early Twentieth Century]. *Minzuxue yanjiu 民族学研究 [Studies on Ethnology]*. Ed. Chinese Ethnology Society 中国民族学协会编辑. Vol. 1 第一辑. Beijing: Minzu chubanshe 民族出版社, 1981. 261-99.

Chien, Chiao. “A Note on the Yao Programme of the Chinese University Anthropology Department”. *Hong Kong Anthropology Bulletin*, no. 1 (June, 1987): 7-8.

Dalziel, Margaret, ed. *Myth and the Modern Imagination*. Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 1967.

Ding Fubao 丁福保. *Foxue da cidian 佛学大辞典 [The Dictionary of Buddhism]*. Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe 文物出版社, 1984.

Du Bose, Hampden C. *The Dragon, Image and Demon: The Three Religions of China, Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism Giving an Account of the Mythology, Idolatry and Demonolatry of the Chinese*. Richmond: The Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1899.

Doty, William G. *Mythology: The Study of Myths and Rituals*. Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1986.

Duara, Prasenjit. *Culture, Power and the State: Rural North China, 1900-1942*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988.

———. *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995.

Dundes, Alan, ed. *The Study of Folklore*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1965.

Eberhard, Wolfram. *Studies in Chinese Folklore and Related Essays*. Bloomington: Indiana University Research Centre for the Language Sciences, 1970.

Eliot, Charles. *Hinduism and Buddhism: An Historical Sketch*. Vol. 1. London: Edward



Arnold & Co., 1921.

Fan Boqun, ed. 范伯群编辑. *Zhongguo jinxindai tongsu wenxue shi* 中国近现代通俗文学史 [A History of Chinese Popular Literature of the Early Modern and Modern Periods]. 2 vols. Nanjing: Jiangsu jiaoyu chubanshe 江苏教育出版社, 2000.

Fei Xiaotong. *Toward a People's Anthropology*. Beijing: New World Press, 1981.

Fei Xiaotong 费孝通. *Xiangtu Zhongguo: shengyu zhidu* 乡土中国: 生育制度 [Rural Life in China: Family Planning]. Beijing: Beijing daxue chebanshe 北京大学出版社, 1998.

Feuchtwang, Stephan. *The Imperial Metaphor: Popular Religion in China*. London: Routledge, 1992.

Finnegan, Ruth. *Oral Traditions and the Verbal Arts: A Guide to Research Practices*. London: Routledge, 1992.

Fontenrose, Joseph. *The Ritual Theory of Myth*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966.

Frazer, James G. *The Golden Bough: A Study in Comparative Religion*. 2 vols. London: Macmillan and Co., 1890.

———. *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*. 3 vols. London: Macmillan, 1900.

Frye, Northrop. *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957.

———. "Literature and Myth". *Relations of Literary Study: Essays on Interdisciplinary Contributions*. Ed. James Thorpe. New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1967. 27-55.

Georges, Robert A., and Michael Owen Jones. *Folkloristic: An Introduction*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995.

Goldman, Merle, and Leo Ou-fan Lee, ed. *An Intellectual History of Modern China*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Gu Jiegang. *The Autobiography of a Chinese Historian*. Trans. and annot. Arthur W. Hummel. Taipei: Ch'eng-wen Publishing Company, 1966.

Guldin, Gregory Eliyu. *The Saga of Anthropology in China: From Malinowski to Moscow to Mao*. Armonk, N. Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1994.

- Gunn, Edward. *Rewriting Chinese: Style and Innovation in Twentieth-century Chinese Prose*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991.
- Guo Moruo. *Selected Poems from the Goddesses*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1978.
- Heberer, Thomas. *China and Its National Minorities: Autonomy or Assimilation*. Armonk, N. Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1989.
- Hockx, Michel. *Questions of Style: Literary Societies and Literary Journals in Modern China, 1911-1937*. Leiden: Brill, 2003.
- Hsia, C. T. *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999. Also see 1<sup>st</sup> ed. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961.
- Hu Shi 胡适. *Baihua wenxue shi* 白话文学史 [A History of Vernacular Literature]. Hefei: Anhui jiaoyu chubanshe 安徽教育出版社, 1999.
- . “Wenxue gailiang chuyi” 文学改良刍议 [A Tentative Proposal for the Reform of Literature]. *Xin qingnian* 新青年 [The New Youth], II, no. 5 (January, 1917): 1-11.
- Hu Zhiyi 胡志毅. “Wusi xinwenxue de shenhua yishi jiqi liubian” “五四”新文学的神话意识及其流变 [Mythic Consciousness and Its Changes in May Fourth New Literature]. *Zhongguo xiandai wenxue yanjiu congkan* 中国现代文学研究丛刊 [Studies on Modern Chinese Literature], no. 3 (1992): 9-30.
- Hung, Chang-tai. *Going to the People: Chinese Intellectuals and Folk Literature, 1918-1937*. Cambridge, Mass.: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1985.
- . *War and Popular Culture: Resistance in Modern China 1937-1945*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.
- Jin Kemu, trans. 金克木译. *Mokepoluoduo chahua xuan* 摩可婆罗多插话选 [Illustrated Edition of *Mahabharata*]. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe 人民文学出版社, 1987.
- Karlgren, Bernhard. “Legends and Cults in Ancient China”. *BMFEA* 18 (1946): 199-365.
- Kinkley, Jeffrey C. “Shen Congwen and the Use of Regionalism in Modern Chinese Literature”. *Modern Chinese Literature*. San Francisco: San Francisco State University Center for the Study of Modern Chinese Literature, 1985. 157-83.
- . *The Odyssey of Shen Congwen*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987.

- Kirk, G. S. *Myth: Its Meaning and Functions in Ancient and Other Cultures*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1983.
- Kramer, S. N., ed. *Mythologies of the Ancient World*. Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1961.
- Lee, Haiyan. "Tears that Crumbled the Great Wall: The Archaeology of Feeling in the May Fourth Folklore Movement". *The Journal of Asian Studies*. Vol. 64, no. 1 (February, 2005): 35-65.
- Lee, Leo Ou-fan. *Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China, 1930-1945*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999.
- . *The Romantic Generation of Modern Chinese Writers*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973.
- Li Rui 李锐. *Mao Zedong tongzhi de chuqi geming huodong* 毛泽东同志的初期革命活动 [Comrade Mao's Early Revolutionary Activities]. Beijing: Renmin chubanshe 人民出版社, 1957.
- Li Shaoming 李绍明. *Minzuxue* 民族学 [Ethnology]. Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe 四川人民出版社, 1986.
- Li Zehou 李泽厚. *Mei de licheng* 美的历程 [The Path of Beauty]. Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe 文物出版社, 1981.
- Lin He 林河. *Zhongguo wu nuo shi* 中国巫雠史 [A History of Chinese Shamans and Witchcrafts]. Guangzhou: Huacheng chubanshe 花城出版社, 2001.
- Lin Yaohua, and Jin Tianming 林耀华、金天明. "Cong lishi fazhan kan dangqian woguo minzuxue de duixiang he renwu" 从历史发展看当前我国民族学的对象和任务 [A Look at Chinese Ethnology's Object and Task from the Perspective of Its Historical Development]. *Minzu yanjiu* 民族研究 [Studies on Nationalities], no. 2 (1980): 50-57.
- Link, E. Perry. *Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies: Popular Fiction in Early Twentieth-century Chinese Cities*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981.
- Liu Kang and Xiaobing Tang, ed. *Politics, Ideology, and Literary Discourse in Modern China: Theoretical Interventions and Cultural Critique*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1993.
- Liu, Lydia H. *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity in China, 1900-1937*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995.

- Liu Xin, ed. *New Reflections on Anthropological Studies of (Greater) China*. Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, 2004.
- Loh, Wai-fong, "From Romantic Love to Class Struggle: Reflections on the Film Liu Sanjie". *Popular Chinese Literature and Performing Arts in the People's Republic of China 1949-1979*. Ed. Bonnie S. McDougall. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984. 165-76.
- Long Pingping 龙平平. "Jiu Zhongguo minzuxue de lilun liupai" 旧中国民族学的理论流派 [The Theoretical Schools of Old China's Ethnology]. *Zhongguo minzu lishi yu wenhua* 中国民族历史与文化 [History and Culture of the Nationalities of China]. Beijing: Zhongyang minzu xueyuan chubanshe 中央民族学院出版社, 1988. 191-207.
- Lu Xun. "Myths and Legends". *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction*. Trans. Yang Hsien-Yi and Gladys Yang. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1959. 10-19.
- Ma Changyi 马昌仪. "Zhongguo shenhuaxue fazhan de yige lunkuo" 中国神话学发展的一个轮廓 [An Outline of the Development of Mythological Studies in China]. *Zhongguo shenhuaxue wenlun xuancui (shang)* 中国神话学文论选萃 (上) [Selected Works of Studies on Chinese Mythology]. Ed. Ma Changyi 马昌仪编选. Vol. 1. Beijing: Zhongguo guangbo dianshi chubanshe 中国广播电视出版社, 1994. 1-6.
- Ma Jibin, and Pu Ren, ed. 马济彬、蒲仁编辑. *Mao Zedong zhuzuo yinyu, chengyu, diangu cidian* 毛泽东著作引语、成语、典故辞典 [Dictionary of Quotations, Idioms and Allusions in Mao Zedong's Works]. Beijing: Zhongguo wenlian chuban gongsi 中国文联出版公司, 1997.
- Ma Xueliang, and Jin Dan, trans. and annot. 马学良、今旦译注. *Miaozu shishi* 苗族史诗 [The Epic of the Miao People]. Beijing: Zhongyang minzu xueyuan chubanshe 中央民族学院出版社, 1992.
- Ma Xueliang, Liang Tingwang, and Zhang Gongjin, ed. 马学良, 梁庭望、张公瑾编辑. *Zhongguo shaoshu minzu wenxue shi* 中国少数民族文学史 [A History of the Literature of China's Minorities]. Beijing: Zhongyang minzu xueyuan chubanshe 中央民族学院出版社, 1992.
- Mackerras, Colin. *China's Minority Cultures: Identities and Integration Since 1912*. Melbourne: Longman Australia Pty Ltd., 1995.
- Malinowski, Bronislaw. *Myth in Primitive Psychology*. Connecticut: Negro University Press, 1971.

Malinowski, Bronislaw. *Sex, Culture and Myth*. London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1963.

Martin, Helmut, and Jeffrey Kinkley, ed. *Modern Chinese Writers: Self-portrayals*. Armonk, N. Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1992.

Mao Dun 茅盾. "Guanyu xiangtu wenxue" 关于乡土文学 [About Native Soil Literature]. *Wenxue* 文学 [Literature], no. 2 (February, 1936): 4-6.

———. "Luohuasheng lun" 落花生论 [On Luohuasheng]. *Wenxue* 文学 [Literature], no. 3 (October, 1934): 4-5.

———. *Mao Dun lun Zhongguo xiandai zuojia zuopin* 茅盾论中国现代作家作品 [Commentary on Modern Chinese Writers and Their Works by Mao Dun]. Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe 北京大学出版社, 1980.

———. *Shenhua yanjiu* 神话研究 [Studies on Myths]. Tianjin: Baihua wenyi chubanshe 百花文艺出版社, 1981.

———. "Wang Luyan lun" 王鲁彦论 [On Wang Luyan]. *Xiaoshuo yuebao* 小说月报 [Short Story Monthly] no. 19 (January, 1928): 12-13.

McClellan, T. M. *Zhang Henshui and Popular Chinese Fiction, 1919-1949*. Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2005.

McDougall, Bonnie S. *Mao Zedong's "Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art": A Translation of the 1943 Text with Commentary*. Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, The University of Michigan, 1980.

———. *The Introduction of Western Literary Theories into Modern China, 1919-1925*. Tokyo: The Centre for East Asian Cultural Studies, 1971.

McDougall, Bonnie S., and Kam Louie. *The Literature of China in the Twentieth Century*. London: Hurst, 1997.

Mueggler, Erik. *The Age of Wild Ghosts: Memory, Violence, and Place in Southwest China*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.

Nienhauser, William H., ed. *The Indiana Companion to Traditional Chinese Literature*. Vol. 1. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986.

Otterbein, Keith F. *Comparative Cultural Analysis: An Introduction to Anthropology*. 2nd ed. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1977.

- Pasternak, Burton. "A Conversation with Fei Xiaotong". *Current Anthropology*. Vol. 29, no. 4 (1988): 637-62.
- Pollard, David E. *A Chinese Look at Literature: The Literary Values of Chou Tso-jen in Relation to the Tradition*. London: Hurst, 1973.
- Rack, Mary. *Ethnic Distinctions, Local Meanings: Negotiating Cultural Identities in China*. London: Pluto Press, 2005.
- Righter, William. *Myth and Literature*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975.
- Rosenberg, Bruce A. *Folklore and Literature: Rival Siblings*. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1991.
- Ruthven, K. K. *Myth*. London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1976.
- Safran, William, ed. *Nationalism and Ethnoregional Identities in China*. London: Frank Cass, 1998.
- Schneider, Lawrence A. *Ku Chieh-kang and China's New History: Nationalism and the Quest for Alternative Traditions*. Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1971.
- Shaw, Jason. "Current Trends of Ethnology". *Ethnicity and Ethnic Groups in China*. Ed. Chien Chiao and Nicholas Tapp. Hong Kong: Special Issue of New Asia Academic Bulletin, 1989. 41-64.
- Shen Congwen 沈从文. "Lun Luohuasheng" 论落华生 [On Luohuasheng]. *Shen Congwen wenji* 沈从文文集 [Literary Works of Shen Congwen]. Guangzhou: Huacheng chubanshe 花城出版社, 1984. 103-04.
- Shih, Shu-mei. "Writing English with a Chinese Brush: The Work of Fei Ming". *The Lure of the Modern: Writing Modernism in Semicolonial China, 1917-1937*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001. 190-203.
- Slupski, Zbigniew, ed. *A Selective Guide to Chinese Literature 1900-1949*. Vol. 2: The Short Stories. Leiden: Brill, 1988.
- Su Xuelin 苏雪林. "Wang Luyan he Xu Qinwen" 王鲁彦和许钦文 [Wang Luyan and Xu Qinwen]. *Xiandai* 现代 [Modernity]. Vol. 5, no. 5 (June, 1934): 5-6.
- Tan Zhengbi 谭正璧. *Zhongguo wenxue jinhua shi* 中国文学进化史 [A Evolutionary History of Chinese Literature]. Shanghai: Xinyue shudian 新月书店, 1928.

- Tang Tao 唐弢. *Zhongguo xindai wenxue shi* 中国现代文学史 [A History of Modern Chinese Literature]. 3 vols. Beijing: renmin daxue chubanshe 人民大学出版社, 1979-85.
- Taylor, Archer. "Folklore and the Student of Literature". *The Study of Folklore*. Ed. Alan Dundes. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1965. 37-46.
- The American Heritage. *Dictionary of the English Language*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000. 16 October, 2005.  
<<http://dictionary.reference.com/search?q=ethnology>>.
- Thompson, Stith. *The Folktale*. New York: The Dryden Press, 1946.
- Wakeman, Frederic JR. *History and Will: Philosophical Perspectives of Mao Tse-tung's Thought*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973.
- Wang, David Der-Wei. *Fictional Realism in Twentieth-century China: Mao Dun, Lao She, Shen Congwen*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1992.
- . *Fin-de-siècle Splendor: Repressed Modernities of Late Qing Fiction, 1849-1911*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997.
- Wang Guowei 王国维. *Renjian cihua* 人间词话 [Talks on *Ci* in the Human World]. Hong Kong: Zhonghua shuju 中华书局, 1961.
- Wang Qingming 王轻鸣. "Xin shiqi xiaoshuo de shenhua yuanxing" 新时期小说的神话原型 [Mythical Archetypes in the Fiction of New Age]. *Dangdai wentan* 当代文坛 [Contemporary Literary World], no. 2 (1997): 7-19.
- Wei Shaochang, ed. 魏绍昌编辑. *Yuanyang hudie pai jianjiu ziliao* 鸳鸯蝴蝶派研究资料 [Research Materials on the Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies School]. Hong Kong: shenghuo dushu xinzhishi sanlian shudian 生活·读书·新知 三联书店, 1980.
- Wen Rumin 温儒敏. *Xinwenxue xianshizhuyi de liubian* 新文学现实主义的流变 [Development and Changes in Realism in China's New Literature]. Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe 北京大学出版社, 1988.
- Werner, E. T. C. *Myths and Legends of China*. London: G. G. Harrap, 1922.
- White, John J. *Mythology in the Modern Novel: A Study of Prefigurative Techniques*. New Jersey: Princeton University, 1971.
- Widmer, Ellen, and David Der-wei Wang, ed. *From May Fourth to June Fourth: Fiction and Film in Twentieth-century China*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993.

- Williams, Raymond. *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976.
- Xia Zengyou, ed. 夏曾佑编. *Zhongguo lishi jiaokeshu* 中国历史教科书 [Textbook: The History of China]. Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan 商务印书馆, 1905.
- Xu Dishan, trans. and ed. 许地山翻译编辑. *Mengjiala minjian gushi* 孟加拉民间故事 [Bengali Folk Tales]. Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan 商务印书馆, 1956.
- Yan Yu 严羽. *Canglang shihua* 沧浪诗话 [Poetry Talks by (the Escapist of) the Canglang River]. Comp. Guo Shaoyu 郭绍虞校订. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe 人民文学出版社, 1961.
- Yang Yi 杨义. *Zhongguo xiandai xiaoshuo shi* 中国现代小说史 [A History of Modern Chinese Fiction]. Vol. 1. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe 人民文学出版社, 1986.
- . *Zhongguo xiandai xiaoshuo shi* 中国现代小说史 [A History of Modern Chinese Fiction]. Vol. 3. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe 人民文学出版社, 1998.
- Ye Shuxian 叶舒宪. *Wenxue renleixue tansuo* 文学人类学探索 [Explorations in Literary Anthropology]. Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe 广西师范大学出版社, 1998.
- Yuan Ke, ed. 袁珂编辑. *Zhongguo shenhua chuanshuo cidian* 中国神话传说辞典 [Dictionary of Chinese Myths and Legends]. Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan 商务印书馆, 1986.
- Zhang Henshui 张恨水. *Bashiyi meng* 八十一梦 [Eighty-one Dreams]. Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe 四川人民出版社, 1980.
- Zhang Yijiu 张贻玖. *Mao Zedong he shi* 毛泽东和诗 [Mao Zedong and Poetry]. Beijing: Chunqiu chubanshe 春秋出版社, 1987.
- Zhao Xiaohuan. "From Shanhai jing to Liaozhai zhiyi: Towards a Morphology of Classical Chinese Supernatural Fiction". PhD thesis. The University of Edinburgh, 2003.
- Zheng Liangshu 郑良树. *Gu Jiegang xueshu nianpu jianbian* 顾颉刚学术年谱简编 [Chronology of the Academic Activities of Gu Jiegang]. Beijing: Zhongguo youyi chubanshe 中国友谊出版公司, 1987.
- Zheng Zhenduo 郑振铎. *Zhongguo su wenxue shi* 中国俗文学史 [A History of Popular Chinese Literature]. Vol. 1. Shanghai: Shanghai shudian 上海书店, 1938.
- Zhongguo funü zazhishe 中国妇女杂志社. *Women in Chinese Folklore*. Beijing: China



Publications Centre, 1983.

Zhou Shizhao 周世钊. "Diyi shidan shidai de Mao zhuxi" 第一师范时代的毛主席 [Chairman Mao at the First Teacher Training School]. *Xin guan cha* 新观察 [The New Observation], no. 2 (1951): 17-19.

Zhou Zuoren 周作人. "Huai Fei Ming" 怀废名 [Thinking of Fei Ming]. *Yaotang zawen* 药堂杂文 [Essays of the Medicine Hall]. Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe 河北教育出版社, 2002. 16 February, 2006.

<<http://www.ztdec.com/old/ebook/nowadays/zhouzhuoren/090.htm>>.

——. "Xinwenxue de yaoqiu" 新文学的要求 [Requisites for the New Literature] *Xin qingnian* 新青年 [The New Youth], no. 1 (1920). Trans. Kirk A. Denton. 8 October, 2006. <<http://mclc.osu.edu/rc/pubs/zhou.htm>>.

——. *Zhitang shu hua (xia)* 知堂书话 (下) [Zhitang Literary Talks]. Vol .2. Changsha: Yuelu shuyuan 岳麓书院, 1986.

——. *Zhou Zuoren xuanji* 周作人选集 [Selected Works of Zhou Zuoren]. Ed. Xu Chensi and Ye Wangyou 徐沉泗、叶忘忧编辑. Shanghai: Wanxiang shuwu 万象书屋, 1936.

——. *Zhou Zuoren zaoqi sanwen xuan* 周作人早期散文选 [Selected Early Essays of Zhou Zuoren]. Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe 上海文艺出版社, 1984.

——. *Ziji de yuandi* 自己的园地 [One's Own Garden]. Jiulong: Shiyong shuju 实用书局, 1972.

Zhu Donglin, Ding Fan and Zhu Xiaojin, ed. 朱栋霖、丁帆、朱晓进编辑. *Zhongguo xiandai wenxue shi, 1917-1997* 中国现代文学史 (1917-1997) [A History of Modern Chinese Literature, 1917-1997]. 2 vols. Beijing: Gaodeng jiaoyu chubanshe 高等教育出版社, 2002.

Zimmer, Heinrich. *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1946.

Zong Li, and Liu Qun'er 宗力、刘群二. *Zhongguo minjian zhu shen* 中国民间诸神 [Popular Deities in China]. Shijiazhuang: Hebei renmin chubanshe 河北人民出版社, 1987.