

**THE HOME AND THE WORLD:  
RETHINKING THE IDEA OF THE RURAL  
IN CHINESE MODERNITY**

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# **The Home and the World: Rethinking the Idea of the Rural in Chinese Modernity**

*by*

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## THESIS CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled “**The Home and the World: Rethinking the Idea of the Rural in Chinese Modernity**” being submitted by **Wing-Kwong Wong** to Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi, for the award of the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy**, is a bona fide record of the research work done by her under our guidance and supervision. In our opinion, the thesis has fulfilled the requirements and has reached the requisite standard for the submission relating to the degree. The contents of this thesis, in full or in parts, have not been submitted to any other Institute or University for the award of any degree or diploma.

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Pin-hsien Wu are also indispensable in the journey. At last, I must also deeply thank my activist friends who guarded the Losheng colony for the last fifteen years so that we could finally return home.

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Wing-Kwong Wong

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*Wing-Kwong Wong*



## ABSTRACT

The idea of the rural persists as the most potent image in the century-old tradition. In the thesis, I seek to understand the sentiment towards a certain rural past, always prior to the language of politics in the Chinese-speaking world in the past hundred years. The thesis makes a movement to the geographical location of India and makes it its conceptual milieu. By revisiting the body of writings on the rural at the inaugural moment of the modern in China, it asks the question: how was the idea of the rural being evoked at the juncture of the encounter with “world history” to set forth a mode of modernity, if modernity means how we relate to the past and project a future? How is historical transformation to be understood therein?

I venture to organize the conceptual movements in this discursive space through a series of tropological movements—the wind, the river, the earth, and finally the sky. Chapter 1 “The Wind”, sets up the question of literary history and criticism, where literature and history always stand in tension, by reading two contemporary literary critics’ works; Chapter 2 “The River”, sees a mode of thought that carries with the negative in thinking of the vocation of literature in the inaugural moment of the modern in China; Chapter 3 “The Earth” captures the contour of the autochthonic thought; and Chapter 4 “The Sky” moves back in time to see the transitional time and look at the tectonic shift of certain premodern templates for the thinking that perhaps gives the grounds for these two modes of thought.



## सार

ग्राम्य की धारणा सदियों पुरानी परंपरा में सबसे शक्तिशाली छवि के रूप में बनी रहती है। इस शोधपत्र में, मैं एक विशेष ग्राम्य अतीत के प्रति भावनाओं को समझने की कोशिश कर रहा हूँ, जो हमेशा पिछले सौ वर्षों में चीनी भाषी दुनिया की राजनीति की भाषा से पूर्व है। यह शोधपत्र भारत की भौगोलिक स्थिति की ओर गति करता है और इसे अपना वैचारिक परिवेश बनाता है। आधुनिकता के उद्घाटन के क्षण में ग्राम्य पर लिखित सामग्री को फिर से देखकर, यह प्रश्न उठाता है: "विश्व इतिहास" के साथ मुठभेड़ के चौराहे पर ग्राम्य का विचार कैसे सामने आया ताकि एक आधुनिकता के तरीके को स्थापित किया जा सके, यदि आधुनिकता का अर्थ है कि हम अतीत से कैसे जुड़ते हैं और भविष्य की योजना बनाते हैं? वहाँ ऐतिहासिक परिवर्तन को कैसे समझा जाए?

मैं इस संवादात्मक क्षेत्र में वैचारिक आंदोलनों को एक श्रृंखला के माध्यम से व्यवस्थित करने का प्रयास करता हूँ—हवा, नदी, पृथ्वी, और अंततः आकाश। अध्याय 1 “हवा” साहित्यिक इतिहास और आलोचना के प्रश्न को स्थापित करता है, जहाँ साहित्य और इतिहास हमेशा तनाव में होते हैं, दो समकालीन साहित्यिक आलोचकों के कार्यों को पढ़कर; अध्याय 2 “नदी” एक ऐसे विचारधारा को देखता है जो चीन के आधुनिक उद्घाटन के क्षण में साहित्य के कार्य के बारे में नकारात्मकता पर विचार करता है; अध्याय 3 “पृथ्वी” स्वदेशी विचार की रूपरेखा को पकड़ता है; और अध्याय 4 “आकाश” समय में पीछे लौटता है ताकि संक्रमण काल को देखा जा सके और उन कुछ पूर्व-आधुनिक रूपरेखाओं के टेक्टोनिक परिवर्तन पर विचार किया जा सके जो शायद इन दो विचारधाराओं के लिए आधार प्रदान करती हैं।



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# Introduction

Millet here with grain droops low;

Sorghum there attends the blade.

With a slow pace I go through;

My heart is so dismayed.

He who knows me says I'm distraught.

He who doesn't asks if I'm seeking aught.

O vast, almighty blue sky,

Who on earth caused this and why?

Millet here with grain droops low;

Sorghum there is in the ear.

With a slow pace I go through;

My heart feels drunk and drear.

He who knows me says I'm distraught.

He who doesn't asks if I'm seeking aught.

O vast, almighty blue sky,

Who on earth caused this and why?

Millet here with grain droops low;

Sorghum there is in the grain.

With a slow pace I go through;

My heart is choked with pain.

He who knows me says I'm distraught.

He who doesn't asks if I'm seeking aught.

O vast, almighty blue sky,

Who on earth caused this and why?

— ‘Millet Droops Low’,

from *Books of Song*(*Shijing*)

The idea of the rural has always been a spectral image that haunts our experience of the modern. It is perhaps even more so in a geopolitical and historical context called the “third world”, with its deep conflicted and ambivalent sentiment towards the question of the rural, for it was once the “*rus*”, the open space, in the eyes of colonizers. One sees a long-standing tradition of writings on the rural in the history of modern Chinese literature. The idea of the rural persists as the most potent image in the century-old tradition. In the thesis, I seek to understand the sentiment towards a certain rural past, always prior to the language of politics in the Chinese-speaking world in the past hundred years. The thesis makes a movement to the geographical location of India and makes it its conceptual milieu. By revisiting the body of writings on the rural at the inaugural moment of the modern in China, it asks the question: how was the idea of the rural being evoked at the juncture of the encounter with “world history” to set forth a mode of modernity, if modernity means how we relate to the past and project a future? How is historical transformation to be understood therein?

In the canonical treatise on the idea of the rural, *The Country and the City*,

Raymond Williams unpacks the powerful myth of the rural past in the long tradition of English Romanticism. What is at the heart of his analysis is the question of “change”, in which the social experience in solution finds its form in the seemingly permanent image of rural life as a response to the process of internal development from agrarian to industrial capitalism. The rural landscape remains figurative, which points to the indeterminate present in the change experienced as an internal division. For Williams, the contrast of country and city leaves an indeterminate present experienced as tension which is a ratification of a certain unresolved division. To my mind, this pertains to the internal division of the subject experienced as a certain crisis; however, in Williams, not at the level of the individual but the social. The social experience thus could only be captured in its tension with literary form, with a reading of the border. However, to follow Williams’ reading of the border, the rural past as the residue is only to be sought after as bordering experience, traces left in the structure, or a moment in shared practice sedimented in the language itself<sup>1</sup>(Williams).

In the Chinese context, critical scholarship in the field of modern literary history also constructs the century-old tradition around the urban/rural divide and the quest

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<sup>1</sup> I benefit from Gayatri Spivak’s reading of Williams, where she makes a clear distinction between the “archaic” and “residual”, and, through her critique of Frederic Jameson, focuses on the heterogeneous trace structure in the “emergent” and “residual” categories, especially her reading of the “pre-emergence” alongside Lacan’s concept of “foreclosure” and Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok’s “cryptonymy” which opens up a certain possible past (Spivak).

for the “native soil (*xiang-tu*; 鄉土)”<sup>2</sup>. The May Fourth legacy, seen in its realist imperative, sets the question around the epistemological limit of representation and its reference, the breach of which sets forth a history as tragic (Lee; D. D. Wang, *Fictional Realism*). Literary history is thus written by interpreting the “tragic ironic” mode of writing inherent in the tradition, which distances itself from the sanctified History(Lee); even in the most earnest quest for the rural, the history of consciousness is written in a tragic narrative, in which the actualization of thought in action turns out to be the destruction of thought and the thinker, where the “plentiful agonies” gives over to the world and is to be transformed into “the fund of the spirit (*jing-shen zi-yuan*; 精神資源)”(Qian)<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> See the representative essays in the volume to write the century-old tradition *From May Fourth to June Fourth: Fiction and Film in Twentieth-Century China*(Widmer and Wang). See also Liu Kang’s treatise on the aesthetics question in Chinese Marxism. In his reading, instead of casting an Orientalist frame to the experience of Chinese Marxism is to be understood as an imagination of alternative modernity, the internal conflicts between urban, cosmopolitan Marxists and rural, nativist revolutionaries remain one of the pivotal aspects underlying the aesthetic and cultural debates and movements within the tradition(K. Liu). Another example could be Tan Xiao-bing’s treatment of the cultural history, in which the Chinese modern”, with all its reference to the literary and cinematic representation of the city and the country, is dealt with in the conceptual dyad of “the heroic” and “the quotidian”(Tang).

<sup>3</sup> In Qian Lichun’s *The Plentiful Agonies: Don Quixote and Hamlet Travelling to the East*, he traces how the literary image of Hamlet and Quixote has travelled and altered and how the latter has been gradually given an edge over the former in the development of the history of world literature. In the first part of the book, he traces how the two figures travel from their origins to the literature of German romanticism to Russian literature; in the latter part of the book, he uses the two figures to read the writers in the revolutionary traditions in modern Chinese literature. Although the magnum opus deals with a long conceptual history across a large geographical span, it is written in a deeply auto-biographical, a life-writing, manner. To use Qian’s own words, he is among “the first generation of

The thesis, as an attempt to capture the idea of the rural at the inaugural moment of the modern in the literary space, benefits from these endeavours of literary history mentioned above. It however takes “literature” in its broadest sense and rethinks the idea of “the literary” and “the historical” through the auto-critique of these writings. From the very beginning there is no recourse to the self-valorization of the category called literature. The thesis also seeks to depart from the tragic understanding of the historical transformation, as in reading the set of writings, one detects in the history of the idea of the rural, a different sense of “ground transformation”, a kind of “turning over”, or if one were perhaps to borrow the Yogacara Buddhist lexicon “*asraya-parivrtti*”. It is perhaps helpful to think with the Chinese word for the rural, *xiang* (鄉), in its etymological history, it is “the region of the (obscure) multitude(*min*; 民)<sup>4</sup>”. It could also refer to “the past”, “the anterior”, or “what is gone”. In its earlier usage, it means “turning toward” or “direction”. In *Shuowenjiezi Zhu* (*The Annotations of Shuowenjiezi*; 說文解字注), “to territorialise(*feng*; 封) means the obscure multitude

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intellectuals in New China”, who have experienced moments of both great hope and terror and witnessed the important events of the establishment of socialist China, the Cultural Revolution, the 1979 democratic reform, and the 1989 *Tiananmen* massacre. He looks at his own work as “survivor’s writings”. The entire work is to answer the agonizing question—why the idea of rural taken to the ideals leads to the catastrophic consequence. Therefore, he reappraises the two archetypes and rather gives the (self-)doubting and inward direction of Hamlet more gravity (Qian).

<sup>4</sup> *Min*(民) is usually simply translated as “the people”. It is also used to translate the modern concept of the people. However I use the explication in *Shuowenjiezi* where *min* refers to *zhong-meng*(眾萌; literally multiple, numerous obscure, ignorant peasants).

taken in the midst of the region; to turn toward(*xiang*; 鄉) means returning toward.

*Explication of Names* says: *xiang*(鄉), [is] turning toward(*xiang*; 向). [It is] the obscure multitude turn toward”<sup>5</sup>(translation mine).

The current moment sees the restructuring of global capitalism and the rise of new regional powers, in a context like China or India, the intellectual ideas and concepts also seek legitimacy in its autochthony. People look for a certain different notion of history from the ancient “Asian agrarian empires” and seek alternative modernities in cultural differences. The gestalt of the culture seeks its “internal perspective” by distinguishing the real enemy in its own plane—what is so-called the West—thereby pluralizing the world in a new *nomos* of the earth. In its earliest conception, the motive of the project was to trace the idea of autochthony in its best tradition and see it to its historical limit. In a way, it is perhaps also to put this work, coming from a space of certain postcolonial thinking, into its own crisis.

In the early stage of the work, I read in this set of texts a tension moving between two poles for which I give the title the “home” and the “world”. I “take-at-hand” (to follow Lu Xun)<sup>6</sup> Rabindranath Tagore’s famous novel *The Home and the World*

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<sup>5</sup> 所封謂民域其中，所鄉謂歸往也。釋名曰：鄉，向也。民所向也。

<sup>6</sup> Lu Xun(1881-1936), who is seen as one of the most important modern thinkers and writers in China, has talked about the “take-at-hand-ism(*na-lai-zhu-yi*; 拿來主義)” as the way of appropriating foreign and given concepts. Inhabiting a moment of destitution of thought, it an exigent move for thinking itself to be able to happen. It always involves the productive dangers inherent in a certain unavoidable

(which is also a critique of the *swadeshi* movement—*swa-desh* as the *auto-chthon*) as an allegory of the movement of the concept and of the history that is sought in the idea of the rural. As in the Bengali title *Ghare Baire*, which joins “at home” and “outside” together without a copula or a conjunction. It is an allegory of a double move: to break down the wall of the home to be exposed to the outside and in the ruin of the home that one is to return home. This is the embryo for chapter 3 “The Earth”, which broadly captures the contour of the autochthonic thought, and chapter 2 “The River”, which sees a mode of thought that carries with negative in thinking of the vocation of literature. Later I take a step back to see the transitional time and look at the tectonic shift of certain premodern templates for the thinking that perhaps gives the grounds for these two modes of thought. This constitutes the last chapter “The Sky”. The first chapter, “The Wind”, then sets up the question of literary history and criticism, where literature and history always stand in tension, by reading two contemporary literary critics’ works.

### **The Tropological Movement**

I venture to organize the conceptual movements in this discursive space through a series of tropological movements—the wind, the river, the earth, and finally the sky. When I was doing chapters 2 and 3, the idea took shape from Carl Schmitt’s *Land and*

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"catachreses", which is to say the deliberate use of inappropriately juxtaposed metaphors.

*Sea*, which develops from paragraphs §§ 247/248 of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* as the intellectual-historical nucleus to give a historical perspective of the international law and order. The entire treatise revolves around the two poles of primary elements—the earth and the water (Schmitt, *Land and Sea*). This insight is also from the conundrum of the Japanese literary critic Kojin Karatani's formula "literature as landscape" by which he dissolves the self-evident existence of the space called literature (Karatani, *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature*). If the trope here is linked to the self-referentiality that always puts interpretation in its crisis, is there a possibility to think of the tropology in a different manner? Heidegger and Eugen Fink's 1966-67 seminar on Heraclitus provides insight into a different possibility. In discussing fragment 31 "Fire turns itself over into sea, this splits into earth and breath of fire, and half of the earth turns back into sea", Fink gives a "fantastic meaning to *puros tropai* (the turning over of the fire)"(Heidegger and Fink 80). Fink uses the familiar phenomenon of the break of the day at the Ionian coast to understand the cosmogonic fragment. He gives primacy to the element of the fire, which breaks up time to the past, present and future and lets the cosmos (the world-order) come forth to appear like the break of the world day. The cosmogonic elemental movement of *tropai* here does not presuppose an underlying substance. If one were to speak of the Chinese word for cosmos, it is the word *wen*(文), the "astronomy" (*tien wen* 天文;

Heaven's pattern) and "topography" (*ti-wen*; 地文; Earth's pattern). It is the same word for what we call the "written words" or "literature". In fact, what is considered to be the first systemized treatise on literature *Weng-Xin-Diao-Long* (5BC) starts with a cosmogenic fragment, breaking with the first sentence "*wen* is good, born with heaven and earth"<sup>7</sup> (Owen). However I refrain from directly entering into the cosmogenic thought, that would perhaps be another thesis, but only use these tropes in a limited sense, as I am aware that the modern discursive space and this thesis largely still think along the line of negativity. This *tropai* as the turning over perhaps only comes in the last chapter. However as an organizing principle, one perhaps sees a logical conceptual move in the order, with the set of texts that think profoundly with these metaphors.

## Asia as Method

I would like to mention here an intellectual endeavour launched by an inter-Asia circle of critical intellectuals, from which this project owes much of its early intellectual inspiration and still takes its cue for certain methodological issues. In the face of the discourse of the "rise of Asia" that emerged in the 1980s, this endeavour

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<sup>7</sup> "As an inner power (*te*), pattern (*wen*), is very great indeed, born together with Heaven and Earth. And how is this? All colors are compounded of two primary colors, the purple that is Heaven and the brown that is Earth. All forms are distinguished through two primary forms, Earth's squareness and Heaven's circularity. The sun and moon are successive disks of jade, showing to those below images (*hsiang*) that cleave to Heaven. Rivers and mountains are glittering finery, unrolling forms that give order (*li*) to Earth. These are the pattern of the Way" (Owen 187).

began by “problematizing Asia”, re-examining how the colonial past still sets the discursive-affective limit for the imagined Asia with the uneven and heterogeneous realities in the region (Chen and Huat; “Editorial Statement”). In this trajectory of the movement, Kuan-Hsing Chen in *Asia as Method* sets forth a signpost for the *methodos*, a direction, a path—i.e. using the idea of Asia as an imaginary anchoring point, societies in Asia can become each other’s point of reference, thus transforming the understanding of the self. To overcome the impasse of imperialism in knowledge production in general and in a particular historico-geographical context, one sets on a new path by “shifting the frame of reference”. It points out a way to set up a mode of comparative analysis which recognizes similar structures of feeling in different historical experiences in the Third-World space (K.-H. Chen, *Asia as Method*).

To track the trajectory of the movement , one could perhaps go back to an earlier moment, whence Asia “as method” actually takes the cue. Here I mean the works of two Japanese Sinologist<sup>8</sup>—Mizoguchi Yuzo(1932-2010)’s *China as Method* and Takeuchi Yoshimi(1908-1977)’s “Asia as method”, which is basically the minutes of his 1960 speech “Asia as object and Asia as method”. In both of the cases, the thinkers in their reflection on their methods for doing intellectual history deeply

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<sup>8</sup> The Japanese Sinology actually sees a turn from the earlier *hanbunkaku* (literally as Han literature) to the post 1895 Sino-Japanese war Sinology. However in Japanese, Sinology it also saw a turn from the more despiseful usage of 支那學 (*shinagaku*) to the usage of 中國學 (*chukunigaku*; the character of *chukuni* means “the central country”, which is what China is called in Chinese) after the WWII.

engaged with the question of Chinese modernity. “Asia as method” is only a casual lecture on Takeuchi’s observation and reflection of a series of affairs then, the basic theoretical frame of which could be seen in his earlier essay “what is modernity—the case of Japan and China”. Takeuchi in the end of the lecture names Asia, instead of his earlier common usage of Orient; he names Asia as a method, with a sense one could read in its etymological root as *methodos*, as a path to go, and says that in its resistance to the invasion of Europe, it could perhaps enfold Europe in itself with a more encompassing universality (Takeuchi, “Asia as Method”). But what does he really mean by Asia and its resistance (*teiko*)? In “What is Modernity”, he conceptualizes Europe and the Orient in the schemata of (the Europe) advance—(the Orient) retreat. The basic formula of Europe is that “A needs the exclusion of non-A in order to be A.” The Europe needs the resistance of the Orient for it to be Europe. The invasion can never be unilateral; defeat presupposes resistance. However the equivalence of advance and retreat is in one instant which is “*a limit, a point within history that lacks extension, or rather it represents the place (which is not an expanse) from which history emerges*” (Takeuchi, *What Is Modernity?* 59). In this image of equivalence (A=A, not non-A) which is itself Europe, Europe becomes Europe and Orient disappears as Orient. Takeuchi detects in Japan a mode of modernity that is without resistance. One could say everything passes through without any trace. For

him, there is thus no self-consciousness. In this form of ultra-progressivism, everything new, every new concept and word soon becomes old and falls into decadence. Paradoxically, progress is thus decadence. He compared it to what he thinks to be Chinese modernity. To say Chinese modernity, he however actually only hinges on one singular thinking mind—i.e. the thought of Lu-xun, the encounter with which he saw as an event to provide him the path to his “feeling about” “resistance”. He dwells on Lu Xun’s parable about “the wise man, the fool, and the slave”, where resistance is nothing of any humanist or progressive discourse about liberation. One could read the key passage:

The “most painful thing in life,” awakening from a dream, occurs when the *slave* rejects his status as *slave* while at the same time rejecting the fantasy of liberation, so that he becomes a *slave* who realizes that he is a *slave*. This is the state in which one must follow a path even though there is no path to follow; or rather, one must follow a path *precisely because* there is no path to follow. Such a *slave* rejects being himself at the same time that he rejects being anything else (Takeuchi, *What Is Modernity?* 72).

The slave refuses to recognize the fact that he is a *slave*. He is a true slave when he thinks that he is not a *slave*. And he reveals the full extent of his *slavishness* when he becomes a master, for at that time he subjectively views himself as no longer a *slave* (ibid: 72).

Here a slave does not recognize himself as slave is a true slave. A slave rejects being a slave only in rejecting the slightest phantasy of himself not being a slave. He is *not* not-a-slave. It is the full awareness of the inescapable subjectivity that it wants to escape. It is the meaning of despair, the most important word Takeuchi sees in Lu Xun. True resistance is not any overthrowing in an antithesis or any overcoming in reconciliation but actually emerges only as “the activation of despair”. One only enters history in the instant of resistance, where one has to inhabit a state of despair. It is how he captures Chinese modernity as a mode of modernity with the self-reference to the negative. His approach to Asia is to follow the same path. Asia is thus not any entity that has any substantial attributes or value judgment. To name Asia as *methodos*, instead of the disappearing Orient, is pointing to this holding fast of negativity. The Asian-ism is thus not any substantial content nor can it be objectively determined thought. It is only a “tendency”, a “mood”, in his words.

Mizoguchi Yuzo’s project that comes after the war is however a response and a critique of Takeuchi’s China and Asia. He sees in Takeuchi’s formulation the problem of yielding to the abstract and obscure notion of Asia, which gives its way to the aggressive war. What he puts under his critique is a way of grasping the Chinese modern in the atmosphere of post-war Japan<sup>9</sup>, which finds its predecessor in the

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<sup>9</sup> In the book *China as Method*, Mizoguchi Yuzo mentions what China meant to the post-war

“Overcoming modernity” debate in the 30s, in which Takeuchi was the most thoughtful critic. Mizoguchi detects in Takeuchi’s generation a prospective structure that projects out of self-abnegation. In this paradigm, the Chinese modern being the anti-thesis of the Japanese modern is grasped in the following formula, in which the negative expression of the “non”(無; *mu*) of the “non-follower of Western Europe” turns to be equivalent to “nothingness”, which is to say “lack” or “nihility and emptiness”, and further deems this “nothingness” to be the very motive force of “transformation” (Mizoguchi, *China as Method* 3). It then however doesn’t escape from the advance-backward scheme produced by the monistic western worldview. Moreover, this viewpoint includes in itself a paradox, which is to say that it is to argue for inheriting a tradition of the Chinese modern as “total negation and cancelation” of traditions, as a tradition of a self-negating subject, who regenerates itself in its very backwardness, finding its paradigm in Zhang Taiyen and Lu Xun. For this reason, it

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intellectuals in Japan. As its modern project got frustrated with Japan losing the second world war and the resistance from China towards the Japanese invasion gave birth to the socialist China, the common view among the intellectuals that see China as backward place was getting reversed. The war responsibility and sense of guilt constitute the reflection on the pursuing of modernization. The bottom-up modernization route became the model. Therefore, for the generation, “the China in [their] mind” is the desiring place. This kind of view got heated in the 50s and 60s at the time of Chinese Cultural Revolution (Mizoguchi, *China as Method*).

cannot grasp the premodern historical traditions. For him, under the very historical perspective that is “anti”-history and “negates” history, Chinese modernity is born from the subject of self-abnegation. Mizoguchi sees this emphasis on the break than the succession and inheritance being more of a Japanese origin. The Chinese modern that “overcomes the modern” is only certain subjective projection in order to provide the criticism of the Western, and, as its follower, the Japanese modernity. This image of China is thus interiorized and given a depth in this self-negating visionary structure with the post-war defeated sentiment. As a consequence, this subject of Asianism which is anti-modernism and against the modernist drive of “breaking away from Asia” turns out to be a subject that is thin and frail. Therefore it is important to develop some “objective” understanding of China, the *imago* for third world socialists. Mizoguchi’s work is thus also important in its way to engage in a history of the rural China. With his critique of the self-projective view on cultural revolution, in his work, for example, he tries to see how the conception of “*Da-tong*” (Great Harmony; 大同) persists through the internal modernization process of China since the 16th century and how it has been re-articulated again and again in those social reforms and revolution. The socialist thoughts and practices therein are enabled and, at the same time, limited by this kind of historical ideas. It could be said that, for Mizoguchi, it is to find a path to escape the self-referenced enclosed circle of modernity overcoming

itself. He thus argues for a space to look into the pre-modern as a sort of what he called “base-entity (基體; *kitai*)<sup>10</sup>”, as opposed to a lack or a naught, for the history to unfold itself and the modern to take place. The substratum is not an entity but a configuration of internal dynamics of history, a fictitious image that emerges between a set of things in inductive reasoning. For him, there was “something” rather than nothing for one to free oneself and risk “entering into history empty-handed” to find out the internal organic correlation (Mizoguchi, *China as Method*). China, thus is not a nation or a geographical entity; it is the name for this base-entity, the internal mechanism of the dynamics. He argues to see the “deflection and unfolding” of concepts in the pre-modern between a series of thoughts and events. He is careful enough to see that the pre-modern always presupposed the modern. There is always a superimposition of concepts. One can therefore juxtapose two adjacent concepts of the modern, usually a translation taken from the West, and the pre-modern, both of which usually being seen as the equivalent of each other, but this time one tries to see the modern one through the pre-modern one. In *China as Method*, he discusses what contains in the idea of “*guomin*(國民; lit. tr. national citizen)”and its corresponding

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<sup>10</sup> It’s difficult to translate the term *kitai*(基體), as the word 體 is really fraught in the history of Chinese philosophical thoughts, especially in the dual of *ti*(體) and *yong*(用), which at time people would think in terms of essence and appearance. Here I follow the prevalent translation in the inter-Asia circle. The entity here could be misleading to be a geographical entity. However one could perhaps think of the etymological root of entity from “esse”.

idea of the “*guojia* (國家; lit. tr. nation-state) in the modern Chinese political thoughts, always contains within them the pre-modern idea of *shengmin* (生民; lit. tr. living folk) and its corresponding idea of *tianxia* (天下; lit. tr. under the heaven), which carry a sense of cosmopolitanism that goes beyond the scope of modern nation-state. For him, to enter history, to grasp the internal dynamics that unfold on the base-entity is to carve out a route of alternate modernity, which is free for its own thought. This is what he calls “free Sinology”. In his sense, Takeuchi is too immersed in China. Asia as method thus has China as the *Telos*. But for him “China as method” is toward “the world as the end” (130). The goal is to produce a pluralistic view of the world (Mizoguchi, *China as Method*).

However, what Mizoguchi has perhaps missed is that if one takes Takeuchi’s admonition seriously, there is no such transcendent vantage point where one sees the plural developments of cultural differences as if one is watching a racecourse. This abstraction will be a refusal to enter history, which springs out only from that singular point of limit. However, his earlier treatise on the transitional moment of the idea of nature, the relation between the idea of *tian-li*(天理; the heavenly law) and *ren-yu*(人欲 ; human desire) in the Confucianist thoughts also dwells a negative moment(Mizoguchi, *Deflection and Unfolding*). The project is to trace the prehistory of the rural land revolution, which he sees as the core of Chinese modernity. But it

sees the incipient moment of this modern in an experience of the negative and hinges the whole analysis on a marginal and paradoxical figure within the Li Zhuo-wu(1527-1602). At the moment, while externally the rural social order was in its crisis with the emerging estate of land owners as commoners(*min*; 民), the thought was also experienced as crisis for Li for him to dwell on a notion of thought as the groundless limit point (*bu-rong-yi*; 不容已) and as an “absolute state of hunger” where the self is experienced as a void. The base-entity (*kitai*) as nature(*zi-ran*; 自然; as self-being, whence-being, as-such-of-itself) is not seen as identity. In the book the first chapter starts with the story of Li Zhuo-wu’s experience of hunger on his exiling trip to the north, where he couldn’t distinguish the northern millet and wheat from the southern rice and sorghum. There is no allowance to choose in this extreme state of hunger (*Deflection and Unfolding* 111–15). It is however the prey of seeking cultural differences with the semblable other that he could not escape and sees the difference in the abstract positive contents.

However, Mizoguchi’s later comparative method seems to be more influential at this juncture, especially in contemporary China, where particularity seems to reclaim its priority, for it seems to legitimate the concepts in its autochthony and its potential being a new *nomos* of the earth. In Wang Hui’s seminal work on the rise of modern Chinese thought, he basically follows a similar argument about the internal Confucian

perspective with the juxtaposition of two concepts(H. Wang, *The Rise*). While he argues for overcoming the dualism and seeing the complexity of the historical route, what appears to be an undecidable situation of “no path to follow” in effect becomes a doubled alibi. The seeming undecidability between the nation-state and empire becomes the double alibi for “the restoration of the power of the state”(if one can borrow Mizoguchi’s words here). It gives legitimate grounds to the actual Chinese state and shies from furnishing the concepts for the critique. The ruse of history has made those “methods” that start from a self-critique in Japan be imported to China as a substantial value within a certain cultural identity.

### **Transference in the Inter-Asia Encounters**

I would however like to dwell with a moment in Chen Kaun-Hsing’s *Asia as Method*, which illuminates the affective dimension in the inter-Asia thought encounter. I wish to draw attention to the Chinese word for “shift” in the phrase “shifting the framework of reference” used in the Chinese version of the book, *Qu-Di-Guo*(去帝國; *De-Imperialization*), *zhuan-yi* (轉移), which is often used to translate the word “transference”, loaded with a psychoanalytic meaning. It is precisely this double inscription of meaning on the phrase *zhuan-yi* that marks out an affective dimension of this shifting or transferring of the knowledge framework (K.-H. Chen, *De-Imperialization*). The double meaning of the term *zhuan-yi* is perhaps not a co-

incident. In fact, the psychoanalytic perspective has never been foreign to Chen's *Asia as Method*. In the preface of the Chinese version *De-Imperialisation*, in setting forth the nodal problematics of the book—i.e. the triad movement of de-colonisation, de-cold war, and de-imperialisation, which has the imagined Asia to mediate its operating locus—Chen says that the emergence of the problematics is “not purely from theoretical thinking, but rather entangled with the trace compressed and marked on the body and concerned with transcending the psychic suffering and desire, which simply put, is the question of subjectivity”(ibid: iv). Therefore, from the outset, it is a project for suturing and transforming the traumatized subjectivity in third-world history. Here I do not wish to digress into all the discussion and debates on transference in the psychoanalytic literature. However, I would like to briefly mention that transference has always been about the shift, the displacement and substitution in the signifying chain<sup>11</sup>. To say transference, one also enters the space of metaphoricity.

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<sup>11</sup> When the founder of psychoanalysis Sigmund Freud first used the German word for transference, *Übertragung*, in his earliest scientific project for the psychic system based on a neurological model, he talks about the displacement of train-of-thought as “cathexis transference from neuron to neuron”, which later Lacan would read as a chain of signifiers, and then in *Interpretation of Dreams*, he use the same word to refers to the dream-work process where the indecipherable dream-thoughts and repressed desire hooks upon the residue of the previous day thoughts in the preconscious (Freud, “Project”; Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*). As the word *Übertragung* indicates, it is always a carry-over of a certain repressed memory of the past. Later when he encountered a peculiar and enigmatic phenomenon that obstructed the psychoanalytic treatment, where the patient takes the physician as his/her object of emotions. Whether affectionate or hostile, it is peculiar that it is always marked by an excess. He also called this phenomenon “transference”. He realized that it is always when the association comes close to core of the pathogenic complex the transference happens as resistance to

To expound on the double inscription implicated in Chen Kuan-Hsing's idea of *zhuangyi* (shift [of reference]/transference), I will briefly mention two moments in Takeuchi Yoshimi's "Asia as Method" and Mizoguchi Yuzo's *China as Method*, the two important references in his work. At the end of the lecture on 'Asia as Method', Takeuchi brought up the question that he would like the audience to think about: If European modernity and universality are founded on the colonization and exploitation of Asia and Africa, which is based on the fundamental scheme of the West aggressing on the East, then how does the Orient, in its rollback of the culture and values, re-embrace the West and change the West itself for the universality to be surpassed by itself? He ended the lecture with the following sentence:

When the rollback takes place, one must have something of its own. But if one wants to say what it is, this thing perhaps does not exist, in any substantive form. But as a method, which is also to say *as a process of the subject formation*, it is possible that it does exist.

I have given it the title "Asia as method". However, even for me, it is impossible to define what it actually is (Takeuchi, "Asia as Method" 250 emphasis added).

Here Takeuchi does not take Asia as the opposite of the West. He still uses the Orient

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avoid the recognition. The transference is itself a piece of repetition, and the repetition is a transference of the forgotten past. It constitutes the greatest difficulties in the treatment, but it is also most invaluable as it makes manifest and actual the forgotten and buried past (Freud, "Remembering, Repeating, Working-Through"; Freud, "Dynamics of Transference").

and the West when he talks about the correlative opposite. In the rollback of the Orient and its subjectification, there has to be “something of its own”. But it does not exist as any substance or entity. Therefore, Asia here is not any entity or objective existence. It only exists as a method, as *mediation*. “Asia” only exists as the object of transference for the retreating and disappearing Orient, which in its obscurity and imbecile can never exist as itself. Perhaps one can return to what is inscribed in its etymological root, *Asu*, where the sun rises. It is only the darkness of the earth that disappears after the sun rises. Asia, perhaps, only exists as a metaphoric substitution for the *negative object* that is forever lost in entering modernity. In the space of transference, perhaps the idea of Asia would always work as a failed metaphor.

If Takeuchi’s idea of Asia marks a negative moment in the trajectory, Mizoguchi, as someone who inherits his legacy and thus critiques his idea, sees a positive aspect of the method. His own agenda is to break away from this singular perspective that despite its inhabiting the position of “non”-Europe still takes Europe as the singular reference point. Instead, he wants to sufficiently investigate the Chinese and Japanese moderns as respective entities that are inevitably “hetero-European” without any choices. As he says in *China as Method*,

China’s modern is a result of its own pre-modern ‘*mǔtǐ*’ [mother’s body, matrix, or originating basis]; therefore, it imminently inherits the historical specificities of the pre-

modern . . . From the very beginning, China did not have the tendency of the European modern type. This is not a ‘lack’ or ‘blankness,’ but a *necessary substance*(*chong-shi*, 充實). Because of the inheritance of this substance, it *will have to be* (*bu-de-bu*, 不得不) conditioned by the *mǔtǐ*” (Mizoguchi; quoted from K.-H. Chen, *Asia as Method* 248 emphasis and Chinese translation added).

In this passage on the pre-modern *muti*(母體; matrix/maternal body), the wording of the Chinese translation of the term “substance” there is *chong-shi* (充實), which also means fulness, filling up, plentitude, or even positivity, which concerns the presence rather than the negative absence. In another version of the Chinese translation, instead of “*necessary* fulness/plentitude”, it says “*irrepressible* fulness/plentitude” (Mizoguchi, *China as Method* 11). What is concerning here is what is always full and in excess. To add a marginal note, instead of *muti* (the maternal body, the matrix), there the two places are respectively translated as *mutai*(the maternal placenta) and *muban* (the birthmark, the mother’s mark) (*China as Method* 11). If we take the trope of placenta and birthmark seriously, then our modern subjectivities are always marked by the pre-modern matrix/maternal body which is once a part of us as the placenta but fallen from us as an object lost. We experience this matrix only as the inevitable presence and irrepressible excess in those most perplexing questions that plague us

which concerns the *dis-ease* of our modern experience<sup>12</sup>. It is through the inter-referencing, *inter-re-ferre*, we perhaps carry back in this space a new understanding of it. If this “fulness/plentitude” is not those comparable categories under the positivist or empiricist abstraction, then perhaps the negative experience that Takeuchi dwells with is precisely what Mizoguchi tries to capture in his theory of *kitai* (基體; ground-  
entity)—the very traces that are left on us inevitably by our most intimate and the most estranged pre-modern matrix/maternal body for which we turn inside out to search empty-handed.

The thesis treads the path of *Asia as mehod*. It works in this space of transference. The shift of reference happens not by taking India as an object of comparative study but, as mentioned earlier, by taking it as its conceptual milieu and habitat. In its content, the thesis actually sees a partly ostensive and partly lurking thread of the idea of Asia in its analysis. If Chapter 2 is ostensive about two cases of “transference” in the inter-Asia encounters, Chapters 3 and 4 see a thread idea of Asia in the Sino-Japanese wartime thinking. Chapter 4 also sees a longer historical span of the encounter of thoughts in the East-Asian and Indic language-thoughts. Chapter 1 sees an inter-referencing between two scholars from two localities.

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<sup>12</sup> What prompts Mizoguchi to think China as Method is actually the troubling question of the blunders and frustration of the experience of Cultural Revolution.



## Chapter 1: The Wind

Touch my sail with your fresh gush of wind,

break my anchor –

I do not even regret if I sink.

Morning has slipped away in vain;

the evening seems to follow,

Please do not restrict me near the shore.

I keep myself awake through the night looking for the boatman,

The waves toying with me every now and then.

I wish to make friends with the storm,

never be terrorised with,

Leave me alone, O dear,

I am comforted if I catch wind.

--Rabindranath Tagore, "*tomar khola hawa*"

To be sensuous, that is, to be really existing,  
means to be an object of sense, to be a sensuous object,  
to have sensuous objects outside oneself  
—objects of one's sensuousness.

To be sensuous is to *suffer*.

Man as an objective, sensuous being is  
therefore a *suffering* being [*leidendes*]  
--and because he feels his suffering [*Leiden*],  
a *passionate* being [*ein leidenschaftliches Wesen*].

Passion is the essential power of man

energetically bent on its object.

----Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*

The wind is what moves and stirs up (things)<sup>13</sup>. The trope of wind is prevalent in our everyday usage of the Chinese word *feng* (風; wind or air), as the (literary and art) style, ways and methods, the timely trend and tendency, customs and habits. From the very early literary exegetical tradition, the semantic equivocality of the word *feng* stands for a series of meta-phoric transference: it is at once the poetry of folk songs, the suasion, the eduction and education, the suasive transformation of the world (from top to below as the customary transformation and from below to top as the innuendo that pierces into the governing power (*fengci*; 諷刺)), and the ethos and mores of the community that are being transformed<sup>14</sup>. In medical terms, it is the maladies of both the body (*feng*; 風; cold) and mind (*feng*; 瘋; madness) that are part of the pervasive weather and atmosphere (Lam; Van Zoeren). Thus the topoi of the wind traverse what is interior and exterior, what is affecting and what is being affected, the affective and the affect.

In this chapter, the wind provides the trope that moves and turns around the long-standing tension between literature and history in the vocation of literary

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<sup>13</sup> Kangxi dictionary “Feng is what moves myriad things”

<sup>14</sup> For the polysemy of *feng* in the succinct ‘Great Preface’ to the *Book of Songs*, I will quote the paragraph from Lam Ling Hon, “In the Han exegesis, *feng* is at once (1) poetry that winds give rise to (hence a major poetic genre called *feng* or “Airs”), (2) the oral delivery (variably written as *feng* 諷) by which poetry is transported, (3) the practical functions of political admonition (*feng ci* 諷刺) and custom transformation (*feng jiao* 風教 or *feng hua* 風化) that poetry carries out, and (4) the ethos (*feng su* 風俗) that poetry edifies and transforms”(Lam 23).

criticisms that inhabits this very crisis in thinking of a kind of literary modernity. I read the tension in the works of two contemporary literary critics, Kojin Karatani and David Der-wei Wang. I first read the trope of landscape (*fugei*; 風景) in Karatani. While landscape is this seemingly permanent object existing out there, etymological research indicates that 風景(*fengjing/fugei*) as the state or the physiognomy is also often related to a sense of the by and large situation of a time or a country<sup>15</sup>. Both the characters suggest a fleeting, momentary, ever-changing and elusive condition, perhaps as Karatani shows us that the existence of what we see as literature is never self-evident but contingent and momentary. Then I read the trope of wind(*feng*) in which stands for the concept of *qing*(情; affect/fact) in Wang's work by which he tries to reconcile literature and history, the interior and the exterior.

### **The Inverted Landscape**

In Kojin Karatani's seminal work *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature*, "The Discovery of Landscape" is placed as the opening chapter to analyse and, moreover, to figure these origins. In his genealogical view, the origin is always a "perspectival

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<sup>15</sup> Here it is difficult to use the Latin alphabets to denote the morphemes, for the Kanji or Chinese character have different possibilities in its pronunciation. For example, 風 could be read in Japanese as *kaze* however in the *Kanji* compound 風景 or 風物 it is read as *fu*. In the standardized modern Chinese language, it is read as *feng*. However, seeing the characters, people from different provincial areas can use their colloquial language to read the same characters. However, here is where we try to enter the polysemic and polyphonic world that is often time retained in one's vision in the translation process.

inversion”, which is to say, the origin always contains within it an inversion, by which something that had never existed before came to be seen as self-evident and as something “out there” preceded the inversion. The origins thus immediately get eradicated and concealed as soon as the epistemological constellation is produced. Therefore, what Karatani means by the origins of modern Japanese literature is by no means marking a certain point or event in time as the beginning of a period for literary history in a linear perspective but that the existence of (Japanese) national literature (*kokubungaku*) as such is instituted by a modern epistemological constellation which effaced its origins. This is what he calls “landscape”(風景; *fugei*):

What I am referring to as “landscape” is an epistemological constellation, the origins of which were suppressed as soon as it was produced. It is a constellation which appeared in nascent form in the literary trend of realism in the 1890s(Karatani, *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature* 21).

It is for this reason that Karatani made his analysis mainly focusing on the literature from the Meiji period, or say, in a term that he hesitantly used for the historicism insinuated in it, the “transitional” period of early modern, where a perspective inversion took place to render the discovery of landscape possible. He uses painting as a metaphor to talk about this inversion, which produces the effect of being “real” in this trend of realism. It depends on the specific kind of modern linear perspectival

configuration, which is an inversion of, thus also conditioned by, the medieval perspective. It is actually not the bodily perception but rather a drafting, a technique of projection, by which a certain effect of the “real” is produced. This drafting as *techne* is then prior to and what *makes* our bodily perception. Thus, it is also in this Meiji period that the *description* of the rural landscape as something real and out there *substituted* and, as a sort of hindsight, made equivalent the earlier writings of *jokei* (叙景; compositions about places), which is written within totally another epistemological constellation that is retroactively called *Kanbungaku* (漢文學; Classical Chinese literature). However, what is with the cases of the pre-modern writings of *jokei* is that, where we the modern people find them describing the landscape, they did not really see the landscape; instead, what they saw was a preexisting text. The place (*basho*; 場所) was never a certain landscape or position that exists out there in the three-dimensional space but certain transcendental concepts (Karatani, *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature*). It is therefore in saying that the description of the landscape is a substitute for the earlier *jokei*, in this substitution, the substitute comes before the substituted. *Kanbungaku* was only objectified as *Kanbungaku* with the categories of the consciousness of Western modern “literature”; *jokei* can only appear to be the description of landscape within the apparatus of the landscape. The discovery is always at the same time a cover,

which is also to say it is the very look that make the vanishing of what was there. Therefore, by the inversion contained in this origin, a linear history of “Japanese literature” can be written retroactively, as a long native tradition of writing of the landscape. The origins of modern Japanese literature thus are nothing but this “perspectival inversion” in which the imagery of literary history grafted on a vanishing point is projected from the inner life of the subject. One can see that there are two processes happening within this transformation, which Karatani seem to constantly draw a parallel to. One is the Japanese discovery of “landscape”, and the other is the emergence of Japanese literary “history”. On the one hand, spatiality is extended from the modern episteme to see a distant landscape being out there; on the other hand, time is inverted in a violent distortion to project a history.

This origin, in his own line of Freudian analysis, could be seen as an “introjection”, the withdrawal of the libido that turns inward from the lost object. If one goes back to the lines where he historicizes “modern Japanese literature” in toto, it says that,

To speak in Freudian terms, the libido which was once directed toward the People's Rights movement and the writing of political novels *lost its object* and was redirected inward, at which point "landscape" and "the inner life" appeared (Karatani, *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature* 39).

It is a complete inward retreat after a failed, or in fact stillborn, political revolution. It is at this point that the landscape and the inner life appear. The analysis is tantamount to the narcissistic regression in the melancholic structure. What is left here is the interior landscape, perhaps a narcissistic specular image, which takes on the appearance of an “object”.

If one still remembers the origin of *Origins*, which is still a response, a return, in its inhabitation of the Marxian problematic in being a literary critic, to the haunting debates in the 1930s, between naturalism, romanticism, the proletariat literature, a problem being raised once again and again in different forms, one can sense *Origins* being a critique of the historicity of the debate itself, if allow me to put in the words—i.e. the historical limit of Japanese romantics in its broader sense. For if the In this sense, it is not possible to give way to any historicism to launch a history of progressive development of romanticism, gradually marching from subjective inner experience to an objective consciousness of the external world. The distinction of the genres “romanticism” and “realism” is not as important as what they actually share in this historicity. It is conditioned by the *genbun itchi* movement which is a semiotic constellation that gives rise to the inner subject and projects out the landscape. Even in this quest of the “real world”, what we see as “real” is already an internal landscape, which is to say, self-consciousness. It is only before the “inner man” that

the people in the landscape, at the same time and more importantly, as being people-as-landscape, are to be discovered, no matter the image of “the proletariat” in the case of Japanese Marxist or the anti-romantic image of “sturdy survivors” in the case of the critic Kobayashi Hideo. The 1930s critique of the interiority and persistent attempt to reach out to the “external world”, as what Kobayashi called “shatter[ing] the sphere of self-consciousness”, ends up being a recuperation of a kind of interiority. The proletariat, the mass, the people are always an “image”(Karatani, *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature* 34).

What is the origin of this image of the people (*min*; 民) ? Karatani discusses how the term *jomin* (“common and abiding folk”), as an ever-existing landscape to be discovered, was used by the earliest Japanese folklorist Yanagita Kunio in the early Showa period in the institution of the “folklore” to replace the earlier term *heimin*(commoners) and *nomin* (farmer), which had a very specific referent to denote certain groups, or say castes, during the Meiji time. One can go on to say that, in this transformation, a certain “ordinariness” of the people is established in the sense that “the ordinary” has inverted the *ordinarius* as “the orderly” and “the people” has inverted the *populus* as and *persona* as being a mask, an actor, or a character in a play. The ordinary people—the “insignificant ones” to whom one is indifferent now inverted to be the “significant ones” in the writing just as the natural scenes that used

to be the background now comes to the front to be the landscape to be seen in its beauty—are revealed of its true “nature” in its “ordinariness”. People emerge as the landscape in this inversion. The “ordinariness” is thus a product of a negative structure. Here, an abstract and general universal sense of “the people” is produced in writing on the “insignificant ones”, which provides the base for the then-emerging modern nation-state. The seemingly anti-modern motives in the romantic moves from its very beginning cannot but fall within the very modern constellation.

In Karatani’s later work, even when modern Japanese literature has come to its end, the landscape does not disappear. What persists in the landscape is the ironic-consciousness. It is the reflective disjunction, in the sense of *dédoublment*, where the subject is split to the I as the subject, which finds a distance from the empirical self that is immersed in the world. Karatani cites Schlegel’s idea of romantic irony, “[i]n irony, everything should be playful and everything serious, everything naively exposed and everything deeply disguised”(Schlegel, quoted from 128). His understanding of romantic irony is closer to Hegel, “its form is that of subjective emptiness [Eitelkeit], in that it knows itself as this emptiness of all content and, in this knowledge, knows itself as the absolute”(Hegel 182). It is the subject that empties itself of all contents and refuses to enter history. For Karatani, the landscape thus persists through from the beginning of the modern literature in Japan. At the

very beginning, when Kunikida Doppo wrote “Those Unforgettable People [Wasureenu hitobito, 1898]”, Doppo sees the people as landscape. “Those unforgettable people” are mere internal landscape eradicated with proper names. It is forgetfulness through remembering. Even at its very end, with the pastiche and parodies in the works of Hiraki Murakami, the landscape only comes to its fullness. Those in-the-moment landscapes are merely signs in an arbitrary differential system. It is a jubilant moment for the transcendental self. The landscape as the romantic imagery is at expense of the real landscape(Karatani, *History and Repetition*).

### Literature “as” Landscape

But how does one understand this recurrent trope in his work, written like a formula, “literature *as* landscape”<sup>16</sup>? The equivocal meanings of the equation seem to incur certain disquietude, especially when the effort is seen in the English translation to render certain univocity and transparency to the text <sup>17</sup>. The disquietude is manifested in a paragraph from the translator Brett de Bary’s Introduction to the book to indicate the metonymic sliding as a failure in its conceptual rigour:

...[Karatani’s] concept of modernity itself, is blurred by his failure to rigorously

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<sup>16</sup> In the Chinese translation, it is written in an equation form “literature=landscape (“文學”= “風景”)” (Karatani, *Ri ben xian dai wen xue de qi yuan [Origins of Modern Japanese Literature]* 日本现代文学的起源9).

<sup>17</sup> In the English translation, the formulation is always translated as “literature as landscape”.

delineate the multiple and overlapping concepts of “landscape,” “literature,” “epistemological constellation,” “system,” and “écriture,” used prominently and in varying contexts within the book. At some points, Karatani appears to equate Japanese modernity *in toto* with what he calls “landscape” as an “epistemological constellation” (*kigoronteki na fuchi*). It is impossible not to see resemblances between this concept and that of the Foucauldian *episteme*, although Karatani rigorously (and, for reasons that in themselves deserve analysis, quite sensibly) avoids wholesale “application” of this term within his argument(de Bary).

de Bary’s criticism has brought the question to the foreground: why are there these constant slippages between the concepts of “landscape”, “ literature”, and “epistemological constellation”? Why is the trope of “landscape” constantly being used instead of a more rigorous concept like *episteme*? Is the shifting between the figure of language and the analytical concepts simply a failure in providing a clear and distinct conceptual framing? Why does Karatani seem to insist on equating Japanese modernity *in toto* with the recurrent word “landscape”? Where is then the concept of modernity itself? It is perhaps this criticism by De Bary, as the one who renders this work into the English language, which opens a possibility to enter the difficult methodological paths undertaken by Karatani. In one of the passages he explicates what he describes as landscape and its origin:

Once a landscape has been established, its origins are repressed from memory. It takes on the appearance of an “object” which has been there, outside us, from the start. An “object,” however, can only be constituted *within a landscape*. The same may be said of the “subject” or self. The philosophical standpoint which distinguishes between subject and object came into existence within what I refer to as “landscape”. Rather than existing prior to landscape, subject and object emerge from within it (Karatani, *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature* 34 emphasis added).

In the passage there seem to be two different movements that go against each other. In the first part of the movement in the passage, a landscape is originated, taking the appearance, the semblance of a natural object that has been out there for the subject. However in the second movement, the landscape “had been there” even prior to the existence of the object and the subject. It seems to be the condition, the place, wherein the subject and the object came into existence. The landscape not only refers to the “object”, as something the subject sees out there through his representation produced in this epistemological constellation. Landscape here is not only the product, but it is at the same the condition of the production, the horizon *within* which the subject and object came into existence. In this ambiguous paragraph, it is almost saying that landscape can only be constituted in landscape. Landscape is not

only what is being objectified with this epistemological constellation, thus getting written as the eternal natural existence in the modern literature and found its equivalence in the premodern writings. It is also more than the metaphor for “literature”, which has been originated and effaced its own origin. Landscape seems to be the *episteme* itself. It also seems to be a historical horizon for things to appear. Landscape than appears to be the central concept of the whole project. If one reads *Origins* for its architectonic edifice, it is clear that the first chapter ‘the discovery of landscape’ has a different place from the rest of the chapters. All the chapters include different themes and problematic that emerge in the institution of the modern Japanese literature, including the notions confession, interiority, child, and construction etc. Landscape is one of the particular objects that is rendered possible and seen by the modern literature regime. However it is also the trope, or to use Karatani’s own words, the “allegorical representation”, or one may say the “representative representation”, of the whole modern epistemological constellation-- i.e. an interiority. It is part standing for the whole. Landscape is, therefore, a synecdoche. It is the foundation for the whole edifice to stand on. It cannot be a solid foundation. It is something that is undecided between the inside and outside of enclosure of the theoretical building. Perhaps one could say that the landscape

function as something that is hidden in the etymological root—the land-*scape*, the peduncle that arises at and at the same time hides beneath the surface of the ground.

In the Japanese version of the book, the word that is translated into “landscape” is “*Fugei*”(風景), written in Kanji. There is a multiple translation that is worthy of notice involved in this process. On the one hand, *Fugei* was the word used to translate the French word *paysage* and the English word “landscape” in Japan’s exposure to the Western painting. The birth of landscape within the drafting skill is perhaps even clearer in this French word *paysage* —.i.e. the area of a region(country) that can be measured within a sight. In the etymological roots of both the morpheme of *pays* and the suffix of -age, one might detect a sense of “envisioning a country”. In this sense, *Fugei* in the “discovery of landscape” is totally a modern product that effaced its origin. On the other hand, *Fugei* in its *Kanji* is a compound word taken from the *Kanbungaku*, where Soseki in Karatani’s words in his stubborn attachment still seeks a world beyond, in which “the meaning of writing was polysemic and radial”(69). One could perhaps stays with the morphemes in the compound word for a while. According to the Chinese dictionaries, one can find earlier usage of 風景 between third to fifth century indicating the character and integrity of a person. At least since thirteen century, it was used to indicate a situation or a state at the moment. As early as sixth century, it has been also used to be an umbrella relating to

the natural scenery, such as “mountain, water, birds, and flowers”. One has to however notice what has been repetitively told by Karatani that this categorization of meanings has already involved an inversion. What was there about “mountain, water, birds, and flowers” the maybe nothing about the “natural things out there” but a set of concepts within a moral or cosmological universe. If one carefully looks at these example, 風景 as the physiognomy or as the situation is also often related to a sense of the by and large situation of a time or a country or a sense of heroic fortune in the tumult. There is always a temporal sensibility in the expression. Moreover, the compound “江山 (river-mountain)” or “山河 (mountain-river)” in its always coupling of the river and the mountain in its concept is not rivers and mountains as such, it always already contains in its universe a sense of “the country” or “the territory” that is in turmoil. However, this look also involved a inversion from our sights in midst of the modern nation state to look at the possible meaning of “the country”. It is not within one’s reach or my intention here to derive at the lost meanings of the compound 風景 in its earlier usage. However one would sense in its the linguistic root, 風景 is something close to the condition, to the horizon, or to a certain historicity itself. If one looks at the two morphemes separately, the first morpheme 風 has several possible meanings and pronunciations. As indicated earlier, it has been refers to wind or breeze; manners, ways, or methods; pretension

or appearance; trends or the tendencies; customs and habits; folklores classified in the compilation of *Shijing* (Book of Song)...and so on. One could perhaps read in it rather a fleeting, momentary, and ever-changing condition than the eternal existing landscape. Here one could perhaps be reminded of the work of Watsuji Tesuro's *Fudo* (風土; *Climate and Culture*), which is an attempt to ask the phenomenological question in its grasping of the neglected spatiality question in Heidegger's famous work *Being and Time* in its overemphasis of the temporality question. It is in the climate that we grasp our own being. 景 (read in modern standardized Chinese as *Jing*) can be translated to refer to an image, the shadow, the light, or the grandness. What is possibly sedimented in the language as the remaining sight, or, more than that, as the trace of the pre-condition of a site, still endures in the insistent appearance of the signifier itself. It could be said to be pointing to the temporal and spatial condition that we grasp our temporality and spatiality. In the language itself, the exterior is already built in the interior. It is where the outside turns in the and insides turns out. Is it a possible way that Karatani opens for his formulation: literature=風景 (landscape)?

de Bary's doubt however remains, why does Karatani holds onto the figural language of "landscape" in the midst of all his theoretical orientation? Perhaps his acknowledgement of the encounter with Paul de Man gives us an inkling of the

answer. In the Afterword to the Japanese edition, in his memory of his acquaintanceship with de Man, Karatani mentioned there was something striking in de Man , which was a dark awareness that “the nature of the human condition was existence in language” (Karatani, *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature* 187). The epistemological constellation is always a semiotic constellation that precedes the standpoint that separates the subject and the object. The experience of a shared “dark hue” in the awareness of one’s existence in language tells how the trope is inevitable and links to an interpretative crisis of self-referentiality. Interpretation is always in peril of the loss of meaning, where the reference is always in question. Nevertheless, it is less about a general theory about language but rather than the ethical agony in grappling with the solipsism of self-referentiality. For Karatani, the literary device of allegorical writing, which always points to elsewhere, at its best, exposes the disavowal of the symbolic thought and the unbridgeable gap with perhaps an irretrievable past<sup>18</sup>. This entails a constant experience of finitude.

Three decades after *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature*, Kojin Karatani writes in the preface of the republished Japanese version that often one is aware of the origin of something only when it is about to end. When he was writing the book in the late 70s and 80s, he had sensed a certain end of the modern Japanese literature but did not

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<sup>18</sup> See his analysis of Oe Kenzaburo (Karatani, *History and Repetition*).

give a full thought of it. At that time he saw the emergence of a kind of Renaissance literature, in the sense that the sudden appearance of a varieties of genres, wordplay, pastiche, satire and so on, which had been repressed by the modern canons. But this renaissance was a short-lived one. It did not flourish further to produce a new force. On the contrary, it soon underwent a rapid decline. By the 90s, literature started to lose all its social and intellectual impact<sup>19</sup>. From the hindsight, it was perhaps a turn-about and transvaluation which is a perspective from the “end”. There one sees the effort to overcome the self-destruction of the norm which is under the working of capitalism. In another place, Karatani sees this end as the Oedipal motif of the modern subjectivity—the subject which internalized the father’s repression—dissolves with the father worthy of being killed died himself before the patricide(Karatani)<sup>20</sup>. To look retroactively, like the beautiful soul which contributes its own downfall, Karatani’s criticism goes with end day of the age of literature(-cum-nationalism). He said that he did not know that his criticism was only a part of the force of that history. When he revisited his own work, what struck him were the words that escaped him thirties years ago in his own long quotation of Natsume Soseki, whose thought he inhabits in casting the doubt on the self-evident nature of literature, where in probing into the origin, Soseki is already thinking of the “decadence” and “withering away” of

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<sup>19</sup> 柄谷行人. 日本文學の起源; Karantani, Kojin. 2008. Rethinking Seseki’s Theory.

<sup>20</sup> Karatani, Kōjin. 2012. *History and Repetition*. Trans. Seiji M. Lippit. New York: Columbia University Press.

literature. The prescience of the end is already in the beginning. For Karatani, this reconsidering of the end is his last obligation to literature as if writing the last will and testament. He has bid his farewell with such words,

Modern literature is not ever-lasting. But even if it could only persist for a short time, the meaning and significance of its existence will not disappear. On the contrary, a time will come, when people will be aware of the once existence of such a thing with unbelievable wonder and at the same time feel fascinated about it.[...] Now I have such a hunch!<sup>21</sup>

This is perhaps the humor of *haiku*, to use Karatani's own analysis, where "*the superego (adult) encourages the suffering ego (child) by urging it to ignore its pain, as if that pain were petty and negligible.*"<sup>22</sup> The end is painful loss. However this painful feeling of the end is perhaps not particular only to Japan. Not only a crisis of discipline but the loss of historical momentum and exigency of literature in our time is not only a particular experience.

### **Theory as an Ascetic Modality after the Violence**

It is perhaps important to mention the intellectual trajectory that Karatani takes after finishing this project. He has lost his interest in literature. He sees his endeavor in the

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<sup>21</sup> 柄谷行人, p.11.

<sup>22</sup> Karatani. 2008, p.11.

ruse of history being part of the force that put to an end the regime of “modern Japanese literature“ in accordance with seeing the ending time of the hey days of nation state. In the course of writing, he is increasingly being skeptical of turning to literature after a failed political revolution, including what he sees in the post-1968 intellectual orientation in France as involving certain kind of textual idealism. For him, it is another turn that in the end still returns to the “interiority” that he is critiquing through the project (Karatani, “Rethinking Sōseki’s Theory”; Karatani, *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature*). If one were to seek for a possibility of breaking through this “inside”, it has to be a critique on the main “architecture” instead of the substitute “textuality” that is easily maneuverable. His works take a theoretical turn on Kant and Marx, the metaphor of architecture in western philosophy, and the ambitious work on the “origin” of philosophy (Karatani, *Architecture as Metaphor*; Karatani, *Transcritique*; Karatani, *Isonomia and the Origins of Philosophy*). If one were to use Marx’s formula on the urban/rural relation in his discussion in his writing on the pre-capitalist economic formation, if the interiorization in literature can be figured upon the modern process of “urbanization of the countryside”, Karatani’s engagement with the theories could be “the ruralization of the city” in the Greek city state, where one sees a return to the “classical time”.

After finishing the *Origins*, Karatani almost renounces the vocation of literature and turns towards, as it were, “theory”, or to be more precise, certain formalization. For the reason to not fall back to another version of interiority, he is careful in his persistence with a rigorous formalization that exhausts formalism to its limit, where *Naturwüchsigkeit*<sup>23</sup> as becoming is first to be formally demonstrated as a self-referential differential system which can never find its ground. The dehiscent nature of the self-referential formal system inevitably leads to undecidability. What remains the final trace of the “naturalness”, *Naturwüchsigkeit*, which does not accede to “the will to architecture”, to use his own words, perhaps could only be seen in the crisis, as something approximate to certain eventuality.<sup>24</sup> Karatani is however feeling trapped in the course of the internal critique of the self-referential structure. It is still the “exteriority” that he seeks to work through. The quest persists in his later work where he tries to recapture exteriority as “history”, though undecidedly as the periodic violent crisis as repetition compulsion that is immanent in the structure or the nonrepeatable historicity of the singular event. Finally in Marx writings, he sees in the way Marx looks at history as natural history, or in a sense becoming, there is

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<sup>23</sup> Karatani, remaining a secular critic, follows Marx to use the word *Naturwüchsigkeit*, instead of the word that is often used by Rosa Luxemburg, *Spontanität*, which maintains an implicated deism. (In the etymology, spontaneity has a possible connection to the Latin word, *Spondeo*, *Spend-*“to perform a rite, an offering”.)

<sup>24</sup> See the long discussion in *Architecture as Metaphor* on what is of the “*Naturwüchsigkeit*”.

always the exteriority of “relative other”, a secular other as opposed to an absolute one, in the intercourse (*verkehr*) of sociality, which requires one to take a “leap of faith”(Karatani, *Architecture as Metaphor*).

It is easy for one to see Karatani’s withdraw from the literary critic as only a turn to leave an a-political idealist trend. As some leftist discourse would have it, it is a turn from the textualism to the universal theory and world history. I would however see that there is a deep ascetic modality in Karatani’s “being theoretical”, which is what he sees in Paul de Man in his short friendship with the latter. For Karatani, after the war, de Man’s mode of being *cannot but be* theoretical, as if it is a kind of asceticism. It shows in the way his engagement with the question of romanticism and history. But for Karatani, in finishing the project on Japanese literature, he has already lost his only reader. Like Soseki and de Man, the rigorous formalization is a self-prisoned choice. He is particularly interested in the self-prisoned figure after the violence in Soseki and Oe’s works, which points to a foreclosed past possibility of certain revolutionary Asianism. But if there is an ascetic modality in Karatani’s turn to the theory, then what is it for?

In the After note that Karatani added on to the opening chapter in the English translation of *Origins*, he replaces the formula of landscape in the Kantian language. He then sees the aesthetics, in the Kantian sense, of landscape, not being of an

experience of the beauty but of the sublime. It is accompanied by an event that is not “internal”—the discovery of Hokkaido. It is in the awe of wilderness that renders one to grasp the territory as sublime. What he is trying to critique is the sublime in the inaugural moment of the nation-state and its colonialism. In the afterword to the english edition, Karatani has also stated that this book can be “seen as a transposition of the debate over “Overcoming the Modern”(Karatani, *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature* 191). The original debate in the 30s was an event marking a decisive moment at a time for Japan to engage in world history when the West was also going through a self-critique of their own culture. The event is often seen as the prelude for the intellectuals’ turn to the nation and support the Pacific War. For Karatani, the project of *Origins* in the end is a critique of the nation state. It is, however, a critique from within, which inhabits all the ambivalent moments of the nation-state. Karatani used to say of the Soseki moment that runs through his project being a deep doubt of a belated nature, after the decision has already been made. It is after the violence of nationalism and colonialism that he is in the modality of being theoretical, which is to say that he has witnessed the violence in his literary critic.

In many ways, Karatani is a mourner. One reads the pervasive mournfulness in his works from the initial object-loss that constitutes the landscape of modern Japanese literature, the loss of the enigmatic stranger whom he reckons as his only

reader, and even the transience and passing away of modern Japanese literature whose downfall he contributes as a part. What permeates his writing is a temporal experience of belatedness, or, if one were to use it, *Nachträglichkeit*. There is always a sense of atonement as if it is after certain violence, like his favourite figure of the self-confined man of the Meiji 10s. When theory also turns to be a form of interiority, his decision remains in the space of “criticism,” which puts itself at the border and is always in danger of its own jeopardy.

### **The Wind as Affect/Fact (*Qing*; 情)**

In the latter part of the chapter, I turned to another more recent endeavor of literary and art criticism. David Der-Wei Wang(2015)’s *The Lyrical in Epic Time* is a treatise that seeks to reconcile the tension between literature and history through the idea of the lyrical/*shuqing*(抒情). In his earlier work on realism, seeing a moment of the autochthonic thought in Taiwan that rewrites literary history for the formation of the new nation, he argues that *xiang-tu* (鄉土; literally rural-soil) literature, as opposed to a commonsensical understanding, is a kind of “rootless” literature. The “imagined nostalgia” is not toward the real geographical place, but rather a textual locus. Literature is the original homeland (*yuanxiang*; 原鄉) (D. D. Wang, *Fictional Realism*). The recent 600-page monumental work *The Lyrical* is a treatise on the idea of the lyrical/*shuqing*(抒情) that runs through Chinese modernity as a literary motive,

which stands apart from the other two main motives of revolution and enlightenment. The work is however not about the lyrics but an analysis of a set of literary and art works of the mid-twenty century—the most tumultuous time that sees the Sino-Japanese war, the civil war that led to the divide of the country, the building of the new socialist China and the cultural revolution. By invoking the concept of *qing*(情), which carries the meaning of feeling/sentiment and fact/situation, he sees in this tradition of the lyrical/*shuqing* a poetics of selfhood that reconciles the inner and outer experience. He sees the importance of this motive that stands against the moment of sublime in history(D. D. Wang, *The Lyrical in Epic Time*). However in his attempt to reconcile the inner and outer experience, the way he reads these works in the historical contexts, *qing* retreats as a notion of interiority that is about personal feelings and emotions. Literature thus provides a haven to weather the storm of history. Here I wish to re-read the works of the two important figures in Wang's treatise to see a different possibility to read the work of *qing*.

The late literary scholar Chen Shi-Shiang(1912-1971)'s seminal works perhaps are the most profound treatises on the Chinese lyrical tradition in recent time, which has its base in the meticulous philological works. In his last essay published posthumously, he discussed the concept of time in the Chinese literary tradition. Although the very paper is published originally in English in a Chinese journal

posthumously, one could see the English title “The genesis of poetic time: the greatness of Chu Yuan, studied with a new critical approach” to be very different from the Chinese title written in a classical language “論時:屈賦發微(*lun shi: qu fu fa wei*)”, Chen uses the classical expression of “*fa-wei*”<sup>25</sup>, which often used in conjunction with “the invisible” and also often used in the title for explication works over the two thousand years. The title thus could be translated more closely as “On time: the opening of the minuscule intricacy and the concealed in Chu Yuan’s poetry”<sup>26</sup>. For Chen, there is a remarkable moment of sudden full-fledged development of the concept of time with the individual being that is close to the modern philosophical reflection happened in the work Chu Yuan’s *Lisao* in the 4th century BC, which one could see as marking the inception of the modern. In the essay, there is a long discussion on the different exegesis of the passage in Chu Yuan’s “*Tien Wen* (Interrogations of Heaven)”:

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<sup>25</sup> The modern dictionaries often translated the phrase as “explication of the intricacy” or even “small discoveries”. The expression *fa-wei* is often used in the explication work. The word *wei* has the meanings of being tiny and minuscule, being intricate and exquisite, being fine, subtle and wonderful, what is in the dark, obscured and concealed, or even simply indicates the negative (similar to the English “no” or “not”). The word *fa* could mean beginning, emergence, discovery, to illuminate, to give...and so on.

<sup>26</sup> I will for the moment leave aside the question of translating the word *fu* (賦) as poetry here. *Fu* is a particular genre of composition in verse which is freer in its metrical rules. The word can mean to endow, to give, to diffuse...etc. But the word usually one uses to translate the concept of poetry is *shi* (詩), which is another genre that is with more strict rules in the metrics. However one could see in Chen’s analysis, the genesis of the concept of time and thus poetry emerges out of *fu*.

明明闇闇 *Ming ming an an* (Light unto dark, dark unto light revolving,)

維時何為 *Wei shih ho wie* (What is *that* indeed?)

陰陽三合 *Yin yang san ho* (The yin and yang intercourse)

何本何化 *Ho pen ho hua* (What is basic, and what changes?)<sup>27</sup>(S. Chen, “The Genesis of Poetic Time” 396–97)

What is important for Chen is the 12 century AD interpretation of the word *shi*(時) as “time” which would understand the question asked in the sentence as “what is time” and the essence of time. Most of the later authorities, especially of the Confucian traditions, prefer the archaic meaning in *Book of Songs* and explicated the word of *shi* (時) to be *shi*(是), as the neuter pronoun “it” or the demonstrative “that”. Chen shows that in the archaic usage, the pronoun also has the sense of “then” or “there”, indicating a particular moment or place, or “just” “good” or “correct” in the sense of what is the appropriate. In modern time, *shi*(是) is borrowed to be the most common copula as “to be” and also as the affirmative “yes”. The advent of Chu’s poetry has freed the initial bondage of the word *shi*(時) to certain particular mythical object or thing or the auspicious occasion or event to be an abstraction for contemplation. This

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<sup>27</sup> Translation in the bracket is by Chen. He also provides another translation of the last sentence as “what is being and what is becoming” to indicate even with the exegesis of *shi*(時) here as the pronoun it or that *shi*(是), this mythical that-ness is being inquired with the question of the movement and the question of being and becoming, which is gesturing towards an abstract concept of time.

is the advent of the subjective experience of time which for Chen is the advent of the poetic time and individual being. However, to look at the transition from that pronoun pointing to a certain unknown mythical being that is not named to the abstract notion of time, he looks at the evolution of the word. He looks at the primeval character for *shí* 時 as the combination of the ideograph 日 as the “sun” or the “day” and the graph 日, as an image of the foot on the ground. In many instances, it could be read and understood as something close to “that day”. But for him, the more important thing is that the true etymon however is from the phonetic, which is from 日. Thus it already contains a sense of the rhythmic movement (S. Chen, “The Genesis of Poetic Time”).

One would recall his earlier work on the primal meaning of the Chinese word *shi*(詩), which is the word to translate “poetry”. Chen analyzes the ancient script for *shi*(詩) written as (言日). For long time people have thought that the meaning of *shi*(詩) comes from the morpheme 言 (*yeng*), which is mostly about "speaking, saying", Chen however considers the morpheme 日 to be of more importance. The hieroglyph of 日 comes from the image of a foot. It contains both the meaning of *zhi*(之), which signifies “to go, to direct towards”, and *zhi*(止), which signifies “to halt, to cease”. Chen sees in it the unity of the opposite meanings. He draws on Zhang Tai-yen(1869-1936)'s work on the principle of word making in ancient time in

China, which elaborates in many instances two words with opposite meanings often evolve from the same root or same word. Chen argues that in the instance of *shi*(詩), the contradiction is unified in a higher-order concept to retain the dynamics of the opposite meaning. Similar is the example of English word *life*, which derives from the old Teutonic “*laib*” contains both the meaning “to leave” and “to be left”. *Life* is at the same time “going somewhere” and “what is left”. This image of the foot on the ground, where it is indistinguishable that it’s being uplifting or setting down, constant or in movement, for him is the very “gesture”(姿; 姿) of poetry(S. Chen, “The Primeval Word of Shi”). For him, the reconciliation in a higher order as the synthesis constitutes the lyrical as the literary tradition in China.

However, how does one understand the opposite meanings in the etymon? Do we read what is poetic (time) as the synthetic reconciliation? Is the development of the literary tradition from the reiteration of *that* being laid down as foundation in the beginning, as being marked by the tradition of *Book of Songs*, to the subjective experience of time and the general contemplation on its essence as Chen sees in Chu Yuan’s poetic works? In Freud’s 1910 essay “The antithetical meaning of primal words” has dealt with the question in a reverse way. To understand the lack of “non-contradiction principle” in dream work, where the contrary elements are often combined into unity and presented as one and the same thing, Freud cites the

etymological work about the ancient Egypt language to see the remarkable instances of the antithetical meaning of primaeval words. The comparison with the primaeval words provides an understanding of “the *regressive*, archaic character of the expression of thoughts in dreams”(Freud, “The Antithetical Meaning of Primal Words”). In Freud’s interpretation of dreams, in chapter 7, he discussed regression in the topographical sense, which is to say, a reversible movement of motor activity in the opposite and backward direction in the first topography of the *psy* system. The fabric of the thought is resolved into raw materials, which is the mnemonic images. The starting point of dream thoughts is the unconscious (Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams*). In this sense, Chen’s thesis perhaps gestures towards a kind of primordial indistinctness that is prior to and beneath the subject.

The writer Shen Conwen(1902-1988) is perhaps the most central figure in David Der-wei Wang’s oeuvre, as he seems to stand against the sublime moment of history with the telos of socialism and the grand the telos of socialism and sets forth a “history with feeling (*you-qing*; 有情)” as opposed to the “history of action (*shi-gong*; 事功)”. Wang chooses to translate *you-qing* as “feeling”, which turns *qing* back into the interiority of the subject. The word *you* often means “there is”. *You-ching* has long been used to translate the word “sattva” in the Buddhist tradition; therefore, most of the time, in common usage, it refers to all sentient beings. As the

semantic history shows that the word *qing* always carries a negative aspect<sup>28</sup>, it would perhaps not be wrong to say that *qing* carries a sense of passion in the sense of passivity, which I read in Shen Cong-wen's works.

In the lecture Shen gave on "The History of Chinese Novels", if we look at what are included as novels across time, they seem to belong to disparate genres and bear no similarity. However, *xiao-shuo* in Chinese literally means "the small, or petit telling." From the earliest usage of the term in the official history *Hanshu* (the Han Book; 89AD), it is by definition the hearsay, "the said on the streets and the heard along the road"(Shen, "History of Chinese Novel" 15). In a sense, it is only preserved, archived, or classified, though as the hearsay or the petit saying, in the enormous system of taxonomy of all the written records in official history. By that

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<sup>28</sup> The two words *xing* (性) and *qing* (情) in the coupled compound *qing-xing* (情性) occupy an important place in the metaphysics of life in the history of thoughts in China. In *Shuowen Jiezi* 《說文解字》, a comprehensive dictionary on Chinese characters compiled by the grammatologist in Han dynasty Xu Shen(30-124 AD), the words *xing* and *qing* are explained as the followings: "qing 情, the negative [yin 陰; shadowed] pneuma [qi 氣; breath, air] of human which has desire" and "xing 性, the positive [yang 陽; lightened] pneuma of human. Xing, that which is good." In the annotation on *Shuowen Jiezi* in , it is added that "xing, that which is the substance of life (sheng; 生)" (性者·生之質也). In one of the ancient Confucian classics *Zhongyong* (Doctrine of the Mean), it says "what heaven confers is called xing"(天命之謂性). The word *xing*(性), often translated as "nature", is related to the word *sheng* (生; life, birth), in a way similar to the Latin root of the word *natura*, nat-(born), derived from the verb *nasci*(to give birth). *Xing* as nature is mostly regarded as good. There is however a question in the history of thought regarding if *qing*, the disposition/inclination which pertains to human desire is good or evil. In Zhang Taiyen's philological studies *Yuyen yuanqi shuo* (語言源起說; *The Origin of Languages*), the word *qing* is derived from the word *xing* with a slight mutation of the sound.

time, *xiao-shuo* was taken as "something to do with history" or what is "loss in history(*shi-yi*; 史佚)". Therefore, from the very beginning, novel is deeply related to history, but not actually divided along the line of fictive/non-fictive. Besides these two mutual related notions, in Shen's framework, there is myth (*shen-hua*; 神話) or fable prior to the time of history and novel, which I think to be crucial to understand his ideas of literature<sup>29</sup>. *Shen* (神) is the word we use for the divinity, the gods, the spirits, or the marvel. *Hua* (話) is also the sayings. For Shen, myth is the site of the immediate wonder of the primitive people to those inexplicable things in the world which remains to be mysteries for them. He thinks *Shen* is the word for that which exceeds the limit of the human, and myths (*shen-hua*) are close to an primal form of natural theology, or natural philosophy, as he sometimes uses interchangeably, which is the understanding of the cosmos and abstract(*chou-xiang*; 抽象) records of the things(*wu*; 物) in the world. He says that "actually the ancient histories in China has no difference from myths. Even to Middle Age history is still iteration of myths"(Shen, "History of Chinese Novel" 9). The decline of the myth was on the one hand due to the Confucian ideology, which resists the notion of *shen* for its being outside of the human order, gaining its power in the political scene; on the other hand,

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<sup>29</sup> The lecture was delivered in West-South United University. Shen only took the first two classes, the rest of the class were taken by other lecturers. Intriguingly, besides the introduction of the outline, the other class was solely on the myth(*shen-hua*).

it was due to the rapid development and proliferation of written scripts and their prevalence led to its detachment from its immediate wonder. The proliferation of written scripts saw the different developments of history and novel. Even the lyrical poetry(*shi*;詩) is still "in enmity with myth"("History of Chinese Novel" 13). The myth as the origin for the later genres to derives from thus seems to be for Shen an anthropological fiction, which is only mediated by, and also can only be approached through, these later genres.

Shen's short novel *Fengzi* (鳳子) could perhaps be read as an allegory for literary writing. It is a story about a young scholar from a remote rural town and for some reason wandering around the countries meets an old professor who has visited his hometown decades ago and the conversation between the two. The only trace that is left on both the native and the former guest, which makes them recognize each other's having been there at the place, is the constant usage of figural languages--i.e. the constant drawing of semblance and contrast between the natural phenomena and human affairs in life, however uncertain which is the metaphor for the other. In the peculiar narrative, the memories of the hometown are told by the outsider who has once visited but not the native in flashback. As the novel was published in instalments, the first eight sections were published between 1931-32, but the last section was only published five years later in 1937, the year the Sino-Japanese war

started. The last section is titled “the re-presence of god (*shen de zai xian*; 神的再現)”, the ritual for the arrival of god that the professor has attended. The novel ends without returning to the present time. The end cannot return to the beginning. In a conversation in the novel, the protagonist talks about the divine, the spirit(*shen*; 神) that “that which has come into being outside of the human capacity does not need any eulogy about their beauty to exist.[...] Due to their rash action, [the poets][...] boldly try to eulogize the beauty and explicate everything; the punishment they get is everlasting loneliness. [...] This kind of things are dispensable for the rural folks (*xiang-xia-ren*; 鄉下人), but quite necessary for the city.[...] Their work often brings its own failure in that it contaminates the living(*sheng-ming*), which they respect, but cannot be solidified for a single moment”(Shen, “Fengzi” 122–23). For Shen, the immanence and complete form of living as always in becoming and the immediacy of the mythical wonder is something irrevocably lost for all the literary language, even for poetry(Shen, “Fengzi”). In some of his essays in the form of monologue, he often writes about the tension between living (*sheng-ming*; 生命) and life(*sheng-huo*; 生活)<sup>30</sup>. The first is somewhat closer to the daily life, the animality, necessity, and triviality. The second is living as a whole, as it is in becoming, and as it is in the world. For living, “change and alteration is the constant(*chang*; 常) status,

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<sup>30</sup> See (Shen, “Dorment Pond”; Shen, “Dorment Pond 2”; Shen, “Life”; Shen, “Venus”; Shen, “Zhuxu [ Candle Flame Void] 燭虛”).

contradiction is the constant status, and catastrophe is the constant status"(Shen, "The Lyrical Abstraction" 527). Literature is somewhat like an impossible pursue for the second, which is a world where man can stand face to face with the divine. *You-qing* seems to be the passion to undergoes these changes, contradictions, and catastrophe. As the transience of any moment cannot be captured, Shen is often attracted to what is "abstract" in the experience. The writings of novels, which is secondary as compared to poetry, for Shen is always a struggle between the two, whereas the myth as an ideal literature language for "tomorrow" seems to be forever lost (Shen, "Dorment Pond 2" 85).

For Shen Cong-wen, a "rural folk" who came from a border town by the river, the river is the trope for the constant change and alteration of history. In one of the letters that he wrote to his wife on the river, titled "History is a Long River", he says that what do we read in history books besides silly people killing and slashing each other?

But real history is a river. From the rocks and sand in the water that flows day and night for invariably thousands of years, the rotting grass and trees, and the broken boards of the boats, I am touched by the weal and woe of a certain mankind that we have overlooked for a certain eras!(Shen 'History is a River' 188)

## Chapter 2: The River

Friend, I do not wish to follow you anymore.

I am not willing to dwell.

I am not willing!

Woe is me! I am not willing;

I rather falter with no ground.

I am nothing but a shadow;

Will bid you farewell and be submerged in the darkness.

Yet the darkness will also engulf me;

yet the light will also make me disappear.

Yet I am not willing to falter in between effulgence and darkness.

I would rather founder in the darkness.

Yet I eventually still falter between effulgence and darkness;

I do not know if it is the dusk or the crack of dawn.

--Lu Xun

...that which begins already is,

but is also just as much not yet.

The opposites, being and non-being, are therefore in immediate union in it;

or the beginning is their undifferentiated unity.

-- Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel

A river is the water that flows. It flows over the pathless earth. It is what gives limits to the earth and separates the land. It springs forth and violently cuts the paths on earth, striving to take its direction and making its course as a destiny. It founds the land as land, giving its shape and nourishing it. The river is thus less the boundaries that separate but instead what links human beings together, allowing intercourse (*Verkehr*) as “the greatest fund of education”<sup>31</sup>. The fluidity of the river is also marked by danger and destruction as it rushes and rages.

For a long time, rivers offer the trope for what remains as it is in flux and by change and what is at once the same and not the same. At the inaugural moment of the modern in China, one reads in Zhang Tai-yen’s essay “*Guo-jia Lun* (on Nations; 論國家)” (1907) the metaphor of the river, which turns around the schema of the coupling of subject and object divide/jointure:

There is a river now. It inherently has its river channel. The river channel doesn’t change over a hundred thousand years. However the water it contains is the aggregate of each minute drop that runs and gathers, from mornings to nights, flowing in torrents and

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<sup>31</sup> The usages of “intercourse(*Verkehr*)” and “fund of education(*Bildungsmittel*)” here I refer to §§247 in Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*, where he opposes the natural element of earth and sea. The latter is the natural element for industry that allows commerce to derive its world-historical significance. Here the word *Verkehr* refers to the trade (Hegel 268). It is the same word “intercourse (*Verkehr*)” that Karatani reads from Marx’s *German Ideology* for the other-embraced sociality that always requires a fatal leap (Karatani, *Architecture as Metaphor*).

pouring/emptying downward. The water drop tomorrow is not the drop today. Thus, one can say the riverbed is the subject (*zhu-ti* 主體; host-body), and the water drops in the riverbed are the objects (*ke-ti* 客體; guest-body)...[...]. Riverbanks and silt, in spite of being what grounds the riverbed, by its nature/concept is earth, which cannot be referred to as the river channel. What can be referred to as the channel is only the empty place. In regarding the empty place as the subject, and instead regarding the water drop that has its existence as the object, the subject is the emptiness/void. Since the emptiness/void is not (*fei*; 非) what there is (*you*; 有), then the subject is also not what there is” (T. Zhang, “On Nations” 458–59).

Here the subject(*zhu-ti* 主體; the host-body) as what subsists is the river course, which is only the empty place or the void (*kongchu*; 空處) where the object (*ke-ti* 客體; the guest-body) being water drips as temporal existents gathers and passes through. What it *in-forms* (*yu*; 喻, figure) is the subject as the void, which is non-being (*fei-you*; 非有). Unlike the free substrate of *tabula rasa*, the mind here is this coupling, where thoughts come-to-be and pass away and the subject is only the topoi of the not. The subject as void is similar to a certain desire structure, wherein love for the nation is understood as an inevitable phantasmic apparition. What is really loved is always what is often that which is not perceptible (*xian-liang* 現量; *pratyaksa*). Love loves not the present being but the no more of the past as memories and the not-yet of the

future as desire(T. Zhang, “On Nations”).

This template sets forth a mode of modernity that always carries with the negative. In this chapter, I track this mode of thought in the writings of the first generation of modern writers and critics in China, with the recurrent tropes of the river, how the question of historical change is broached in how they think of the vocation and destiny of this modern endeavour of writing called literature (*wen-xue* 文學; the study of texts). I look at this beginning of modern literature as a beginning that negates itself as its own end. Like a vortex in the stream, at every point, it vanishes and springs up anew. My attempt here is to think of this beginning, which contains a move that already makes the act of literature an effacement and undoing of literature itself. The analysis involves two instances of what I would call moments of transference/*zhuan-yi* in the inter-Asia encounters of thoughts. At the historical moment, the idea of Asia worked as a metaphoric substitution in these encounters to forge this space of transference love, whether affectionate or hostile in its excess. The “inter” as an opening, which allows the intercourse as the education fund, is also an experience of a rift, where the uncharted future and unassimilable past breach in.

### **The Beginning of New Literature**

I would like to go back to this moment of thought in history, when what is called “new literature (*xin wen-xue*; 新文學)” was launched in China, embodied in the writer

Zhou Zuo-ren's (1885-1967) famous essay "The human literature (*ren de wen-xue*; 人的文學)"(1918). The name of Zhou Zuo-ren is often under the shadow of the overwhelmingly famed pen name of his elder brother Lu-xun and his own later controversy of treason to the nation as he served under the marionette government in the Japanese-occupied area during the war. However, this early essay is often seen as the political manifesto for "new literature". It was published in 1918 in the magazine *Xin Qingnian La Jeunesse* (*The New Youth*; 新青年), which is emblematic of the spirit of the May Fourth new cultural movement<sup>32</sup>. The 1911 *Xinhai* year revolution abolished the thousand years of the Empire system in China but left the country in the tumult of different military forces with finally the first president claiming a restoration to be the first modern monarchy with a constitutional system. The 1911 revolution was seen as a failed revolution, while afterwards a legitimate state was never in place and the nation was always seen in the crisis of its extinction. The failed revolution however did not fail to open a revolutionary imagery in all the cultural fields, including a call for a "literature revolution". It was also a time that called for everything new; all kinds of magazines and associations were launched in the name of

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<sup>32</sup> The publication of the essay was chronologically prior to the actual event on May 4<sup>th</sup>, 1919, when the large-scale strike and demonstration with the participation of the students, workers and Beijing's citizens broke out to contest the government's weak responses to the stipulations of the Treaty of Versailles, allowing Japan to receive territories in Shandong. However the signifier "May Fourth" turns to be the generic name for the movement of the time that transvaluate the cultural norms and mores.

the new, ex. *The New Youth* (*Xin Qingnian*), *The New Tides* (*Xin Chao*; 新潮)<sup>33</sup>, *The New Society*, or even Mao Zedong's Association of the New People (*xin-min-xie-hui*; 新民協會) in Hunan<sup>34</sup>. The new literature movement, taken as a whole, resembled the *genbun itchi* (the unification of spoken (*gen*) and written (*bun*) language) movement in Japan, which is indispensable for the establishment of the modern nation. It was a romantic movement that sought to make the written language represent what now appears as the interiority of the natural man and dispense the extravagance of the classical written language as the obsolete and inorganic parts. Thus its advocates at times also use the term "the plain speech writing (*bai-hua-wen*; 白話文) movement".

This essay was not the first declaring gesture that tries to define the agenda for the new literature. There had been calls for literature reform or revolution, which turned the literary norm upside down to value the plebian literature with the idea of

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<sup>33</sup> Although the official English name of the magazine was *Renaissance*, the literal translation of the compound of *xin-chao* means "new tides", "new currents" or "new trends".

<sup>34</sup> The opening part of the forward "*Jinggao Qingnian* (Respectfully Appeal to the Youths; 敬告青年)" that Chen Duxiu inaugurates *The New Youth* could be seen as an epitome of the rhetoric for this sentiment for the newness and novelty, "The youth is just as the early spring, as the morning sun, as the flourishing of the blossom, as the newly sharpened blade; it is the most precious time of life. The youth is to society just as the fresh and vigorous cells to the body. Metabolism is the way the corrupted and the rotten are ever being eliminated by nature and the spatial location and temporal life of all the fresh and the vigorous. A human body will be healthy if it obeys this metabolism, and it dies if it is filled with old and corrupted cells. A society that obeys the metabolism will flourish, but a society that is filled with those old and corrupted members is on its way to death" (D. Chen, "Respectfully Appeal to the Youths" 21).

the popular and naturalness over the classics as aristocratic literature<sup>35</sup>. However, to my mind, among all these revolutionary or reformist writings that fervently advocate for the destruction of the old literary norms and forms, Zhou Zuoren's essay was remarkable as it broached a question of the new as beginning. The essay is a quest that asks what is the newness of this new, or if one could put in another word "the modern", and what *is* literature with all the prevalent talk about new literature. Thus it tries to lay a ground for the launching of new literature, which is to say, the discovery of human/*ren*. Literature (*wen-xue*) is set to be predicated on "human (*ren*; 人)". It thus assigns the whole task of literature (*wen-xue*) as "learning (*xue*) to *be* human (*ren*)". It is as if it is a declaration of the coming of age of enlightenment with the literature (*wen-xue*) as the inchoate queries to ask what we can know and the practical

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<sup>35</sup> The year before "The Human Literature" appeared in *The New Youth*, there were two important essays published in the same journal in the same issue, both of which made clear agendas for the form and content of the new literature with a few precepts. One is "*Wenxue Gailiang Chuyi* (My Humble Opinions Concerning the Literature Reform; 文學改良芻議)" by Hu Shi, the prominent liberal intellectual who was once John Dewey's student. The essay lists eight precepts about the "dos and don'ts": 1. It shall have some "things" to say; 2. It shall not imitate the ancients; 3. It shall appeal to the grammar; 4. It shall not "whine with no illness"; 5. It is obligated to dispense the cliché and established phrases; 6. It shall not resort to the classics. 7. It does not require the parallel phrases and sentences in the verse. 8. It shall not shy away from using vulgar words(Hu). The other is "*Wenxue Geming Lun* (On Literature Revolution; 文學革命論)" by Chen Du-xiu, one of the early figures who launched the Chinese communist party in the coming years. In the essay, he puts forward "three flags" for the "revolutionary army for literature": The first flag writes "overturn the ornamental and flattering aristocratic literature; establish the simple and lyrical national literature." The second writes "overturn the fossilized and extravagant classical literature; establish the fresh and honest realist literature." The third writes "overturn the obscure and incomprehensible hermit literature; establish the lucid and popular social literature"(D. Chen, "On Literature Revolution")

question to ask what we should do. I use the slash to join at the same time separate the English word “human” and Chinese word *ren*, for the translation makes the jointure and dis-jointure of human and/or *ren* a double movement. One sees an inner fissure in the human/*ren*, where it fades out at once as it is made to appear. This moment of thought at the level of the concept precedes the later moment where it is projected as the landscape of the folk/*min*, a world and space of the folk (*min-jian*), as a world of the lowly, the obscure, the inchoate, as indicated in its etymology that a set of writings on the rural intends to approach.

I would like to quote at length the opening paragraph of the essay:

The new literature that we should advocate right now, to sum up in a phrase, is the “human literature (*ren-de-wen-xue*; 人的文學)”. What should be rejected and fought against is the non-human (*fei-ren*; 非人) literature.

But the designation old and new is inappropriate in the very first place. Actually “is there anything new under the sun?” ... [...] If we are to say new, it is only new in the sense of new discovery (*xin-fa-xian*; 新發現), but not new in the sense of new invention (*xin-fa-ming*; 新發明) ... [...] Truth is there not limited by time. It is only due to our own imbecile and the belatedness of hearing the course (*dao*; 道) that the discovery is still so close and recent. It is therefore called new. It is in fact the most ancient thing, like the new continent and the electricity that has been in the cosmos long

ago. It would be excessively wrong if it were to be seen as something like fresh fruit or trendy clothes. But isn't the instance now—to talk about this phrase of “human literature” also something like a fashionable trend? But nothing can be done (*wu-nai*; 無奈) that men in the world (*shi-ren*; 世人) were ignorant so that they willfully refused to realize (*ti*; 體) the will of humankind, or to walk on this right middle course (*zheng-dao*; 正道), but instead they were lost in the course of beast (*sho-dao*; 獸道) and the course of ghost (*gui-dao*; 鬼道) and wondered for so many years before getting out. It is like a man rushing about in the daytime with his eyes closed, and finally, after he opens his eyes, he then realises there is such good sunlight in the world. However, in reality, the shine and drop of sunlight have long been so throughout many ages.

[...] Today the first step is to talk about the human (*ren*; 人), [which] has been born (*sheng*; 生) for more than four thousand years. However [one] still has to talk about the meaning of the human, to discover “human” anew (*cunxin*; 新), to “reclaim the wasteland of humans (*pi ren huang*; 闢人荒)”, is also something ridiculous. But to learn (*xue*; 學) in old age is perhaps a step better than not learning at all. Our hope to start from literature (*wen-xue*; 文學) to advocate for a little bit of the thought for the human course (*ren-dao*; 人道) is the only thing that is meant to be said above (Zhou, “The Human Literature” 9–10).

In this opening paragraph, the manifesto for new literature predicated on the human

somehow undermines its whole enterprise. The novelty of what is called the new is rendered inappropriate. The gauge of the predicate human is laid waste in the dark. Literature is only left with this infinitesimal move of the first step of beginning to learn.

One would have in mind that since the colonial encounter with the Western modern in the late period of Qin dynasty in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the talk of the “new (*xin*)” had always been at stake and proliferating, often been referred to what today one would probably call “of the (Western) modern”. At Zhou’s time, whenever he refers to “new literature (*xin wen-xue*; 新文學)”, “new novels (*xin xiao-shuo*; 新小說)”, there is an implicit referent point of the Western literature. Zhou is however more vigilant about what is to be called “new”—i.e. the absurdity to designate anything within one’s knowledge as new.

If one were to reflect more on the question of new/*xin* and the temporality involved here, it is worthy to mention the discussion in the small polemical essay on the etymology of *xin* written by the philologist and modern thinker Zhang Tai-yen (1869-1936), who was once a mentoring figure for Lu Xun and Zhou in their early intellectual days in Japan. It is a response to an expression in the classical text, “despite being an old state, the fate of Zhou is to make/to thread/to sustain the new (*Zhou sui jo bang, qi ming wei xin*; 周雖舊邦，其命維新)” which was invoked to

name the political reform in the late Qing dynasty as “*wei-xin* (維新; to make new, to thread the strand of the new, to extend the new)” by the moderate reformist camp that tried to turn the old emperor system into constitutional monarchy<sup>36</sup>. In the essay Zhang criticizes his contemporaries for their way to designate the new and the ways that concepts in foreign knowledge were translated into certain concepts in classical Chinese as if something equivalent had always existed and as if they were properties one already owned. He thus elaborates the concept of *xin* by its etymology,

The initial cutting/tailoring of garments is called *chu* (初; the initial, the first, the beginning); the initial cutting/falling of trees is called *xin* (新; new). Therefore, once the garment is ready made, it cannot once again gain the name *chu*; once the wood dries up, it cannot once again gain the name of *xin*... [...] What is new, one person, one generation/period, can only be new once but nevermore.” (T. Zhang, “On the Absurdity” 243).

What is new is actually the singular cut. It is the beginning that is not yet made into something. That which is new can only be once and singular however can only be designated retroactively. In Zhang’s view, if one indeed wants to talk about *wei xin*, it can only be “the emergence of the heroic, embodied by the cosmic time (*li shu zai*

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<sup>36</sup> As an advocate for revolutionary action, Zhang poignantly criticizes the deception of the reformist agenda and its self-label as “*wei-xin*”. What follows the etymological explication is his refutation of the possibilities for Qing dynasty to be new again. In the expression, the character *ming* indicates the fate, the ordering, the nomination, the life, or the *telos*; it therefore involves the idea of revolution (*geming*; 革命), both in the sense of forcible overthrowing of the regime and the cosmic circular motion and course.

*gong*; 歷數在躬), and afterwards it gets to correspond to the name”(ibid). What the compound *li-shu* (歷數) signifies is fate, destiny, chance, circumstance, contingency (as something befalling), reckoning cosmic time, and the cycle and movement of cosmic time. And *gong* (躬) signifies the body, the self. It indicates a kind of emergent heroic action, in the body of which the cosmic course lies. What is new is not about the evanescent experience of the novelty but the realization of the bestowed destiny and the embodiment of the cosmic time. However what is new does not recognize itself as new. The naming of the newness of the event only comes afterwards. There is always a belatedness involved in its temporality. To return to the passage of Zhou Zuo-ren’s essay, what runs through is this deep sense of belatedness. What is called new is nothing but this belatedness. He casts doubt on the predicate “new”. He says that now we are subscribing to and urging the newness while there is in truth nothing new. Since truth is timeless, there cannot be new truth; therefore the newness can only be new in the sense of discovery. The experience of the “new” is possible and only possible due to its belatedness in time, which is so recent that one still feels it; it is also only possible in this state of transition, where the “new discovery” is not fully discovered but where one is suddenly aware of the deception and ignorance that one has been inhabiting.

One first sees in the passage a move of the declaration on the discovery of a

universal truth, timeless and unbound, which is the existence of human (*ren*) and its value, that have always been there to be discovered, yet always belated, whether in Europe or the current instance in China. There is a strong ocular metaphor of the sunlight and men's sight, which always figures as the image for the knowledge of truth. The translation of human as *ren* starts the talk of *ren* anew. There is a transfiguration that is happening with the word *ren*. From a locus in the cosmogeny and cosmology that is marked between the heaven and earth (*tian-di*; 天地)<sup>37</sup> or a pronoun that signifies a world of the others, as opposed to the I (*wo*; 我), which is

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<sup>37</sup> In *Shuowen*, *ren* is “the highest of those which are born of the heaven and earth(*tian-di-zhi-xing-zui-gui-zhe-ye*; 天地之性最貴者也) ). In *Liji* (*Book of Ritual*; 《禮記》), *ren* is “the good of heaven and earth, the crossing of *ying-yang*, the convergence of divine and ghost, the ether of five elements (*tian-di-zhi-de, ying-yang-zhi-jiao, guei-shen-zhi-huei, wu-xing-zhi-xiu-chi-ye*; 天地之德，陰陽之交，鬼神之會，五行之秀氣也。) In the later *Shuowenjiezi Zhu* (*The Exegesis of Explication of Texts and Interpretation of Words*; 《說文解字注》), it is stated that “*ren*, the heart/core of heaven and earth; the incipience of five elements; those are born to eat with taste, distinct the sounds, covered with colors. The birds and beasts, herbs and woods are all born of the heaven and earth but cannot be the heart/core of heaven and earth. Only man is the heart/core of heaven and earth. Therefore, among those born of the heaven and earth, it is the highest and noblest. The heart/core of heaven and earth is called man; which can join the Good with heaven and earth. The heart/core of the fruit is called *ren*, which can make the herb and wood reborn to become fruit. Both [*ren*] (core; here “both” refers to the fruit seed and man) are the smallest/finest but contain the whole. (*ren-zhe, tian-di-zhi-xin-ye. wu-xing-zhi-duan-ye. shi-wei-bie-sheng-pi-she-er-sheng-zhe-ye. an-chin-sho-cao-mu-jie-tian-di-suo-sheng. er-bu-de-wei-tien-di-zhi-xing. wei-ren-wei-tian-di-zi-xing. gu-tien-di-zi-sheng-ci-wei-ji-guei. Tian-di-zi-xing-wei-zi-ren. Neng-yu-tien-di-he-de. guo-shi-zi-xing-yi-wei-zi-ren. neng-fu-sheng-cao-mu-er-cheng-guo-shi. jie-ji-wei-er-ju-cuan-ti-ye*; 人者，天地之心也。五行之端也。食味別聲被色而生者也。按禽獸艸木皆天地所生。而不得為天地之心。惟人為天地之心。故天地之生此為極貴。天地之心謂之人。能與天地合德。果實之心亦謂之人。能復生艸木而成果實。皆至微而具全體也。)”

often with specific referents in a moral cosmos<sup>38</sup>, now *ren* is struggling its way to the universal truth of human that is however still torn between the science of an advanced animal species and the shadow of the divine<sup>39</sup>. It seems to lay the ground for the new literature on the scientific discovery of the *homo sapiens* and the inconsistent discourse of humanism. It then sets the human life (*ren-sheng*; 人生) as the object of literature.

However there seems to be a contradiction in the passage. Zhou says that

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<sup>38</sup> In the common usage, as a contrast to *wo* (我; ego, me), *ren* indicates those persons other than me. In the listed usage in *Kang-xi* dictionary, *yi-ren* (一人; one person) refers to the sovereign monarch (*jun*; 君), *er-ren* (二人; two persons) however refers to the couple Father-Mother (*fu-mu*; 父母). It is also used with different predicates which refer to specific categories in the occupational or official system.

<sup>39</sup> In the latter part of the essay, Zhou redefines the word *ren* for the “human literature (*ren-de-wen-xue*)” that he is talking about: “This human (*ren*) we are talking about is not the men (*ren*) that the world says to be ‘the highest of those which are born of the heaven and earth (see above footnote)’ or ‘the round head square feet (*yuan-lu-fang-zi*; 圓顛方趾)’. It is actually talking about ‘the human species that evolves from animals.’ Two crucial points here: 1. That evolved ‘from animals’; 2. That ‘evolved’ from animals” (Zhou, “The Human Literature” 11). He put first emphasis on the one foot of human in its “being animal”, which has its base of existence in the animal life. The second emphasis is on human beings being “evolved (*jin-hua*; 進化)”, or literally progressed and transformed. And what is gradually distancing itself from animal life is the “interior life”. He wants to disregard the religious dualism of soul (*ling*; 靈) and flesh (*ro*; 肉), which takes the former as the incipience of the divine nature and the latter as the inheritance of beast nature and finally takes the divine nature as its telos. It is this asceticism and abstinence that he tries to do away with. These two should be one in human nature and be concord with each other. As a way to bring back the flesh, he uses the work of William Blake to say life is only “Energy” (*li*; 力), is from the Body; and Reason is its bound or outward circumference. It is from here he quests for the ideal human life (Zhou, “The Human Literature”). It is important to note that the expression “round head square feet” is not a morphological description of the modern understanding of the human body; it is a cosmological concept where the roundness of the head symbolises/resembles (*xiang*; 象) the firmament and the squareness of the feet symbolises/resembles the earth.

human/*ren* has been born for more than four thousand years. But why only four thousand years if the truth is timeless? It seems that the birth of human/*ren* does not refer to the species called *homo sapiens*. If one considers that the span of four thousand years is what is believed to be the years of the scripts, the letters (*wen*; 文) in China, in other words, what is often seen as the span of “the history of China”, then the birth is about the script of *ren* (人). *Ren* is given its birth by this system of written language. But it never knows what *ren* means. It is a script that is placed at the centre with its own nescience of what it means. In translating the human as *ren*, Zhou does not find an equally valuable metaphysical concept in one’s own hoard to be the equivalent for exchange. It is a negative moment that one is in the deep agony of being deceived in the midst of what he is supposed to know. This negative moment, in a reversal, also casts a shadow on the signifier human that is now being translated. One could perhaps detect a similar line of thought in Zhang Tai-yen’s work where the deception of the concept of human/*ren* through the so-called Chinese literary (*wen*) tradition is made clear. In his essay “*Wu Wu Lun* (On five nothingness (*wu*/無; there-is-not); 五無論)”, between the five nothingness of government, community (*ju-luo*; 聚落), humankind (*ren-lei*; 人類), the living multitude (*Zhong-sheng*; 眾生), and the world (*shi-jie*; 世界), he points out the most important one as the nothingness of humankind:

Nevertheless men in the world often say: the sovereign good(*da de*; 大德) of heaven and earth(*tian-di*; 天地) is called life/birth (*sheng*; 生). The female/dark and male/light (*yin-yang*; 陰陽) make a pair. The rooted nature (*genxing*; 根性) is the same. One thus should not act against heavenly good(*tian de*; 天德) nor violate the human course (*ren dao*; 人道). But alas, the human beings amid heaven and earth are like things being parasitic in an empty calabash. If the vessels/objects(*qi*; 器) are not of the same kind, there is no goodness to be affected (*gan*; 感)<sup>40</sup>; if there is no knowledge in the substance(*ti*; 體), what thing(*wu*; 物) can be born/given birth (*sheng*; 生)? Moreover if one traces the beginning right to the end, that which has life/birth cannot but have a death. If one says the sovereign good of heaven and earth is called life/birth, why does one never say that the sovereign good of heaven and earth is called death?<sup>41</sup>(T. Zhang, “On Five Nothingness” 439)

Zhang rejects the double forms of humanism which see the intrinsic value of the human, whether it is the modern one that sees the human and its morality as the telos

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<sup>40</sup> The Chinese word 器 originally indicates a containing jar, a vessel. The meaning of 器 as the receptacle is extended to signify instruments, objects, organs, capacity and talent. As Zhang Taiyen’s writings are filled with Yogacara Buddhist lexicon, one may have in mind the Chinese translation of the Sanskrit terminology *bhājanaloka* (the receptacle world, the world of non-sentient objects) is *qi-shi-jian* (器世間) as opposed to *sattvaloka*( the world the sentient beings), translated as *you-qing-shi-jian* (有情世間).

<sup>41</sup> The original passage in Chinese writes, “然世人多云：天地之大德曰生，陰陽匹偶，根性所同，不應背天德而違人道。嗟乎！人在天地，若物之寄於康瓢耳。器非同類，則無德可感；體無知識，則何物之能生？且原始要終，有生者未有不死。既云天地之大德曰生，何獨不云天地之大德曰死乎？”(T. Zhang, “On Five Nothingness” 439)

of natural history or the ancient moral cosmos where human/*ren* stands at the centre between heaven and earth. He reads these discourses that centre on human/*ren* as always being a cover and alibi of what human is. What is said about life is but the cover, the kernel of death. The entire tradition of literariness is nothing but this covering of the truth of human:

What could make appear the human disposition (*qing*; 情) and its nature (*xing*; 性) is first and foremost poetry (*shi*; 詩)<sup>42</sup>; followed by novels and myths. In the Chinese [*Book of*] *Songs* (*shi*; 詩, often as poetry), the section of ‘*Feng* (風; (regional) wind/air)’ discourses (*dao*; 道)<sup>43</sup> on promiscuousness, both the section of *Yah* (雅; the courteous classics songs) and *Song* (頌; the sacrificial devotion) discourse on homicide. That which speaks of the promiscuousness is inscribed (*wen*; 文; to mark, to decorate, to cover, to literarise) as the graceful [maiden] that is in harmony [with the gentlemen]; that which speaks of the homicide is inscribed (*wen*; 文) as prowess and ordering<sup>44</sup>(*ibid*: 440).

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<sup>42</sup> See Chapter One for the brief discussion on the meaning of *xing* (性) and *qing* (情) in the metaphysics of life(*sheng*; 生) in the history of thought in China.

<sup>43</sup> The word *dao*(道) here could also simply be translated as “speak” or “say”. However, the same word also means “path”, “way”, or “course”, as in the phrase “*rendao* (human course; 人道)” in the discussion above, I decided to use the word “discourse” as a verb to translate the word *dao* here. It is also considering the meaning from the Latin origin *discursus* “running to and fro” and its verb form *discurrere*, which contains the roots *dis-* “away” and *currere* “to run”.

<sup>44</sup> The original passage in Chinese writes, “人之情性可見者，莫若詩；其次莫如小說、神話。中國之《詩》，風以道淫，雅頌以道殺。而言淫者以窈窕好逑文之；言殺者，以神武者定文之”(T.

Zhang Taiyen, in his reading of Vijnanavada Buddhism, dwells on the negative to talk about the nothingness of the human/*ren*. Once a student of Zhang, Zhou Zuo-ren seems to be on the opposite side here in his apparent advocacy of humanism<sup>45</sup>. However, in the negative move in the passage, what he brings forth and reveals as the truth is the truth of this unknowingness of human/*ren*. The space of human/*ren* seems to be made to appear in the locus of the other that is to be acquired. It is however at the same stroke that it is hollowed out and laid waste to become the thing and the wasteland that one is totally in the dark. The topographical metaphor emerges here to mark the space of this labyrinth of ignorance, which is the course of beast (*sho*; 獸) and the course of ghost (*gui*; 鬼). This topography is nevertheless different from the metaphysics that place the divine above and the animal below. *Sho*, with the morpheme of the character consisting of seven devouring mouths, signifies those which devour and eat men (*ren*). *Gui*, signifies that which haunts men (*ren*), which persists to be the literary figure that always casts a shadow in the new form of literature that is just about to take place. Here in the essay, due to our ignorance, we

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Zhang, “On Five Nothingness” 440).

<sup>45</sup> Zhou Zuo- ren perhaps has an ambivalent relation to Zhang Tai-yen, as he sees in Zhang inimitable in his eruditeness and revolutionary character, this includes Zhang’s scholarship and engagement with translation, which Lu-xun and himself participated as a part. He however sees this inimitable endeavor the limit and the very end of the old form of writing which perhaps sought to revolute from within. For more discussion on the affinities and tensions between Zhang Tai-yen and the two brothers’ view on literature/*wen-xue*, see Kiyama Hideo (Kiyama).

have been inhabiting a world with the devouring beasts in front and the haunting and duplicitous ghost at the back. What has been spoken of the human/*ren* is the most inhuman/*fei-ren*.

One therefore detects in the passage that with the intrepid declaration, there is always a withdrawal move of humility or minimality. It keeps reminding itself of its own ignorance and imbecility of the idea of the human and its own lack in never having experienced and embodied the human course. About this wasteland of the human world, it could only speak about the “first step”, “a little bit”, “what it means is only that”, or “to learn from the very beginning” and so on. Therefore the way to talk about the human has to start from a very humble posture—which is to say, to learn (*xue*; 學) from the beginning what it is to be human. It is from the humus that this human, in humility, speaks of and learns of being itself. To learn “to be human”, *zuo-ren*, incidentally the same words as Zhou’s own name, is what he wants to claim about “literature (*wen-xue*; 文學)”. It is to learn to be human that what is to be learned (*xue*; 學) of the letters (*wen*; 文) is to be rethought. The whole endeavour of a discipline called literature/*wen-xue* is thus a threshold of self-knowledge. In the very first opening remark about literature/*wen-xue*, it is not only the positive designation of the human as the predicate that is mentioned; it is also negatively defined. What has been said of *ren* in the existing discourse is now being posited as what is inhuman and non-

human (*fei-ren*; 非人). One could perhaps ask: why does one have to use the age-old word that stands for the core concept in an inhuman knowledge system to translate the idea of the human that is discovered anew? In this negative move, one however sees *ren* as a “paleonymy” with a double mark, rethought and reworked differently. It places human/*ren* always at the threshold of thought and unthought, human and non-human.

### The Rivulet and the New Village

This essay on literature curiously takes a turn in the middle to talk about the ideal life of the human community. It calibrates the ideal life to be based on the gauge of the human—to do the duty within the reach of human force and take what is needed; to abolish the mores and laws that are beyond human force or below human course (Zhou 2011a). To cast this ideal human community, the new literature movement is in tandem with his fervent advocacy of the New Village (*xin-cun*; 新村) movement. From 1918 onwards, Zhou wrote a few essays introducing the experience of *atarashiki-mura* (新しき村; New Village) that was being experimented on by the writers of *Shirakaba* (White Birch) literary coterie in Japan from the year 1918 and its idea of the new village with the blueprint for an ideal community life<sup>46</sup> (Zhou, “Visit

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<sup>46</sup> The *atarashiki-mura* is led by S. Mushanokoji, a member of the *Shirakaba* group, with whom Zhou kept a life-long friendship. The *Shirakaba* group began as a strand to react against the trendy naturalist tendency in literature and aesthetics at that time that had come down to only portrait the disfiguration

of New Village in Japan”; “The Idea and Reality of New Village”; “New Village in Japan”). Half of them were just excerpted translations of the writings of S. Mushanokoji, a member of the coterie and the founder of *atarashiki-mura*, published on their journals. The utopian experiment of the New Village in its principle is to build a community on a voluntary base “from each according to his ability, to each according to his need”, where labour is the duty towards humanity without any price and gradually transforms the inhuman world in an uncoercive way. Zhou actually launched a “Beijing Branch” of the New Village after coming back from his personal visit to the Hyoga New Village in the year 1919, the very same year the May 4<sup>th</sup> movement broke out. However the “Beijing branch” of the New Village had never found a village of its own but only existed as a correspondence address, which was actually Zhou’s personal residence. Never have there been any real villages (*cun*; 村) that were able to emerge or grow out of the ground under this branch as if the Chinese word 新(new; *xin*) has already indicated its fate in its etymology—a “branch” that is cut off as a dead object. The actual historical experience of the New Village in China can be said to be a non-event, for its existence is mostly textual, with a few short-lived experiments around the year 1920, mostly running aground in one or two years.

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and trivialities of daily life. Instead, they advocated for certain humanism, idealism, and the liberation of individuality. In the year of 1918, *Shirakaba* had already come to be a dominant stream in the Japanese literary scene since the beginning of the decade, the experiment of new village had however just started.

However, the New Village as an idea has a long-lasting influence. Zhou Zuo-ren's texts are in fact eventual<sup>47</sup>.

Among these texts, the most extensive and passionate one is Zhou Zuo-ren's traveling note about his visit to the Hyuga New Village, published in September 1919 in the magazine *Xinchao* (*Renaissance*). Interestingly, two third of the traveling note is on the experience of the passage of the journey. The most enrapturing moment of this short visit came at a moment when he was still on the way yet to arrive at the New Village, two people from the New Village suddenly appeared to receive him:

It is as if the world that [I had been] dreaming of every day has already arrived, and these two are coming first to spread the message. Although at present [I am] still residing in the old world, only this partial miracle is able to confirm my belief—there is a day in the future when the success of all as a whole is to come. We often talk about the love between the compatriot fellows/siblings, but mostly we have never felt the love between the fellowmen of the same species...as of the experience, it is the first time. The air of the new village is filled with this love, so as to make people feel melt down and intoxicated and almost get oblivious of the return...(Zhou, "Visit of New Village in Japan" 247).

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<sup>47</sup> See Zhao Hong's work for the dissemination and development of the idea of New Village in China (Zhao).

What seems important in the experience is the confirmation of the dream, the prefiguration of a possible future of a human world before one's eyes. It is the meeting with the two strangers who came as the harbingers figure in silhouette this miracle of the New Village. It is the message, the air, the feeling of intoxication that matters more in the experience. Before entering the village, one is already oblivious of the return.

In Zhou Zuo-ren's memoir written in the 60s, there are three consecutive chapters titled "*Xiao-he yu Xin-cun* (The Rivulet and the New Village; 小河與新村)". In these prose essays, he juxtaposes two of his old poems and this exhilarating, almost ecstatic, journey. In the first episode, he started by stating that in the year 1919, he wrote a modern poem (*xin-shi*; 新詩)<sup>48</sup> titled "*Xiao-he* (The Rivulet; 小河)" and later in the same year, he visited Hyoga New Village. He wrote them down together and gave them the title because "the two events *seem to* have a deep connection" (Zhou, "The Rivulet 1" 485 emphasis added). The rest of the chapter consists of his transcription of his "first and also last" long prose-poetry. In the second episode, he mentions that he had transcribed a set of old poems in "unruly tune" (*fu-ru-diao*; 弗入調)<sup>49</sup> under the title "*Ku-cha-an Da-you-shi* (Doggerels from the Hut of Bitter Tea; 苦茶庵打油

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<sup>48</sup> *Xin-shi* could be literally translated as "new poems".

<sup>49</sup> Zhou explains that in the local language, *fu-ru-diao* means something that doesn't follow the rule or something of a rascal.

詩)” and published them in a magazine with an endnote in 1944, which refers to the poem “*Xiao-he*”. The episode thus consists of transcribing the note and one of the “unruly tunes” (Zhou, “The Rivulet 2”). The third episode mentions the visit to the New Village and transcribes once more certain passages from his own translation of Mushanokoji’s essay and a passage from his travelling note with several remarks (“The Rivulet 3”). In these writings, Zhou often uses the word “transcribe” (*chao*; 抄) to refer to his own act, satirically calling himself a “transcribing master” or a “copy master” (*wen-chao-gong*; 文抄公). The recollection of the life experience in the autobiographical account seems to consist of intertextual references.

The 1919 poem written in a simple colloquial form of prose was experimental and a pioneer in its time, as experiments with the new forms of poetry were at its beginning<sup>50</sup>. In the poem, the tenuous movement and vital impetus of the rivulet, however minute, cannot be limited by any human construct but forms a volatile whirlpool that hollows out the ground and threatens to change the anthropomorphized agrarian landscape. The first stanza starts with the lines,

A stream of rivulet flows steadily.

Where it passes, both the banks are full of blackish soil.

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<sup>50</sup> The first collection of poetry in plain speech writing, *Chang-Shi Ji (Experiments in Poetry; 嘗試集)* by Hu Shi, was only published in 1920.

Bloomed with red florets, emerald leaves, and yellowish fruits.

A farmer came with a hoe on his back. In mid of the rivulet he built a weir.

The downstream is dried up, the upstream, held by the weir, will not come down;

No way to move forward, no way to move backwards,

the water only swirls wildly in front of the weir.

To retain his life, the water has to flow, thus swirling wildly in front of the weir.

The soil under the weir, gradually washed off. A deep pit it has become.

The water however doesn't resent the weir—but just wants to flow,

Just as what it used to be, steadily flows onward (Zhou, "The Rivulet 1" 485–86).

The second and third stanzas are spoken from the voices of the rice plant and the mulberry tree, plants typical of the agrarian landscape in southern China. The anthropomorphized voices speak of the sorrow and apprehension in memorizing their "good friend", the rivulet, with its steady and fertilizing characters in the old days and fearing its "terrible moan" and its potentially destructive force. The rivulet that suffers its own volatile violence under the human construct however seems to be muted. From hindsight, the voices and tone in the two stanzas are perhaps a precedent for what later would be called "children's literature", a topic that Zhou was working on

through translation and collecting the folklore<sup>51</sup>. The last stanza ends in three lines with the blindly swirling water, the unshakable stone weir, and the man who built the weir disappearing without a trace (Zhou, “The Rivulet 1”). The second poem, what he calls a doggerel, was written in 1942 in the form of classical verse with each line seven characters, although not strictly following the metrics. In the poem, the portent of flood is seen from the apprehensive gaze of an old farmer in the midst of the landscape:

The boundary of life for an old rural folk, is to seed his orchard.

With a pipe between the teeth, he stands at dusk.

The bean florets are yet to fall. The gourds still creep its vine.

To the south of the hill, the melancholic gaze falls on the mighty water and clouds<sup>52</sup>(Zhou, “The Rivulet 2” 491).

From a retrospective look with an ironic distance, in Zhou’s own analysis in the 1944 note, he sees the early prose-poetry, despite its apparently experimental form, has

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<sup>51</sup> In 1913-14 Zhou wrote several essays in classical Chinese on *Märchen*(*tong-hua*; 童話; fairytales) and children’s songs(*er-ge*; 兒歌). In 1918, he joined the collective project to archive the folklore. In 1920, he returned to the subject of children’s literature with the purpose of primary school pedagogy. For his writings on children’s literature, see (Zhou, *On Children’s Literature*).

<sup>52</sup> As it is difficult to present the language and metrics of the verse, I will transcribe the original poem in Chinese here, “野老生涯是種園，閒銜煙管立黃昏。豆花未落瓜生蔓，悵望山南大水雲”(Zhou, “The Rivulet 2” 491).

nothing new in its content but its mood entirely falls within the antecedent textual tradition. Even its allegorical form could be seen from certain earlier literary traditions. For him, the poems in the new style (*xin-shi*; 新詩) and the old style (*jiu-shi*; 舊詩) in fact share the same motif. He detects the fundamental mood (*qing*; 情) that runs through his own writings being nothing but “the immemorial apprehension (*ju*; 懼) and melancholy (*you*; 憂)” in the folk tradition. In this old tradition, the agony goes to the extent of wishing not to be born<sup>53</sup>. One is to be reminded that, as if by chance, in his 1919 travelling note, the day he was to leave the New Village, the memento that Mushanokoji asked from him was to inscribe in calligraphy the Confucian motto “if one introspects without remorse, then what would lead to melancholy (*you*) and apprehension (*ju*)?” It is as if in the encounter it had already been written down in a negative way. However, if one reads Zhou Zuo-ren’s 1919 excerpted translation of Mushanokoji’s writings, which he transcribed again in the third instalment of ‘*Xiao-he*’, there is an almost biblical tone that presages the world revolution as an apocalyptic end, “[t]he new epoch shall have come. *Sooner or later*, it’s always time that the world revolution will happen, for the cause to make the world more reasonable...”; “for the epoch that is to come (*jiang-lai*; 將來), if one does not

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<sup>53</sup> He invokes the chapters of ‘*Shu-li* (Millet droops low; 黍離)’ and ‘*Tu-huan* (Hares Unrushed; 兔爰)’ in *Shi-jing* (*Book of Songs*; 詩經) to talk about the fundamental mood in the tradition (Zhou, “The Rivulet 2”).

*prepare in advance*, revolution will necessarily arise. For those who *fear* revolution, there is no other way except the effort to make people gradually practice a human life...”and so on(Zhou, “The Rivulet 3” 494). The utopia in silhouette seems to be enveloping and foreshadowing the revolution as violent destruction. To build a “new house” as if it is heaven on earth, is the atonement anticipating the passing away of the old world. However, in the memoir, as an old man in his eighties, the 1942 poem as doggerel seems to take a comic reversal in his re-transcription with an additional note: finally, the revolution did not come as a flood but arrived instead in the natural course as the slain “a ripped gourd falling from the stalk” (“The Rivulet 3” 495), as what could naturally happen in the yard of the farmer in the third line of the poem, rendering futile all the apprehension and melancholy (“The Rivulet 2”).

In the final instalment, after re-transcribing Mushanokoji’s writings and the exhilarating passage of the travel note cited above, he sees the irony of himself as an irreligious man holding religious fervent (“The Rivulet 3”). After the thwarting of the utopian future, the fanaticism about “human/*ren*” and literature(*wen-xue*) has long perished<sup>54</sup>. As early as in the 30s, he reappraises the “new literature” as a movement it

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<sup>54</sup> In the memoir, the chapter following the three episodes of ‘*Xiao-he*’ was titled “*Wen-xue yu Zong-jiao* (Literature and Religion;文學與宗教)”, where he saw the fervent for humanism in ‘the Human Literature’ as empty. The chapter ends with the end of his “superstition” about literature and the awareness of his own ignorance about literature, and finally the declaration of the “close down of the literature business” (Zhou, “Literature and Religion”).

is but a wave of the ebb and flow of the oscillating tension and vicissitude between the two main literary currents internal to history (Zhou, *Origins and Streams of New Literature*). For Zhou, there is really nothing new under the sun. What remains is the immemorial mood of apprehension and melancholy. One recalls that in the second episode of 'Xiao-he', he mentions the affection for the water in him as people of southeastern China, deeply knowing "the water that bears the boat is the same that swallows it up" (Zhou, "The Rivulet 2" 491). The landscape of the river perhaps always anticipates and is yoked with these fundamental moods in the popular memories, retaining the immemorial past of the utopian and apocalyptic possibilities.

Despite his changed view, Zhou Zuo-ren remains with the posture of humility that he does not know about literature. Whether it is an irony of self-feigned ignorance or a humble gesture, as a prolific writer praised for his prose and his copious translation works from ancient Greek, English and Japanese canons and his archival works of the folklore, referring to these works, Zhou always maintains that he is "never a literatus nor a scholar" but a "gofer" who "chops woods and fills water" (Zhou, *On Children's Literature*). One is reminded that when Takeuchi Yoshimi reflects on the space of Japanese literature in his time, he says,

The literary scholars who think literature consists of extracting the human (*ren*; 人) and believe that the human can finally be extracted do nothing but force the human into the

idea of literature, they do not think of the space that situates them and makes them move around. For if they did, the so-called scholarship, the so-called literature would not be able to stand. Therefore the fidelity to scholarship and literature will finally lead to its distance from scholarship and literature. In Japan, if one wants to be a scholar, one can cast doubt on everything but never the ultimate question; for if that is questioned, he would no longer be a scholar. A writer or a literary person can make the human naked, but this final piece of cloth to veil the shame has to be kept. It is because if this last piece of cloth is torn off, the human will no longer be human, which is to say, the human does not exist (Takeuchi, “What Is Modernity” 197–98).

Takeuchi, in his reflection on the experience of Japanese modernity, is deeply agonized by the progressive nature of its culture that constantly seeks the new and turns towards the new in infinite repetition, where everything new soon turns old and passes through without leaving a trace. He thus distinguishes two notions of conversion as the self-transformative move—i.e. *tenko* (轉向) versus *kaishin* (回心). While *tenko* is a movement outwards, *kaishin* is a movement inwards. The former is unmediated, the latter is mediated by resistance (*teiko*; 抵抗). What Takeuchi wants to turn to is this inward conversion of *kaishin* (回心), which he deliberately uses as a religious concept that has a sense of self-repentance and atonement. *Kaishin* has *resistance as mediation*. The subjectivity that Takeuchi is thinking of is the self-

conscious subject that constitutes modernity which will never form without the mediation of resistance (Takeuchi, "What Is Modernity"). However if one goes back to Zhou Zuo-ren's essay on human literature, the resistance is perhaps below the level of subjectivity that self-consciously wills to preserve itself. There is already a double inscription of human/*ren*, from the beginning, when the entire antecedent textual tradition about *ren* is in the ruin of being non-human and inhuman. In declaring the belated discovery of "human" as the universal truth, at once there is the negative move of hallowing out the human as the dark wasteland of nescience, a counter-movement of resistance (*teiko*) as the enduring negativity that caesuras the earlier movement. In this manifesto of new literature, what is new is this singular cut that cuts through itself as self-laceration. It places human/*ren* always at the threshold of thought and unthought, human and non-human. Literature/*wen-xue* also loses its self-evident ground. If the beginning is the threshold marked by enduring negativity, how does one think of the vocation of literature/*wen-xue*?

### **Literature as a thing-in-between (*zhong-jian-wu* 中間物; *Mitte*)**

In Lu-xun's 1926 postscript to a collection of his early works *The Grave*, titled "Writing after *The Grave*", he refers to a personal experience. As a radical advocate of new literature who scathingly criticizes the "syncretists", he suddenly shuddered at the thought that people considered him an exemplary figure to support their argument

that “to write well in plain speech writing, one has to read the ancient texts” (Lu-xun, “Writing after the Grave” 161). His writing cannot but betray what he has carried. He writes, “I suffer from carrying these ancient ghosts on my back, inextricably, and often feel the suffocating and oppressive weightiness” (161). Then he says,

Most probably due to my laziness, I often soothe myself, assuming that all things and affairs in their becoming must have more or less some things-in-between (*zhong-jian-wu*; 中間物). There are things-in-between animals and plants, invertebrates and vertebrates; or we could simply say that everything is a thing-in-between in the process of evolution (Lu-xun, “Writing after the Grave” 162).

*Zhong-jian-wu* is Lu-xun's (1881-1936) translation of the German word “*Mitte*” (middle, between, midst, mean) that appears in a particular passage in the prologue of Nietzsche (1844-1900)'s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (TSZ). A decade prior to this translation, in 1909 Lu-xun had used the term in his lecturing notes on physiology to refer to certain objects of modern natural science, once as a transitory object in hematopoiesis and at another place as some organic structure in the olfactory organ, which resembles two structures but “neither this nor that” (Lu-xun, “Physiology”). Lu-xun has made two attempts to translate “The Prologue”, once in 1918 in an abstruse and antique style of classical language to translate the first three sections and later in 1920 in an entirely different style of the modern reformed plain speech writing.

The line appears in section 7. It follows the scene in the marketplace in section 6: the ropewalker was “walking across the rope stretched between two towers” (Nietzsche, *Zarathustra Tr. Caro* 11). “As he was at the midpoint (*Mitte*) of his way”, a jester came out of the tower, yelling at him, “you block the way for one who is better than you”, and leapt over him. He “lost his head” and “plunged into the depths” (*Zarathustra Tr. Caro* 11). In his last breath, Zarathustra told him “you perish of your vocation, and for that I will bury you with my own hands” (*Zarathustra Tr. Caro* 12). In section 7, the line comes from Zarathustra, as he was carrying the corpse as his sole stiff and cold company, “for mankind I am still *the midpoint/mean* between a fool and a corpse (*Eine Mitte bin ich noch den Menschen zwischen einem Narren und einem Leichnam*) (Nietzsche, *Zarathustra Tr. Caro* 12; *Zarathustra Tr. Kaufmann* 21; Nietzsche, *Also Sprach Zarathustra*)” Intriguingly, the most prevalent 1909 English translation circumvents the very word and renders the line as “for mankind I am still *something* between a fool and a corpse (Nietzsche, *Also Sprach Zarathustra*). In section 4, in Zarathustra’s speech, one also sees a similar imagery,

Mankind is a rope fastened between animal and overman—a rope over an abyss (*Abgrunde*). A dangerous crossing, a dangerous on-the-way, a dangerous looking back, a dangerous shuddering and standing still. What is great about human beings is that they are a bridge and not a purpose: what is lovable about human beings is that they are a crossing-

over (*Übergung*) and a going-under (*Untergung*). I love those who do not know how to live unless by going under, for they are the ones who cross over (Nietzsche, *Zarathustra Tr. Caro* 7).

*Übergung* as a noun means the crossing, the crossing point, the transition, the footbridge or a gateway. The verb *übergehen* means to pass over, to go over, and to become. *Untergung* means the downfall, the decline, the destruction, the ruin, or the end, whereas the verb *untergehen* means to sink, to submerge, to go down, to be on the wane, to perish, or to come to an end. In Nietzsche's parabolic and aphoristic writing, the spatial trope of *die Mitte* seems to offer an image for the pensée of the earthly self-overcoming. When there is no transcendent nor objective ideal that could drive us, we could no longer think with the end-in-itself in the river of becoming that unexhaustedly begets the will of life. The overflowing love for the "earth" and "life" moves downward and earthward. We still long, strive and desire; we are always on the midway across (*der Mitte seines Weges*), trembling in the still midnight (*Mitternacht*), and in the midst (*mitten*) of our work<sup>55</sup> (Nietzsche, *Zarathustra Tr. Caro*). However there are passages where *die Mitte* is associated with mediocrity (*Mittelmässigkeit*) and moderation (*Mäßigkeit*) of the small people, the last man. As in the chapter "On virtue that makes small", they said, "we place our chair in the middle (*Mitte*) and just

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<sup>55</sup> See TSZ, "And so I am in the middle of my work, going to my children and returning from them; for the sake of his children, Zarathustra must complete himself" (Nietzsche, *Zarathustra Tr. Caro* 128).

as far away from dying fighters as from contented sows” (*Zarathustra Tr. Caro* 135)<sup>56</sup>.

Moreover, in the chapter “The Convalescent” *die Mitte* appears in the bystanders’ view on the most difficult thought of the eternal recurrence. In his sickness, Zarathustra’s animals sing to him:

Everything goes, everything comes back; the wheel of being rolls eternally. Everything dies, everything blossoms again, the year of being runs eternally. Everything breaks, everything is joined anew; the same house of being builds itself eternally. Everything parts, everything greets itself again; the ring of being remains loyal to itself eternally. In every Instant being begins; around every Here rolls the ball There. The middle is everywhere (*Die Mitte ist überall*). Crooked is the path of eternity” (Nietzsche, *Zarathustra Tr. Caro* 175).

Zarathustra however reproaches his animals for the cruelty in watching his great pain like human beings do, “*And you looked on at all of this*” (176)? Heidegger in his Nietzsche lecture discusses these passages together with the chapter “On the Vision and the Riddle”. Zarathustra and the dwarf stand in front of the two-face gateway

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<sup>56</sup> See a different discussion in the passage in *Human, All too Human*, “230 Measure and moderation (*Maß und Mitte*)—Of two very exalted things—measure and moderation—It is best never to speak. Some few know their significance and power through inner sacred paths of experience and conversion: they revere in them something divine and refuse to speak of them aloud. All the rest hardly listen when they are spoken of, and confuse them with boredom and mediocrity: except perhaps for those who did once hear a premonitory echo from the domain but closed their ears to it. The recollection of it now makes them agitated and angry” (Nietzsche 1986: 272).

“Moment (*Augenblick*)” where two paths meet—one leads forward, and one leads backwards infinitely to eternity. Would they contradict each other eternally? The dwarf answers that “time itself is a circle”(Zarathustra Tr. Caro 125) (Nietzsche 2006: 125). Zarathustra finds repulsive this common understanding that makes the circularity a system of perpetual compensation so as to make everything indifferent, as Heidegger says, “striving is flattened out into mere alteration” (Heidegger 57). It is only for “the one who does not remain a spectator but who *is himself* the Moment, performing actions directed toward the future and at the same time accepting and affirming the past” (57), the two paths “affront one another”—“future and past *run up against* one another (*vor den Kopf stoßen*), they bump into one another’s head”(Heidegger 58). Here the ring of being is closed in the Moment, in the middle of the striving<sup>57</sup>.

However, there seems to be scanty discussion on the passage and line in the prologue<sup>58</sup>. Yet the imagery of *die Mitte* in the prologue seems to take a deep seat in

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<sup>57</sup> Interestingly, when the Kyoto school philosopher Nishitani Keiji gave his lecture on Nietzsche’s self-overcoming nihilism in the milieu of post-war Japan, he explicated on the same passage, although his ultimate interest was to retrieve the non-actualized past of the Mahayana concept of *sunyata* as the self-overcoming nihilism in Japan (Nishitani, *The Self-Overcoming of Nihilism*).

<sup>58</sup> One exception is Carl Jung, in his five-year lecture on Nietzsche, spent a spring and an autumn semester in 1934 reading the passages on the ropewalker through symbolism. For his interest in psychic pathology, the ropewalker is the human form of Zarathustra, which also foretold Nietzsche’s own fate. The jester is the negative aspect Zarathustra, which is to say, an unconscious figure could prevail against the human being even to the extent of destroying it. People do not understand the figure of Zarathustra, they see the “corpse” and the “fool”—insanity—perhaps the same for Nietzsche himself

Lu-xun's thinking. If indeed death and madness are the wagers for this unyielding striving of thought in Nietzsche, is there another life of the "tropical concept" when it travels? One could perhaps say that Lu-xun's re-inscription of the *Mitte* as *zhong-jian-wu* takes the earthly self-overcoming to the moment he stands in to think of the vocation of literature/*wen-xue*. I venture to give *zhong-jian-wu* a tentative translation as *thing-in-between*. Whereas the signification of the word *Mitte* is approximate to the Chinese word *zhong* (中), I use thing-in-between to preserve the sense of thinginess in the word *wu* (物) in the figurative language and the sense of in-between-ness, the fissure, the void in the word *jian* (間) which also marks its abyssal nature. Lu-xun stands in his time, perhaps also carrying the limit of the spirit of his time. *Zhong-jian-xu* is indeed marked by the evolutionary thoughts of his time. The image in *TSZ* is also given an "Asian" colouring with the "stiff corpse" of tradition dragging from behind and the unattainable modern consciousness always on its midway which perhaps makes it distant from Nietzsche's insight. There is a deeply melancholic and self-abnegative mood throughout. However Lu-xun parted with his cohorts, friends and his own brother, as he has no interest in any progressive utopianism and humanism. The paradox of writing *after* one's own grave is thus written in a perplexing and convoluted way.

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(Jung).

For Lu Xun, in the midst of the historical change or revolution, we are only the bridge, the ladder, the means that shall give way to those who are yet-to-come (*wei-lai*; 未來) and yet-to-be-born (*wei-sheng*; 未生). As he talks about his experimental writing with the reformed modern Chinese language, “this writing should still pass away together with time (*guang-yin*; 光陰; literally light and shadow), and gradually be extinguished. At most, it is a piece of wood or stone of a bridge, but not any goal for the way ahead, nor in any way exemplary” (Lu-xun, “Writing after the Grave” 262). *Zhong-jian-wu* is only the path. As for wither the path leads, the only destination that he knows is his own “grave”:

However, until now, I never know what I have always been doing. For example, doing the earthwork. One is doing it but never understands if it’s constructing a tower or digging a pit. The only thing that is known is that even if it’s building a tower, it’s nothing but letting oneself fall from there or showing up to be old and dead. If it is digging a pit, then it is certainly nothing other than burying oneself. In brief: passing away, passing away, all and all, together with time (literally: *light-shadow*), have long passed away, is passing away, will pass away—nothing more than that, but it is what I am utterly willing (“Writing after the Grave” 258).

The imagery of the footbridge, the tower, the downfall, the grave digging, and the stiff and cold corpse on one’s back approximates the sense-images in the prologue of TSZ.

There is a lack of the heralding of the lightning, but only a departure for the down-going. Lu Xun's project of *zhong-jian-wu* is perhaps similar to what his contemporary literary critic Qu Qiubai says, we "cannot but commit suicide" and "at every moment commit suicide" (Qu, "Zi Sha [Suicide] 自殺"). The act of writing cannot but be self-annihilating and self-obliterating. As Lu Xun admits, for him, to publish this miscellaneous collection of early writings in both classical and plain speech writing and to name it "the grave" is a "deceitful disguise". There is still a lingering attachment (*liulian*; 留戀) to "the remaining trace of the life that has passed away":

Therefore although I clearly know that the past (*guoqu*; 過去) has already passed (*guoqu*; 過去) and one cannot run after the spirit and ghost to capture it, it is anyway impossible to be so resolved. There is still a wish to collect the debris and make a small new tomb. On the one hand, it is to bury; on the other, it is to linger (*liulian*; 留戀). As for the near future, be it treaded to the level ground, that is what I do not want to care about and what in no way I could possibly care about (Lu-xun, "Preface to Grave" 9).

From its beginning to end, Lu Xun's *zhong-jian-wu* as his ethical project never ceases to carry its deep ambivalence, hanging between the resolved cessation and lingering attachment, the self-anatomy and the disguise, consigning to graves and carrying on the back; it is at once oblivion and memorial. Finally the dedicated gift for the readers who love him is at best a "having-not (*wu-xuo-you*; 無所有)"; however there is an

excessive will of life, that he admits that, more than whom he loves, he writes for his enemies so as “to leave a flaw on their good world” (“Preface to Grave” 8). Despite the radical advocacy of the new voice of the plain speech writing, the postscript ends with a quote from what he was reading from the 3rd-century literary scholar Lu Ji’s (陸機; 261-303AD) lamenting elegy for a long past king of prowess who left behind an imperial edict to arrange his posthumous affairs, “alas, for the existence of the grand lingering attachment, even the wise would not be oblivious” (“Writing after the Grave” 264).

One notices that the postscript is prodigal of macabre images of the tomb, the corpse, the debris, the elegy, the wildfire, and the marionette. There seems to be a particular attachment to the dead, the remains, the decay. Perhaps Lu-xun’s thing-in-between is less a midpoint on the chain of evolution, but closer to *ein Mitte* between a fool and a corpse. In his prose-poetry “Ye-cao ti-ci (Inscription to Wild Grass; 野草題詞)”, referring to the past life, he expresses the rapture over its death, its decay, even over the burning down of everything as to nothing to decay, as to know that it has been lived and has not been empty. Even with the lingering attachment to the past mentioned above, he wishes the decay to come in no time<sup>59</sup>. In his refusal to mourn,

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<sup>59</sup> In his inscription to his collected prose-poetry *Ye-cao* (*Wild Grass*; 野草), he writes

[...]

The past life is dead. I exult over this death,

there is a sense of mournfulness in the melancholic intention. One detects in Lu-xun's writings the melancholic retreat into itself, ceding happiness to future generations.

In the rest of the chapter, I wish to read how the tropical concept of the thing-in-between lives its life in an instance of “negative transference” in the history of inter-Asia encounters, or mis-encounters: the Marxist critic Qu Qiu-bai's encounter with Rabindranath Tagore in 1924.

### **The (Mis-)encounter: A Man of the Past**

On the date of April 18th 1924, when the laureate poet Rabindranath Tagore was on the ship journey for his long-awaited trip to China, the journal *Zhong-guo Ching-nian* (Chinese Youth) published an essay reviewing his novel *The Home and the World* (*Ghare-Baire*) (1916) translated to Chinese in the previous year. The essay is titled “The man of the past—Tagore”. This tart and pungent commentary gave Tagore a

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as by it I know that it has been lived.  
The dead life has decayed. I exult over the decay,  
as by it I know that it has not been empty.

[.....]  
By the tuft of the wild grass,  
at the limit of light and darkness, life and death, past and future,  
I dedicate it in before friends and enemy, men and beasts, whom (I) love or do not love as to testify—

For myself, for friends and enemy, men and beasts, whom (I) love or do not love,  
I wish the decay of the wild grass in no time as the burning flame.  
Go, wild grass, together with my inscription! (Lu-xun, “Inscription to Wild Grass” 5–6).

diagnosis: facing the fast-changing world, he refuses to see India already being a part of the industrial economy and denies the political struggle and only wants to seek answers from the past of India. Therefore while emphasizing the integration of Occidental and Oriental culture, he is actually only the representative of the latter. He is therefore “a saint behind his time” (Qu, “A Man of the Past”).

The review was written by the Marxist literary critic Qu Qiubai (1899-1935), at the time a 25-year-old young man but already a leading figure in the then 3-year-old communist party<sup>60</sup>. Qu’s essay is a representative of the way the leftist intellectuals and writers respond to the laureate’s short visit. The occasions of Tagore’s talks nearly became absolute pandemonium fused with clamour of slogans and banners and pamphlets of protest by the young students. In these pamphlets, it is said that they clearly reject Tagore because the Oriental culture is a culture of dictatorship, casteism, and slavery (Chung et al.). On hindsight, the visit of Tagore was an unprecedented

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<sup>60</sup> To give a brief biographical note on Qu’s life, he was one of the initial founders of the Chinese Communist Party and an important Marxist theorist and literary critic of the time, a good friend to Lu-xun. He was professionally trained in Russian language. In his early days, he was interested in the Tolstoy new village and anarchism. In the May fourth movement time, he was one of the members of the Marxism study circle, which later founded the communist party. After he returned from Russia he taught sociology in Shanghai university and soon also became a member of the central political committee of the communist party. He was also one of the leading figures in the crucial but failed 1927 Shanghai revolution. Later, he died as a martyr, arrested and executed by the Nationalist Party, at the young age of 35. Besides his political writings, he has also done copious works on literary criticisms and language reform and translations and other works on the Russian literature and the Russian Marxist literary theories and criticism. Just two years before 1924, he spent a year in Mexico as a correspondent to cover the ground reality under the new communist Russia.

cultural event among the literati-intelligensia in China, marking the fissure and discordance between the leaders of the May 4<sup>th</sup> New Cultural Movement finally surge to a total split on the surface. On both the welcoming camp and the opposite side stood the leading figures of the New Cultural Movement (Y. Wang, *Tagore's Visit*). The extremely polarized attitudes of eulogizing and deification on the one side and relentless attack on the other were vividly remembered and portrayed sarcastically in a most hilarious scene many years later by the writer Lu Xun, who seemed to be indifferent to Tagore's visit then and looked on coldly, as he ridiculed the symptoms of the Chinese literary criticism as "slaughter by curse versus slaughter by flatter"<sup>61</sup> (Lu-xun, "Slaughter by Curse"). However, in the research concerning Tagore's visit to China, an intriguing fact has been noticed that among those who launched the fiercest criticism, most were the ones who had been the pioneers in introducing and translating Tagore's works to Chinese readers. The main initiator of the New Cultural Movement, Chen Duxiu, who perhaps launched the most malicious personal attack on

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<sup>61</sup> Let me quote a paragraph of Lu Xun's words here: "[To talk about] those people who are recent but undertake the ancient, I am reminded of Tagore. He came to China to give lectures on some altar. People arranged him an ancient instrument and burnt him a whole pot of incense sticks. On the left side there was Lin Chang-min and on the right side there was Hsu Zhi-mo, both wearing some Indian *topi*. Our great poet Hsu started his introductory note: 'Dumbly! Mumbly...rumbly... White cloud and cool breeze, silver chime.....dum!' as if this one is a demigod! Thus our young people on earth got disappointed and left. Demigod versus human being, how could they not leave? But I read his article on the USSR this year. He self-proclaimed that 'I am an Indian under the British rule.' He understands it very clear. I guess that when he came to China he couldn't be that confused. If our poets and babus didn't make him a living demigod, the young people wouldn't feel so far off from him. But see now this dude is really out of luck"(Lu-xun, "Slaughter by Curse").

Tagore at that time, was the one who first translated several poems from *Gitanjali* in 1915 in the form of classical Chinese poetry and introduced Tagore side by side with the name of Leo Tolstoy, who perhaps symbolized the ideal social reformer for the non-West world at that time. The realist writer and the first advocator of full-length novels, Mao-dun, who was also the one who started to follow and report the news of Tagore in literary magazines and translated his short story *Skeleton* in 1920, selected and translated poems from *Lover's Gift and Crossings* for a literary journal in 1922, and also wrote two critical essays concerning Tagore's visit. Compared to Chen, his criticism is relatively moderate. At the first place he gave Tagore a "relative welcome": "we relatively welcome Tagore. We definitely don't welcome the Tagore who praises the Oriental culture; we also don't welcome the Tagore who creates the paradise for the poetic spirit that makes our youngsters find a place to get enchanted and meditate; what we welcome is the Tagore who is engaged with peasants' movement (though we oppose the methods of his peasant movement)—the Tagore who sings for "walking after the light!" (Mao-dun, "What We Expect" 424)<sup>62</sup>. However after Tagore's speeches on "The crisis of Oriental culture" in Shanghai and "The third age of human

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<sup>62</sup> In the first essay 'Our Hope for Tagore', Maodun says, "We relatively welcome Tagore. We definitely don't welcome the Tagore who praises for the Oriental culture; we also don't welcome the Tagore who creates the paradise for the poetic spirit that makes our youngsters find a place to get enchanted and meditate; what we welcome is the Tagore who is engaged with peasants' movement (though we oppose to the methods of his peasant movement)—the Tagore who sings for "walking after the light!"(Mao-dun, "What We Expect" 424)

world”, Maodun expressed his complete disappointed with Tagore for according to him, Tagore totally romanticized the rural image, saw it as only belonging to the Oriental culture, and deemed the path to the third age of the world through the spirit of “observance and sacrifice”. This, for Maodun, is not only the “world of the slaves” but also the “world of the ghosts” (Mao-dun, “Tagore and Oriental Culture”)!

One would perhaps want to ask why the change happened so drastically such that in a few years, the poet who once seemed to lend an inner voice to these social and cultural reformers to found a new language through translation, became a representative of the decadent and the outdated Orient culture for these intellectuals? Also, what did people really see and seek from this visitor who came from a neighboring semblable country, which made the visit burst into an eventful clash?<sup>63</sup>

It seems that the repugnance and unease all pertains to an ambivalent mood over Tagore’s idea of the rural China. It flares up more after Tagore’s speech on ‘The crisis

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<sup>63</sup> The two kind of polarized responses and the rapidly reversed views from these intellectuals and writers toward Tagore could be explained by the internal politics of the literati factions or the then germinating political parties. Wang Yen gives an account of how Mao-dun and others looked back at the event years later, which gives a clear indication that the central authorities of the Communist Party had actually planned a series of criticism and assigned tasks to the writers and intellectuals to publish in different journals and magazines. The party had set the basic tone and view on Tagore (Y. Wang, *Tagore’s Visit*). The editor of the anthology of Tagore’s English writings, Sisir Kumar Das, also mentions in his essay that the series of fierce criticism was not really targeted at Tagore but rather the host who invited him, Liang Qichao from the Beijing Lecture Society. The real concern was a fear that the powerful influence of the laureate poet would lend support to Liang’s Chinese civilisationalism (Das).

of Oriental culture’<sup>64</sup>. Right afterwards, Mao Dun expressed his deep disappointment with its identifying the Oriental culture with its love for the countryside(Mao-dun, “Tagore and Oriental Culture”). For Mao Dun, this sentiment towards the vanishing rural actually has been *what the West inherently owns*—the romantic imagery from the poetic spirit—to which a sense of appreciation is still attached. The love of the rural landscape and natural beauty, the love for the ideal humanity and the ordinary folks, perhaps only had just been founded in the modern Chinese language through translation of the romanticist literature, including the Tagore or Tolstoy once as important figures, by people like Mao Dun himself. It is a language acquired anew. It

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<sup>64</sup> Mao dun wrote another essay right after the speech, where he expressed his disappointment and posed a question to ask what exactly this exalted “Oriental culture” is,

...[W]hat in the world is our treasurable Oriental culture? [Tagore] almost didn't say anything about it. He cried out that the Western factories have destroyed China of its lovable beauty of farm field and the wilderness (*tian-ye-zi-mei*; 田野之美). Is it at all possible to say that the beauty of farm field and the wilderness is the Oriental culture!?! For those ‘nostalgic (*wang-xiang-cho*; 望鄉愁)’ poets in the West, the scene of the beauty of rural landscape eaten up by hideous cities had also been the material for poetry by which they also made very good poems. One thus knows that the beauty of rural landscape is also what originally has been inherent and innate in the West. The thing that Tagore laments and regrets for us has already taken place in the West. According to Tagore, it can be said that the West originally also had this Oriental culture, but it has been destroyed by the Western culture, is it? Does it even sound reasonable?(Mao-dun, “Tagore and Oriental Culture” 440–41)

The loaded translated-ness in the fabrication of the term *tian-ye-zi-mei* and *wang-xiang-cho* perhaps tells the nature of a transitional period in which it is impossible to conceive a borrowed perspective to be one’s innate attributes. While *tien* (田), the measurement of the farming land, is conjuncted to *ye* (野), the distant locus contra the court and official, to designate the rural landscape that is associated with a sensual aesthetic experience is the product of the translating practice, “*wang-xiang-chou* (distracted at the gaze into the rural/home)”, which stands most probably for the word nostalgia, stays in the bracket to mark its foreignness (“Tagore and Oriental Culture”).

would be difficult to perceive it as anything of the Orient. In the aggressive question that ridicules the logic to imagine the Oriental culture as the beauty of its rural scene, it perhaps tells another truth—which is to say that this “Oriental culture” as idyllic rural scene is “what the Western culture *owns*”, it is “in and for the West”, if one is to use Edward Said’s words. There is a reversed side of this Oriental culture that is however seen as what China really inherently has, which is indeed the target that perhaps triggers off all attacks at the poet, who now for the West stands for the Oriental culture. In the leaflets spread by the students at the occasion, which deeply hurt the feelings of the poet, it is stated that they reject Dr. Tagore because the Oriental culture is a culture of despotism, casteism, and slavery(Chung et al.).

If one goes back to Qu Qiubai’s review of *Ghare-baire*, the reason for it to be written, to pay attention to this past embracing poet laureate, who unfortunately became the prop, is actually aiming at those who advocated for this Oriental culture and held on to the language of the world order of an agrarian empire. Therefore right after his opening remark on Tagore in the first sentence, the real repugnance is shown immediately towards his real enemy:

While China has already moved out of from the agrarian country (*nong-guo*; 農國) and the traditional four caste society of “intelligensia-peasant-labour-merchant (*shi-nong-gong-shang*; 士農工商)” for long, still these backward intelligensia-officials (*shi-daifu*)

are still advocating for a nation founded on peasantry/agriculture (*yi-nong-li-guo*; 以農

立國)(Qu, “A Man of the Past” 331)!

Qu, as a young communist, believed in the coequality of the modern revolutions and yearned for the germinating new world. What he seems to really seek from this visitor from the neighboring country is a message, neither from an ancient Empire nor a backward country, but one from the “modern India”, that has a role to play on the stage of world history. Unfortunately, this visitor clearly rejects this expectation. Tagore declared that he didn’t come for any “message” but only to express “a love for China from himself and his people” (Tagore, *Talks In China*).

However, although Qu’s essay begins with the belittling remark that “[m]odern India—the India of all the actual happening social movements and revolutionary movements—definitely is not reflected in the thoughts of Tagore” (Qu, “A Man of the Past” 331) and the following sarcastic tone about the poet being a propagandist for “love and peace”, Qu goes on to say that the political and social question pertaining to modern India, however, is still touched by the poet in *Ghare-baire*. The novel still has a kind of real “historical value”, a phrase he put emphatically in parenthesis. This is worthy of analysis for the reason that it is based on the social phenomena of a particular kind of revolutionaries of that time who were different from the kind of emerging indigenous bourgeoisie: “the ‘de-classed’ intelligentsia, who in spite of

being well-educated due to the superfluous production of its own population live in a condition as miserable as the labouring class” (“A Man of the Past” 332). In the following analysis, it is stated that this novel is “an expression in a total aestheticised manner of [Tagore’s] political ideas, which is to say, the only ‘grandiose path’ to avoid the evil of social conflicts is through ‘personal cultivation’” (333). For Qu, the protagonist Nikhil is the representative of the backward middleman philistine (*shikuai*; 市儈) “revolutionary sentiment”: “on the one hand wanting to fight the British, and on the other hand shuddering at the commandment (*jie*; 戒; *sila*) on killing” (334). And in his analysis, although the main social force of the social movements in India at that time consisted of the semi-proletarianized intellectual class and students, what it actually represented was the interest of the Indian rural bourgeoisie and those wealthy people who practised usury. The historical value of the novel is precisely that it represents “an *unavoidable* social psychology while the old Indian society is going through a structural transformation” (333 emphasis added).

This four-page short essay on a young political journal, after nearly a century, while those revolutionary imperatives have gone through reevaluation, could be easily criticized as a reflection of the immature, vulgar Chinese Marxist perspective at a time the Western modern ideas seem to be the imperative; or it could be regarded as an instance of Marxist orthodoxy’s over-simplification of the relation between literature

and class relation. Qu's criticism also seems to be nothing more than repeating György Lukács view on the novel written two years before<sup>65</sup>. However, if one is to read Qu's writings over a decade, in various forms of travel diaries, political and scholarly essays, or even book reviews, this "man of the past" that he ferociously attacked starts to be hazed and wavering. This shadowy figure of "man of the past" seems to uncannily appear again and again across his writings as if it is a clue to a certain puzzle of history.

In fact, the title of the book review 'A Man of the Past' is exactly the same Chinese term that Qu, in his preface to Zheng Zheng-duo's Chinese translation of Savinkoff Ropshin's novel *The Pale Horse (Kon' Blednyj)*, had used for translating the title of the essay written by the Russian literary critic Anatoly Lunacharsky (1875-1933)(Qu, "Preface to The Pale Horse" 261). The preface is about the structure of feelings of the *Narodnik* nihilist revolutionary figures. Qu mentions that as the *Narodniks* were the product of the idealist religion of the old Russian society, in their struggle against the dark and bleak reality, they rather indulged in the "old Russian thoughts from the medieval time". They however still retained the "sincere, humble,

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<sup>65</sup> In fact, in 1922, György Lukács, in his openly admitted "totally dismissive criticism" of the same novel—"Tagore's Gandhi novel" had already dismissed the novel saying that with its pale stereotype characters and uninteresting and threadbare story, it doesn't even make a "good pamphlet". Tagore's moralist opposition to the use of violence in the freedom struggle only represents the "ideology of the eternal subjection of India". The "cultural scandal" of the enormous celebrity of Tagore in the German cultural circle for Lukacs was only "a symptom of the German mentality today" (Lukacs).

and passionate soul” of the Russian peasants (257). Qu therefore quotes Lunacharsky’s commentary on the *Narodniki* movement in the essay ‘A Man of the Past’, “it is perhaps childish, however with grandeur *from its beginning to its end* (*shi-zhong*; 始終). —Even Marx was sometimes inspired by this spirit, often thinking they would perhaps achieve something, although the cultural development of Russia foreseen by Marx is surely different from the *Narodniks*” (261 emphasis added). For Qu, as the literary history and the history of revolutionary thoughts are deeply intertwined, Ropshin’s novel is just a representative of the ebbing flow of the nihilist sentiment which fell behind the social feeling of the changing time like a river in spate (*pu-liu zhuan-bian*; 瀑流轉變) and was doomed to wane. In its ending days it saw the most zealously decadent fin-de-siècle sentiment<sup>66</sup>. The protagonist Georg is precisely the figure of “the last nihilist”. Qu goes on to say:

The form of social thought is the so-called “ism (*xue-shuo*; 學說)” —the narrow sense of social ideal; the ideal is thus always penetrated with subjective feelings. Therefore “in its ebbing away”, notwithstanding still being the motive of a segment of society’s feelings, it can only represent *the melancholy off for ‘the past’* (“*guo-qu*”-*de-bei-ai*; “過去”的悲哀) (Qu, “Preface to The Pale Horse” 256).

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<sup>66</sup> In fact, the wording “*pu-liu* (a river in spate)” is used by Xuanzang in the Chinese translation of the line “*tac ca vartate srotasaughavat*” in the fourth verse of Vasubandhu’s *Trimsika-Karika* (Thirty Verses): *heng-zhuan ru pu-liu* (恆轉如瀑流) which means “ever-turning like a river in spate”. One often detects a trait of *vijnana* Buddhist lexicon in Qu’s language.

In the last sentence Qu not only put the phrase “*guo-qu* (the past)” in the bracket but also highlighted the whole phrase to give the weight to this “melancholy of the past”. Here the genitive “of (*de*; 的)” makes the meaning obscure with a certain indecisiveness<sup>67</sup>: Is it the “melancholy ‘*of the past*’” that belongs to a past time, which is no more in the coming age under the effulgence of the red sun light in the new world? Or is it the melancholy *for the past*, the deep sorrow for what has passed away and what is incessantly passing away? However if “the man of the past” belongs to “the melancholy of the past” how could he be great and splendid from the beginning to the end? It’s perhaps hard to not recall the words he put down in the traveling note when he was to set forth on his journey to the “home of hunger”—the new Russia:

The canvases of the old society appear in front of us, one after another. They are however also the objects of the social problem that we are going to solve. But...what about “the lingering yearning of/for the past”? What image and imprint (*yin-xiang*; 印象), after all, do you own on what is yet to come (*jiang-lai*; 將來) to me so that both occupy comparable positions in my mind? Now all the associations come into a still. My

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<sup>67</sup> In ‘Resistance to Theory’ when Paul de Man explicates the moment when grammatical decoding could not determinate the rhetorical dimension of a text he uses the example of the title of John Keats’s unfinished epic poem *The Fall of Hyperion*. With the genitive, it could be read as “Hyperion’s fall” but as well as “Hyperion falling”, as both are grammatically possible, thus there is an undecidability in its meaning (de Man). Here in Qu’s text, the Chinese auxiliary word “*de*(的)” could be marking the genitive case but it could also be the auxiliary word for an adjective, which make the meaning of Qu’s phrase “the melancholy of the past” undecidable as in Keats’s case.

mind has another destiny. As I wave my hand, I am resolute to leave! (Qu, “Home of Hunger” 22).

Although Qu was resolute in leaving the past behind and seeking the ever-anew horizon shared by the changing world, a shadow still seems to haunt him from the back. The “lingering yearning of/for the past” seems to still occupy an important place in Qu’s mind, perhaps, instead of Tagore’s. However, what is the imprint that this “lingering yearning of/for the past” had cast on Qu’s future? And what then is the image that had been projected on his future?

### **Beginning and/or End...**

On hindsight, Qu’s fixation on *Ghare-baire* doesn’t seem to be contingent. It is as if it was a foretold tragic end of his own fate<sup>68</sup>.

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<sup>68</sup> To put in a nutshell, *Ghare-baire* is a prose-novel that takes the *swadeshi* movement as its background. The story is only recurrent first-person narratives between the three main characters—with the story of Bimala, the story of Sandip and the story of Nikhil being the titles of each chapter. Nikhil is from a landlord family. In his wealthy family, most of the men are self-destructive characters and women are pretty and with luxurious taste. Nikhil, who went through modern education, however breaks off from the family tradition and focuses on his studies and social work. He established a bank to offer the poor peasants loans at his own cost and often supported the anti-colonial struggles. He, however, never rejects the material demand from his widowed sister-in-law. A youth from a landed family with an intimate widowed sister-in-law in the novel makes Tagore himself the shadow behind the figure of Nikhil. In the beginning of the novel, the newly married Bimala is happy with the family life and sees Nikhil as her entire world. Nikhil however insists that the two of them must meet reality outside and have each other fully in the “outside world” to realize true love. . They argue about it. Bimala asks: “Is anything wanting then, in the love we have here at home?” Nikhil however insists to risk for the free and true love. He therefore pushes Bimila to go “outside”. He introduces his friend Sandip to her. Sandeep is a fervent nationalist leader, to whom Nikhil often lends financial support.

In 1934, when the Red Army retreated to the inland and Qu suffered long from his tuberculosis, he refused to leave and stayed in the Soviet territory in Reijin and was finally arrested by the nationalist party troops. On 18<sup>th</sup> June 1935, he was executed. The deeply melancholic and debilitated Qu walked into the *inexorable* fate as if it was awaited, just as in *Ghare-baire* the protagonist Nikhil ran to the scene of the riot as if knowing it is the immortal draught the goddess had long prepared for him. Like the tragic fate of Nikhil, Qu is destroyed inwardly and outwardly, in the same way as Nikhil says in the novel: “[getting] hurt at every step and at last there comes the supreme hurt of death” (Tagore, *The Home and the World* 199).

In 1935, foreseeing his own imminent death, the prisoned Qu wrote down his

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Bimla is gradually attracted to Sandip, for in his gaze she could see herself differently as a woman representing the politics of “nature” and the power (*shakti*) of motherland. Compared to the eloquent and powerful Sandip, Nikhil seems to be always cornered, dull, pale, and gloomy, bearing the pain of seeing the two getting close in silence. Bimla is more and more intimate with Sandip and devoted to his cause. She even steals Nikhil’s sister-in-law’s savings for him. Sandip’s calculative and exclusive nationalist politics finally triggers communal violence between the Hindu and Muslim communities which, ultimately, is to the benefit of the colonizer. The unconditional boycott of foreign goods advocated by Sandip makes the livelihood of poor local Muslim petit merchants difficult. They have to however subject to the pressure given by the wealthy landlord class (*Zamindar*). The seemingly conservative Nikhil who never unconditionally supports the *swadeshi* movement with the concern of the livelihood of the local Muslim merchants thus is defamed in newspapers. He tries to prevent the growing hostility between the communities but feels helpless. He is also agonized by Bimla’s betrayal. In the end, Sandip’s nationalism incurs a large-scale communal violence. He himself runs away in no time. Nikhil is advised by his mentor to leave the village for Kolkata taking Bimla along with him. However, on the eve of leaving, when the news of the riot’s devastation had already befallen on their neighborhood, looting the households and raping women, Nikhil immediately decides to rush to the site and ends up being severely injured. The end of the story gestures towards the imminent death of Nikhil (Tagore, *The Home and the World*).

famous last will—"The superfluous words" (*duo-yu-de-hua*; 多餘的話), which was once rejected as a forgery and even involved the controversy of "treacherous surrender" and "traitor's literature" in the history of the communist party. For it was almost a confession that tells everything about what he is not, but everyone knows him to be. In the beginning he says, since these are "superfluous words", why even say them? However, it is on the eve of extinction, "disarmed, pulled out of the troop", the petit-bourgeoisie intelligentsia temperament for "self-analysis" made him feel like speaking from the heart and exposing his inner truth. Thus, he left behind these "superfluous words" that are not necessary to be said. At the same time, it turns out that it is also a truth that is necessary to be exposed. He says, "history cannot, and should not, be cheated", and "to let the comrade call a traitor a martyr is condemnable". He shuddered and was horrified to hear how the comrades commemorated him the previous year when the rumour of his death came to them. He is unwilling to "die in the pretension of being a martyr" (Qu, "Superfluous Words" 436).

In this last will, he portrays himself as a "frail figure of a dual nature", who had walked on the path of Marxism and taken up the proletarian outlook on the world and life, nevertheless "throughout the beginning to the end (*shi-zhong*; 始終)" never been able to cast off the latent consciousness of the gentry class. He admits that he could never cast off the "decadent, fragile, and romantic elements" in him; "the hypocritical

kindness and submissiveness that dodges any conflict [...] to the extent of the parasitic ideas to retreat like a hermit” makes him a “high-brow lumpenproletariat”, or to be more direct, certain “useless waste” (ibid 424). He is a “half-baked literati (*wen-ren*; 文人)” throughout “the beginning to the end (*shi-zhong*; 始終)”. Thus he confesses that he was never really interested in politics and was only half-baked in his superficial understanding of Marxist thought. However, the “historical contingency (*ou-ran*; 偶然)” and moreover the “mis-recognition (*wu-hui*; 誤會) of history” made him a leader of the communist party and a “Marxist theorist” in the university. It made him pass off as a character on the political stage of revolution for so many years. He just wished to hastily rush to the end so that he could finally “return to his own place” (424-425).

However, “at the end of the day (*shi-zhong*; 始終) the truth has to be exposed; “one pole” in the “dual” will in fact finally take over and achieve its triumph. He says, with the half-baked and childish Marxist knowledge, lacking an understanding of rural life and land question, he always makes opportunist mistakes with the changing revolutionary conjuncture, thereby thinking the prospect of revolution must immediately take its step in the metropolis, fearing it would dissipate in no time. He goes on to say that after being removed from his leading post in the central committee for the mistake of “putschism”, he however felt “a great relief from the extremely

weighty burden”. He had long felt he had been dead in political life. For seven, eight years, he had only felt extreme tiredness—the mind was never allowed to rest, and the body was exhausted. Tuberculosis, haematemesis and neurasthenia make him feel like only a “uselessly depressed and disabled person”. He couldn’t resist the thought that “no matter the universe is going to be destroyed or not, no matter revolution is happening or not, I only want to rest, rest, and rest! ...So, fine, now I have the chance to ‘rest forever’” (ibid: 436). He wants to expose this truth—which is to say, in the end (*shi-zhong*; 始終), the latent consciousness of the gentry class never really allows him to become a fighter of the proletarian class. He derides himself and says if he had certain achievements in life, then they were only achievements in the contemptible occupation of being a “actor” (*xi-zi*; 戲子)<sup>69</sup> on the stage (435).

However, “a farce will now bring down its curtain!” (435)

The compound adverb phrase *shi-zhong*, literally as “beginning-end”, recurs throughout his writings. The meaning of the compound is often kept in a suspense with its indecisiveness as to whether it is a partially directed compound that refers to

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<sup>69</sup> It is not easy to find an exact translation for the Chinese expression *xi-zi* (戲子). *Xi* (戲) means a play or even “to play” as in a game. *Zi* (子) is a belittling way of referring to a person. It literally means one who earns their living by being a player or an actor in the plays or dramas. However traditionally the occupation is made out of the low rank in the society and seen as contemptible. Perhaps its low status in history is closer to what we usually think of the “clown” in English. *Xi-zi* also has the sense of the inauthenticity and lack of seriousness.

the one pole or a non-leaning opposite compound that refers to both the ends. However, in Qu's writing, it is as if the end finally returns to the beginning to expose the truth right there. Thus, be it the beginning or the end (*shi-zhong*; 始終), he has to expose the truth to history:

There is great *jouissance* (*tong-kuai*; 痛快; literally means “painfully pleasurable”) in unmasking. Not only does unveiling another's mask have the *jouissance*, but being unmasked also has great *jouissance*, especially when one can unmask oneself. I have now unveiled my last fraud mask. Thus you shall congratulate me. I am going to rest, rest for ever and ever. Thus all the more you shall congratulate me (Qu, “Superfluous Words” 437).

When one looks back retroactively, Qu's analysis of “the unavoidable social psychology of the superfluous ‘de-classed’ intellegensia in the rural area” in *Ghare-Baire* is precisely his own autobiography portraited in *Chi-Du-Xin-Shi* (赤都心史; *The Mental History of the Red Capital*): “My family, is indeed the gentry class”, which as “the historical residue of the society” that “belongs to the archeological museum”, therefore “*by its nature* (*zi-ran*; 自然) shares the pathetic fate and is doomed to be broken”(Qu, “Mental History” 201 emphasis added). Tagore, who “emphasizes the integration of Occidental and Oriental culture, but is actually himself only the representative of the latter”, is exactly the “‘I’ [am]—”, under Qu's pen, “the

sacrificed victim of the conflict of the European and Chinese cultures. My spirit is impaired by the ‘inner discordance’, wherein the realist self is at odds with the romanticist self, and ‘social helplessness’. As it happens, sigh! I have become ‘the superfluous man’...” (219-20). The “philistine” revolutionary Nikhil, who avoids the conflict and shudders to think of violence, is finally this frail figure in ‘The superfluous words’, whom Bukhrin mocked as “talking like a lady on the loft, always so polite, never uttering a sentence without adding a ‘perhaps’, ‘maybe’, or a ‘it’s hard to say’”(Qu, “Superfluous Words” 432) and who is always “enduring, dodging, agreeable, hoping people could be kind to each other (433)”. At last, isn’t Nikhil, who still spent the time to carefully pack all his beloved books on the eve of leaving Kolkata with the looming danger, the mirror image of Qu Qiu-bai himself, who, after having written the final sentence of “farewell, all that is in the world”, could not help but add the last line of the postscript: “Finally...in Russia, Gorky’s *The Life of Matvei Kozhemyakin*, Turgnev’s *Rudin*, Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina*; in China, Luxun’s *The Real Story of Ah-Q*, Maodun’s *Waverings*, and Cao Xue-cin’s *The Dream of the Red Chamber*. All these can be read again and again” (438)?

Finally, Qu exposed the truth to history that he himself is the “man of the past” under his own pen:

The literati (*wen-ren*; 文人; the man of the letters), is a Chinese medieval residue and

“legacy”—a deplorable legacy. I do believe, in eight to ten years, there will be no more of this kind of intellectuals.

Nevertheless, I *cannot deny* that I am precisely one species in the “literati (*wen-ren*)” (Qu, “Superfluous Words” 432 emphasis added).

It is therefore as if the “medieval residue”, Nikhil, has foretold the unavoidable end of Qu’s own life—i.e. the unavoidable destiny of the gentry class as the historical residue, which Qu struggles to resist and to run away from but keeps returning to, as if it is already the fate written. The ending “farce” in his eyes however seems to be the best demonstration of the essence of tragedy: the conflict between the freedom in the subject and objective necessity, “to *know* that there is an objective power which threatens to destroy our freedom and, with this firm and certain conviction in our hearts, to fight against it, to summon up all our freedom and to thus perish” (Schelling cited from Szondi, *An Essay on the Tragic* 8). It is like in the tragedy of Oedipus Rex, Oedipus unceasingly struggles to escape from the destined fate, so as to curse the prophet Tiresias thus also cursed himself but yet unbeknownst to him, however finally “willingly endure[s] punishment even for an unavoidable crime, so as to prove one’s freedom precisely through the loss of this freedom” (9). At the end, is it not that both Qu Qiu-bai and Nikhil willingly take their own extinction as the final punishment in seeking and proving this freedom?

**Contingency (*ou-ran*; 偶然), Necessity (*bi-ran*; 必然;), and Nature (*zi-ran*; 自然)<sup>70</sup>**

On hindsight, the mis-encounter with the laureate from the neighboring country is perhaps also not by accident.

In fact, Qu Qiubai was not unfamiliar with Tagore. In the letter he wrote just a year before, in 1923 to his younger brother, one reads the following conversation: The brother Qu Jingbai wrote to him about the “love, light, consolation, and happiness” in Zheng Zheng-duo’s *Welcome Tagore* and then went on to say he was reading Zheng’s translation of Tagore’s *Stray Birds* by the West Lake in Hangzhou, immediately feeling engrossed by the poetic feeling, “the body is thus deprived of its freedom by the ‘affect’ and the ‘scene’, with the blissful joy without any care. To be in this breath is such a rare and unique experience in life. It is now getting dark...” Qu Qiu-bai begins his reply by a sigh, “indeed! It’s getting dark... this endless long night... Brother, Jing-bai, do you really have hope for the East? The East... that the sun will rise at the dawn?” (Qu, “A Letter From” 298) He then tells his brother that the light

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<sup>70</sup> For the question of “nature” in Qu’s works, one can read a similar line of query with a different orientation in Zhang Li-jun’s “Inner Voices and Films: on the Rhetoric of Life Philosophy in Qu Qiubai’s Early Works”, where he discusses the possible influence of Henri Bergson’s *Élan vital* on the image of the turbulent grand torrent of life constantly in change and becoming in Qu’s early writings (L. Zhang, “Inner Voices and Films”). In his other essay, “Modern prince and organic intellectuals—Qu Qiubai, Gramsci and the formation of the theory of ‘hegemony’”, there is also a discussion on the relation between necessity and freedom in Qu’s works (L. Zhang, “Modern Princes”).

from the Western bungalow on the lakeside road is only the light as private property, it is never Tagore's "light" and "love". He then asks his brother in a half-grudged and half-ironic tone, "why don't you seek to understand Tagore in the nature (*zi-ran*; 自然)? Since his philosophy is 'the philosophy in the woods', it should be in harmony with the nature" (ibid: 299). In fact, the most well-known and important translator of Tagore mentioned here, Zheng Zheng-duo, was a close friend of Qu, together with whom Qu edited the monthly journals *New Society* (*Shin-She-Hui*; 新社會) and *Humanité* (*Rendao*; 人道) just a few years back. In his traveling journal *The Journey Towards the Home of Hunger-New Russia*, he noted down the farewell rhymes from the friends of *Humanité* on the eve for his journey. There is a poem by his friend-cum-uncle of the same age Qu Junong sent through the post:

Looking back: the miserable life, the dusky society,

----but you are gone!

Good to be gone, good to be gone.

Just wish you turn around and look back a few more times,

To see the fellow beings in slumber in this dark, sweet home, how, after all, they are.

[...]

Tagore says, "becoming is the essence of life".

Bergson states, all the creatures in the universe are creations--unceasing creations.

One day when you come back,

Hope you to transform, and to create.

(Qu, "Home of Hunger" 34)

Qu replied to his friends when he was at a stopover in Tianjin in the letter "Leaving home and replying to *Humanité*": "Driving me is 'the will of the universe'; Welcoming me is the 'tune of the nature'... The honey is due when the flowers wither away. Re-turning back, the resplendent clouds glow as blossoms" ("Home of Hunger" 36). But later in 1923 when Qu was writing to his brother, he was reminded of the old-time friends: Zhengduo, Tagore's translator, in whom he had long seen a tendency to be too idealist, and his uncle, Junong, who would later become one of the main hosts for Tagore in 1924. He now felt so estranged from them. How could one still place the hope of seeing the sunrise in the East in this unbearable, long, dark night? Perhaps it was already like the scene in the first sentence he wrote in the farewell letter, "To *Humanité*, the train is leaving for the north-east tonight. From now on, we are moving further away. Further away..." (ibid: 35) However, although Qu had already moved afar from his friends from the *Humanité*, while he asked his brother to seek answer in nature, he himself also seems to never have left behind the quest for

nature (*zi-ran*; 自然).

In his early reply letter “to *Humanité*”, he writes, “we eventually are only determined to follow ‘the nature’ and move forward. —If not to create, it itself (*zi*; 自) will create! If not unified it itself (*zi*; 自) will unify!” (ibid:35) The nature (*zi-ran*) under Qu’s pen is rather often put in parenthesis, as if it is that which has to be suspended and bracketed, that which is the “real” (*shi-ji*; 實際) that is inaccessible and unknown to us in the vicissitude of the phenomenological world. When he was sitting on the train leaving home for Russia, hearing the whirling sound of the rail, he immediately felt “the nature (*tian-ran*; 天然), the cloudy mountain and grassy woods, are receding and vanishing in flight in front the eyes. The ceaseless thought coming to mind, bemoaning with bleakness, somehow I feel the deep-rooted solitude of life” (ibid:10). The solitude comes from the feeling that the individual human life is but a trace of the ever-changing social phenomena which in reverse is the mirage mirrored by human life. He uses the trope of a “grand river of life” for this ever-turning social phenomenon,

The “grand river of life (*sheng-ming de da-liu*; 生命的大流)” as a void contains myriads of things, which flow and turn by itself/nature. Every stream and every current, even a surge or a wave, makes an effort to seek a life that stands out. Thus, each clashes and gushes with others, turning and transforming in myriad ways. And each of them—

each part or the whole--does not know itself, not knowing what the self-turning and self-transformation would give rise to in the time and space. There are only blind “movements (*dong*; 動)” as if following the guidance of “the third”, going further and further, without limit and boundary.—The course has been ten thousand years (Qu, “Home of Hunger” 13).

Later in his discussion on the literary debate between Leon Trotsky and Ivanoff Razumnik, the contrast between the eternal earth as abyss for poetry versus it as the temporary machine (Qu, “Art and Life”), or in his translation of Gorky’s *Hearts and Creeds*, the tension between the male protagonist, a socialist party member who “seeks the expansion of knowledge to overcome the nature and the mysterious power to subject to the human will”, and the pious female protagonist who thinks “life is to dedicate to the ‘unthinkable’ sacrifice, to subject in reason to the highest will”, Qu seems to have never given up his thinking and questing for nature (Gorky).

When he was in Russia, reporting the revolutionary transformation in the country day by day, which was at a time when the materialist worldview had become already deeply entrenched in his mind, we can still read in *The Mental History of the Red Capital* a short note of contemplation titled “Nature (*Zi-ran*)”. As he was reading Tagore’s comparison between the notion of nature in Greek and Indian cultures with different tropes, he started to contemplate the tropes for nature in Russia and China:

For Russians, nature seems to be like a “neighbor (*lin-ren*; 鄰人)” one talks to every day; but for Chinese people it seems to be like a “passerby (*lu-ren*; 路人)” whom one happens to (*ou-ran*; 偶然) walk together with on the same path. He goes on to say,

Men have distanced themselves from the nature that circumscribes all the phenomenon and abandoned the permanent foundation, so as to only walk in between the man-made iron wires,—which is like in the movement of dancing, or sliding downhill on a sledge. One accidentally (*ou-ran*; 偶然) finds a foothold; for the moment he feels a sense of hubris: ‘to this nature as externality, I have the power to overcome it.’ Nature (*zi-ran*), [as that which] is to be as such of itself (*zi-ran*), will not be able to remain as such forever, so forcefully...

In the unity of the “I” and “non-I”, there is a place for being in common; in the opposition of the “I” and “non-I”, one only feels the singular individuality.

Thus, there cannot but be the copula: “love”.

It is true that all children indulge in playing. However if he doesn’t know there is “mother’s bosom” to return to, playing turns out to be getting lost and slowly becomes terrifying. If the individuality is only in hubris but cannot enhance itself with “love”, it becomes our own curse (Qu, “Mental History” 222).

Nature (*zi-ran*), is that which is to be (*zi-ran*). *Zi*(自) signifies not only the “self”, but

also “whence”, “from which”, “of the origin”. *Ran* (然) means “to be”, “as such”, “thus” or gives the sense of an affirmative statement. Qu uses the phrase *zi-ran* doubly here with a slight difference, once as noun and once as adverb phrase. Nature (*zi-ran*) is that which is as such; it is the necessity (*bi-ran*; 必然) but also the *primordial reality* (*ben-ran*; 本然) that one cannot but return to. The copula “love” here seems to bind the opposite I and non-I, the children as freedom and mother as nature in tension, as if at the limit of the horizon of the unceasingly receding nature as the ultimate real, “if not unified it itself (*zi*; 自) will unify”. One would see in Tagore’s writing the bosom of the mother is also a trope for nature. Only when the child is separated from the bosom of the mother does he discover the real relationship with the mother. This relationship is freedom. Here nature is also two-folded. On the one hand nature is the infinite offering of the original plenitude but on the other hand, it is also the bondage of the necessity of the law. In the realm of nature where there is the law of necessity, there is no space for mistakes. In the world of Man, there is always the possibility of making mistakes, which is precisely where truth is to be found. In Tagore, however, for the human to be human, there is always the idea of the “surplus” at its centre—the surplus that exceeds the demand of nature, by which men can offer their “sacrifice” and turn inward (Tagore, *Religion of Man*).

To my mind, in *Ghare-Baire*, Tagore also contemplates upon the turbulent

historical change as force of nature. He saw a destructive force suddenly emerge and flood the historical dynamics of the Swadeshi movement. In his lectures, he names it “nationalism” to understand its logic and dynamics. However, in *Ghare-Baire*, he captures it through the confessional narratives and the dialectical movement of thoughts between the three characters, who all are aware of this death-drive-like emergent force in the drastic social change. He portrays this emergent force through the words of Bimala:

If one had to fill in, little by little, the gap between day and night, it would take an eternity to do it. But the sun rises and the darkness is dispelled—a moment is sufficient to overcome an infinite distance.

One day there came the new era of *swadeshi* in Bengal; but as to how it happened, we had no distinct vision. There was no gradual slope connecting the past with the present. For that reason, I imagine, the new epoch came in like a flood, breaking down the dykes and sweeping all our prudence and fear before it. We had no time even to think about, or understand, what had happened, or what was about to happen. (Tagore, *The Home and the World* 11–12)

In the above quotation, with Bimala’s words, Tagore figuratively portrays a moment that holds together two infinitely distant opposite elements in tension. If Bimala speaks for the changing Bengal and dynamics of the historical force, Tagore lets

Nikhil and Sandip enact the dialectic of two opposing logics. In fact, Sandip, who claims that “I am a materialist”, is not just a flat and stereotypical villain, some aspects of him resemble the Bazarov-like nihilist in Turgenev’s novels. In his monologues and dialogues, he enacts the objective logic of nature, reality and power. For him, desire is the driving force of nature, as he reiterates over and over again, “I want” is the driving force of everything. The objective reality for him is that one cannot argue with a storm as it only shakes. The dialogue between him and Bimala about “reality” is intriguing, as he says that men love delusion and ideas, “[b]ut as for you women, you have desired to conceive reality with body and soul. You have given birth to reality. You have suckled reality at your breasts” (ibid:50). He sees in her a brutal force of nature that leads to destruction. In front of the woman, as the nurturer of reality and the natural force of history, both the idealist logic and the materialist logic are mere idealist thesis. In him “there are rifts in the armour through which something peeps out which is extremely soft and sensitive” (ibid: 74).

The materialist logic, which Sandip pushes to its extreme, finally goes against itself. As an atheist opposed to any deceptive illusion, he uses the most deceptive religious symbols in the movement in order to mobilise the real/natural force of the mass. However, Nikhil, who appears to be an idealist who holds up the ideal and always argues with Sandip against any violence, believing that the only permissible

violence is that which curbs the violence of desire in himself, in the end, has to ask himself “I have begun to suspect that there has all along been a vein of tyranny in me. There was a despotism in my desire to mould my relations with Bimala in a hard, clear-cut, perfect form” (ibid: 211). And Nikhil realises his idealism is helpless against the tide of reality, that he himself has become a superfluous man, that “I could see that I was not wanted here [...] I could only preach and preach, so I mused, and get my effigy burnt for my pains. I had not yet been able to bring back a single soul from the path of death [...] I am not a flame, only a black coal, which has gone out. I can light no lamp. That is what the story of my life shows—my row of lamps has remained unlit” (ibid: 207).

Tagore, through the myth-like novel, articulates two opposite logics that make their ways into history enacted by Nikhil and Sandip. The two logics though are not whole nor totalistic, but are fractured with the rifts and the irreducible remainders. In the novel, Nikhil’s mentor says about Sandip: “I believe Sandip is not irreligious [...] like the dark moon, which is still a moon, for all that its light has gone over to the [obverse] side” (ibid: 106-107). In fact, the two opposite logics, both with their own contradictions and residuals, thus have gone to their own opposite sides. Nikhil replies to his mentor: “That is why I have always had an affection for him, though we have never been able to agree. I cannot condemn him, even now; though he has hurt me

sorely, and may yet hurt me more” (ibid: 107). Even Sandip still says “Nikhil, crank though he be, laugh at him as I may, I cannot get rid of the idea that he is my friend” (ibid: 78). At last, Tagore leaves the end open without a real conclusion. Even on a narrative level, the end of the protagonist Nikhil is undetermined but borders on the line between life and death.

If we look back in Qu’s writing, at the beginning pages of *The Journey to the Home of Hunger*, at a historical conjuncture, amidst the chaos of all the new trends of thoughts coming from the West, Qu felt that he was drifting and shaking in the raging turbulent and the tempestuous tides. When he reflected on his own thoughts, he arrived at a certain kind of “realism (*wei-shi-zhu-yi*; 唯實主義)” for life, which desists from “seeing the self-existent essence of the others (*ren-wo-jian*; 人我見; *loaka atman drishti*)” and “seeing the self-existent essence of the (natural) law (*fa-wo-jian*; 法我見; *dhamma atman drishti*)”(Qu, “Home of Hunger” 30). This has become his “worldly (*shi-jian-de*; 世間的) ‘materialism’”, which is to quest for “the real (*shi-ji*; 實際)” (31). The real (*shi*; 實) that is only to be encountered at the limit (*ji*; 際)—as what the word *ji*(際) signifies, the momentariness of the moment, the interstitial border, the breaching fissure. It is precisely the “categorical responsibility” of this “inner quest” that drives him to leave behind everything at the home he still lingers and determine to leave for Russia (ibid.: 15). This “leaving the country (*qu-guo*; 去

國)” is for him as if it is “ex-sisting the world (*chu-shi*; 出世)” (17). He thus uses the ancient story of the two brothers Boyi and Shuqi who voluntarily die in hunger at Shoyang mountain to insist on their ethical decision as the trope for his own quest in the journey to the revolutionary new Russia, “Boyi and Shuqi’s Shoyang mountain is called ‘the home of hunger’. The real force of the *real* (*shi-ji*) demands on the psyche has overcome the economic desire for the edible corn in the country.—From now on, I have my own home of hunger”(31). To this point, perhaps the difference and distance between what would be called idealism and materialism, between Tagore and Qu Qiu-bai, has already turned to be infinitesimal in the very tension and contraction.

After all, he has become “the superfluous man”.

In the end (*shi-zhong*), this “man of the past” that Qu Qiu-bai aggressively attacked was perhaps the most familiar image in the mirror. It is as if in the scene at the graveyard in the play of *Hamlet*, seeing Laertes leaping into the grave of Ophelia in his unbearable grief, Hamlet was shaken: “what is he whose grief bears such an emphasis? whose phrase of sorrow conjures the wandering stars, and makes them stand like wonder-wounded hearers? *This is I, Hamlet the Dane*”. At the very moment, seeing the image in the mirror who is more sorrowful and beautiful than himself, the sudden manic aggression bursts out. Hamlet also advances and leaps into the grave. It finally leads to the fatal tournament. The duel itself is the outburst mourning ritual for

the forever lost Ophelia<sup>71</sup>. One perhaps sees in this instance of the encounter an

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<sup>71</sup> The Hamlet scene is however for Lacan the trope for the two-fold object identification. If we could venture to borrow from the literature of psychoanalysis to look at this encounter, there are two sorts of imaginary identification: (1) the identification with the semblable in the mirror, Laertes, which can be said to be the identification with the specular image of the other as the ideal-ego—the counter-foil of the self that is more beautiful than himself that instigates the aggressive rivalry; (2) however there is another more mysterious identification, which is an identification with the forever lost object, Ophelia, the *objet petit a*, as the object of desire. The subject calls for an apparition of the phantom, the *fantasme* to fill the hole left open in the real. In this very passage to the act of mourning, the subject throws itself out as if it is the abandoned object, unto the abyss of his own death (Lacan, *Desire and Its Interpretation*) The object of desire is the piece of flesh that falls from us when we are separated from the maternal body and enter the symbolic order of language. It is the ever-lost object that we could only encounter negatively. The object only fails us.

The association between Qu Qiubai and Hamlet here does not only come from Lacan's reading of Hamlet. In Lacan's seminar, Hamlet is the representative of the modern tragedy because from the beginning to its end Hamlet knows that he is guilty for his being, which is totally different from Oedipus. In this sense, he would say that Shakespeare invented the modern neurosis. This is a reality created by literature. However the deeper association comes from the reading of Ivan Turgenev's 'Hamlet and Don Quixote' and Qian Lichun's *The Plentitude of Agony: Don Quixote and Hamlet traveling to the East*. Turgenev's essay is a refutation against Alexander Herzen's view on the 1848 revolution, seeing the very revolution as an illusory "Quixotism". Turgenev is to affirm the attitude of keeping up the ideal even if it's illusory. In the essay, he sees Hamlet and Quixote as two archetypes created by great poets that represent two fundamental directions of the human spirit. Hamlet lives only in the stir of himself; he represents the egoist attitude, doubting and negating everything. On the contrary, Quixote only exists outside of himself; he represents the altruist attitude. Turgenev also compared the deaths of the two. Hamlet is tragic as his wound is self-inflicted. He resigns to his fate as if all the contingencies are necessities. Quixote's extreme enthusiasm is stamped to the opposite of comedy. The defeat and death are ascribed to contingencies, but the love abides, and the ideal and the hope for ultimate triumph remain intact (Turgenev). In the essay Turgenev gives primacy to Don Quixote against the tide of his time. However the figure of the Hamlet type seems to appear more often in his own novels, akin to the image of "the superfluous man" that he creates. The Hamlet type perhaps reaches a finale in the character of the skepticist in the new time, Bazarov, in *Fathers and Sons*. In the novel, Bazarov is constantly searching for the necessity and law of reality in nature but negates the beauty and mystery of nature. One perhaps also sees an echo of Turgenev in Qu's idea about nature. Qian Lichun's *The Plentitude of Agony* is one of the most important treatise on the history of Chinese romanticism, if one could put it this way. In a sense it is a response to Turgenev's Hamlet and Don Quixote. Qian lived through the Cultural Revolution. In thinking why the ideals lead to the catastrophic consequence, he reappraises the two archetypes and rather gives the (self-)doubting and inward

outburst of aggression in the negative transference, as Qu reads Tagore, who as the “man of the past” is the very mirror image with which he identifies. However in reading the other there is another identification with the lost object, which is to say the aggressive act is in fact an act of mourning of an unbearable loss. Then, what is this melancholy for/of the past, that haunts Qu, or even perhaps our modern experience?

One would recall the year 1920, Qu Qiu-bai was in Russia as a correspondent for the newspaper *Chenbao*. He was investigating and reporting the social and economic transformation happening on the ground during the revolution and all the challenges and hardships the local peasants and workers went through. Never experiencing five months of snow in a northern country, whiteness after whiteness, with icy storms and piercing coldness, the weather made him feel that “even breathing feels frustrating”. It was August; the slippery and muddy streets in Moscow in the murky, drizzling rain and the carelessly bricked stones all made him gloomy and melancholic. Qu was again down with tuberculosis. In the sickbed, “the faint and pale utterance of dreams, the fretful fever...in the stupor there is only the dream image of the southern country, the flaming yellow of the cabbage, the crystal-clear water in the pond...the peach

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direction of Hamlet more gravity. While the first part of the book he traces how the two figures travel from their origins to the literatures of German romanticism to Russian literature, in the latter part of the book, he uses the two figures to read the writers in the revolutionary traditions in modern Chinese literature. The penultimate figure he discussed before he concluded with Lu Xun was Qu Qiubai. In the very chapter on Qu, Qian describes Qu Qiubai as “a Hamlet in the Chinese communist movement” (Qian 219).

blossoms...”, he then soon reminded himself “the silly old dream” was just “a symptom of some deep illness” (Qu, “Mental History” 165). At the time when Qu was in Russia, notwithstanding his experience of participating the Marxist study circle in the May fourth period and his ideological orientation had already undergone a significant change to reorient from the Tolstoy’s anarchism towards Marxism after the 1917 Russia Revolution, Yasnaya Poliana (*ching-tian-cun*; 清田村), Tolstoy’s ideal village, which was still left untouched on his property even after the revolution, was still an indispensable destination of the pilgrimage in Qu’s spared time. However in his visit what Qu saw in the village was only the gloom among the heirs who still inherited Tolstoy’s ideal and their tension with the rest of the family who could not rid of the aristocratic habit and held full grievance toward revolution and apart from that the bare subsistence of the peasant households in the commune under the new economic policy. The down-to-earth peasant life in Russia was still deeply mired in the petit bourgeoisie economy. The complicated relationship and structure of feeling between the peasants and the intelligentsia in the long history was still a deep-embedded problem. All await their solution to still come “by nature (*zi-ran-de*; 自然的)” after the shaking experience of the revolution. It was a glimpse to the idealist movement and its new village in old Russia, where “the aristocratic air is still breathing in the grass, with the faintly haunting vestige of the dream” (“Mental

History” 198). On the way back, Qu fell asleep on the train with the miscellaneous colours of the exotic culture in front of his eyes; when he woke up from the dream, he had reached the Moscow station. Finally, what is left on the pages of the ideal village is only the final vestige and trace of an old-time dream. Perhaps, that very dream, which is only left with a trace of the vestige behind it and which vanishes, recedes further and further when one tries to grasp it, is also a dream of Qu Qiu-bai’s. It is perhaps the very pastness of a rural past that is no longer accessible to the turbulent torrent of the modern experience which calls for this apparition of the ideal village in Yasnaya Poliana.

Right until his own end, this loss and hollowed feeling is captured in the last will of ‘the Superfluous Words’,

All the things I feel in the recent years make me wish to “return to the beginning and live the life once again”.

The estranged feeling of seeing the landscape in the mist makes one utterly gloomy, desolate, and lonely and feels like to have a taste of the real life closely and intimately. For example, the land revolution in the “central Soviet territory” has been going on for three, four years, what are the concrete changes in the personal everyday life of the peasants? I have gone once and twice for investigation. The moment I opened my mouth, I found there

to be no “common language”. But I am also lazy. In the end, I achieved nothing (Qu, “Superfluous Words” 434).

In the end, what Qu felt to be separated from and wished to return to was so unlikely proximate to what is historical in Tagore’s writing ‘Historicality in Literature (*Sahitye Aitihāsikata*)’—i.e. the everyday (*pratyahik*) contentment and misery (*sukhdukha*) in the peasant fields (Tagore, “Historicality in Literature”). Finally the negative transference of Qu’s encounter with Rabindranath Tagore in the spring of 1924 was like the absolute turning point in the tragedy, as the etymology of the word *catastrophe* suggests; from then on, everything turned straight downwards, and Qu ran straight into his destiny in history. The final arrow of destiny shot at him is not the inevitable arrow from the objective necessity of history, but it is “the other arrow” that he, in the transference, had drawn the bow of life to shoot at the “man of the past” and finally returned to himself by the arc of time<sup>72</sup>. At the level of his personal life, Qu makes death the condition for his action of despair. He fought for a new world that is yet to come, erasing himself as a vanishing mediator. Finally, he marched to the execution ground, singing the song *Internationale*, and then sat calmly to wait for the last moment to come. Yet by writing down the last “The Superfluous Words”, he also

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<sup>72</sup> Here I borrow the metaphor from Peter Szondi’s analysis of the hymn written by Holderlin in the face of the historical storm of revolution, that “the other arrow (*von anderem Pfeile*)” is not as the one that Oedipus resented as “how can any mortal man evade the angry arrows aimed from Olympus”, but “the self-inflicted wound (*von selbgeschlagener Wunde*)”(Szondi, “The Other Arrow”).

left behind the traces of the subject's struggle, which proves it freedom by losing its freedom, as if he reopened the text and counter-signed his name under 'A Man of the Past'.

### **The River's Path Across the Earth...**

At the inaugural moment of the modern in China, the endeavour of writing called literature entered with exposure to the outside. The autocritiques of the first generation of modern writers and critics however offer a mode of thought that thinks the link between the vocation and destiny of literature/*wen-xue* and the historical change through the negative. In launching new literature as a movement, they think of the beginning, however not as a departure but a beginning that negates itself as its own end. This beginning is more like threshold, perhaps not unlike in the epigraph of the chapter what Lu-xun wrote in the 'Farewell of the shadow', a liminal space of the penumbræ—the fainted shades at the margins of the shadow—where the light has passed into darkness and the darkness has into light. When Zhou Zuo-ren thinks of the beginning and sets the task of literature to be "learning to be human", in embracing the belated discovery of "the human" as a universal truth, at once there is the negative move of laying the human to waste. Lu Xun reinscribes Nietzsche's *Mitte* and forges the tropical concept of *zhong-jian-wu*/thing-in-between to make the act of literature an effacement and undoing of literature itself. With the thing-in-between as the crossing-

over through going-under, the transition comes in the downfall and life is affirmed in the decay. Finally in the two instances of transference/*zhuan-yi* in the inter-Asia encounters, the intercourse, *Ver-kehr*, perhaps foretold a turn in the arc of life. In the encounter with Rabindranath Tagore, Qu Qiu-bai wrote his own destiny as “a man of the past”. In Zhou Zuo-ren’s encounter with Mushanokoji, with the passion toward the utopia in silhouette, he negatively inscribed the fundamental mood of melancholy and apprehension and almost half a century later, with the conjunction “and”, he reads a link between the immemorial mood in the popular memories and the utopic and apocalyptic possibilities. At a moment that thinks of the historical change, these writings are prolific with the trope of rivers, whether it is as the subject as void in Zhang Taiyen, the apprehension over the unquenchable (natural-)historical force in Zhou Zuo-ren or Tagore or the blind self-turning and self-movement of streams, currents, surges and waves in the grand river of life in Qu Qiu-bai. In a river, at every point, the water springs up and breaks down by a counter-force. It thus sustains itself as a river and strives to run its own course as a destiny through suffering. When it makes its course, it cuts the paths and gives limits to the earth and forges lands. The river thus gives itself over to the earth to turn it into the homeland for people.

### Chapter 3: The Earth

Today when everything is shaken,

when the whole earth trembleth.

But, when I see the eyes ye make,

methinketh almost,

ye seek more insecurity,

More shuddering, more danger, more earthquake.

--Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*

The earth as the firm and solid ground is the basis of familial life. Blood and soil, where people look for a primordial unity of human wills. The Chinese word for earth, *tu* (土), the abstract pictorial thinking of what throws up, spits out all things, makes the earth the inward ground that gives birth, gives life and generates (*sheng*; 生). One would have in mind that in this part of the world, the real force and impetus of anti-colonial and anti-imperial struggle is often marked by its telluric character—i.e. the

defence of the patch of the earth that one has an autochthonic relation, which sees the moment of the national-popular that gives rise to the sovereign subject of a certain third-world nationalism. Today, the autochthonic defence of the home soil as an archetype seems to persist and prevail as the political ethos of our time, even from the margin. The current moment sees subaltern politics often being articulated in positioning certain tribality or indigeneity and many movements often being heaved up in the milieu of autochthony and autarky. It is a continuation of the politics of the third world, with its third-ness, by which one stands outside the containment and fights unconditionally as the outlawed but grounds its sole legitimacy in the self-soil, as if it is, to borrow the words of Carl von Clausewitz, “the most beautiful of all wars, conducted by a people in its own fields [*Fluren*] on behalf of their freedom and independence”(Schmitt, *The Theory of the Partisan* 31). In this chapter, I look at the advent of autochthonic thought in modern China. I track how a certain image of earthbound China first comes from an inverse look of the anthropological eyes, how the realist account, both in literature and anthropology, writes a history of the rural in its rapidly changing time and finally, how the trope of the earth went through a metamorphosis during the wartime.

In the first section, I juxtapose and weave together the works of two particular figures in the 1930s, the first social anthropologist in China Fei Hsiao-tung(1910-

2005)<sup>73</sup> and the communist realist writer Mao-dun(1896-1981)<sup>74</sup>, both of whom at that same period of time based their writings on the villages of the south-eastern coast at a rapid changing time in their exposure to the capitalist world market. It is in a time when the rural village life is falling apart that it emerges as the object for the realist writings. The realist impetus here could be understood in its double sense, perhaps best described in its two prevalent translations in Chinese—*xieshi zhuyi* (寫實主義; literally as “writing, portraying-the real”-ism) and *xianshi zhuyi* (現實主義; literally as “realizing, actualizing-the real”-ism)<sup>75</sup>. What is shared in the works of the revolutionary novelist and the social reformist (cum-restorationist) functionalist anthropologist is an autochthonic solution to the very crisis in their ineluctable encounter with and final leap into world history. I would like to go back to a historical moment wherein the pauperized villages emerged to be the object in the landscape, the capturing of which has given to a transformation in understanding the rural as the

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<sup>73</sup> Fei’s works were depreciated in the time of the Cultural Revolution and gained fame again after the eighties under the understanding of certain neo-Confucianist revival, as the model to think of a developmental route based on rural industries.

<sup>74</sup> Mao-dun is the pen name of Shen Yen-bing (沈雁冰), who is often considered the earlier advocate of naturalist and realist writing in China and had been closely associated with the communist movement throughout his life.

<sup>75</sup> On the one hand, it is a realism that writes(*xie*) what happens on the ground as the history in time; on the other hand, it is a realism that accelerates and presses upon the time to urge the history, or one could perhaps say, the event, to happen, to realize, to come to present(*xian*). Lee Ou-fen(1993) has mentioned the transition from the former sense of realism to the latter in the course of the development of socialist realism and its consequences.

*home-land* and the *homely-soil*.

### **The Transfiguration of *Xiang* (鄉) : the *Districtus* and the *Rur***

The southern water-surrounded rural landscape is depicted by the prominent anthropologist Fei Hsiao-tung in his PhD turned 1938 work *Peasant Life in China*. It was his fieldwork in the early 1930s while Fei was assisting his sister in one of the reformist silk-worm breeding co-operative farms in a village called Kai-xian-gong in Kiangsu province, which he uses a pseudonym Kiang Village, literally “The River Village”. Despite being an anthropological account, there were apparently certain reformist concerns for rural China, which was going through tremendous change at the time. In this book, Fei’s main concern is the “agrarian problem in China,” which becomes the name of the concluding chapter. However, to answer the question, he explores different institutions of *Chia*(the expanded family)<sup>76</sup>, the kinship, the system of property and inheritance, system of land tenure, the work calendar, local government, local self-governing structure, rural silk industry, financial system... and so on (Fei, *Peasant Life in China*). For Fei, social anthropology provides a standpoint, as it refuses the nineteenth-century convention that made “the demarcation between savagery and civilization, a justification of white man’s burden”(Fei and Chang 13);

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<sup>76</sup> *Chia*(家) is the word for home/family, the same word in the prevalent usage of the current Hanyu transliteration would be *jia*(家).

on the other hand, it always “presents the culture context” because it used to study “communities with a culture different from their own”(ibid). As the peasant society in China is facing a rapid changing situation, functionalism is invoked to provide a realistic understanding of culture to deal with the issue of *social change*, which is to see the culture—the interrelation of different aspects of life—as a tool to make subsistence in the present situation. These different institutions in their life exist not because they are “cultural relics” or their backwardness but because they are “needed” (Fei, “Malinowski on Culture”; *Peasant Life in China*; Fei and Chang).

In Fei’s retrospective understanding of his own work, *Peasant Life in China*, through looking into the interrelation of different institutions in the life of the village, is mainly having a dialogue with the account on the Chinese tenure system provided by the Fabian economic historian R. H. Tawney, which ascribes the absentee landlord tenure system and concentration of land ownership in south-east China to the fertility of land, which makes more agriculture surplus and thus attracts the commercial capitals, and makes an analogy between the medieval Europe and the China at that time. Fei argues that the present-day agrarian problems and the concentration of land ownership lie more in the decline of domestic industry. The Chinese peasantry never fully falls into the category of “agriculture industry.” As the character of agriculture production is seasonal and the agrarian problem in China is always the scarcity of

land with an overflowing population, the surplus of labour goes into various kinds of domestic industry. The portion of income from these domestic industries is always crucial in the income structure of the household. In the experience of Kiang village, there is a depression in the once famous silk industry in the area, the cause of which “lies in the relation between the village industry and world market”(Fei, *Peasant Life in China* 282). The diminishing income in the village makes the peasants turn toward usury and absentee landlords in the town when they need money to finance the production; the land ownership, therefore, tends to be more and more concentrated. Fei therefore says that “the present-day analysis is a warning to reformers who tend to underrate the force of international capitalist economy”(ibid, 283). In other words, the transition in the villages in China is not replicating the medieval Europe by the same route of internal development of the commercialization of economic relations in the agriculture sector. The crisis is exogenous.

It is perhaps at a time of facing the outside—i.e. in waging a national war against Japanese invasion—that a story of a small southern village would turn into a generic image of rural China. Bronislaw Malinowski, Fei’s PhD supervisor, gave the title and writes in the preface,

Our attention is here not directed towards a small, insignificant tribe, but to *the greatest nation of the world*.[...]The book is not written by an outsider looking out for exotic

impressions in a strange land; it contains observations carried on by a citizen upon his own people. It is the result of work done by *a native among natives*. If it be true that *self-knowledge* is the most difficult to gain, then undoubtedly an anthropology of one's own people is the most arduous, but also the most valuable achievement of a field-worker” (Malinowski xix emphasis added).

This comment is perhaps crucial for one to understand an “indigenous anthropologist” trying to grasp his own culture in its own terms and language. At around the same time, Fei also made his aim to “do analysis of social structures more in the way of general theorization”(Fei, *Rural Earth* 93). Two kinds of generalization often happen at once: on the one hand, in the language of the academic institution in the West, a detailed description of the culture of a particular community by a “native informant” is made into general representation of the region or nation, even not out of the author's will, as is showed in the book title “peasant life in China”; on the other hand, it is almost an inexorable temptation for those in the non-West to generalize their “own [national] culture”, and paradoxically in one's own language, in a reversed orientalist framework, for the modernization imperative always make it so pressing to make the West the normative reference point for comparison, whether one is to conform or to resist. It is perhaps this imperative that makes people like Fei thinkers of national-modern proper. It is in preparing a teaching course of “rural sociology”,

his most famous work in the Chinese language *Xiang-tu Zhong-guo* (鄉土中國; *Rural Earthy China*) came into place<sup>77</sup>. One could predictably read a set of dichotomies of modern/tradition, Western/Chinese, urban/rural, industrial/peasant in this work, and a series of signifiers Western—modern—urban—industrial become often time interchangeable as the opposite side of the rural-earthy society of which he is giving an account in the course. Fei mentioned in the postscript of the book, this “comparative study” of “the patterns of culture” is inspired by Margaret Mead’s work *The American Character*, which is to see the characteristic of the US society as an immigrant society. One could however detect here that there is a difference between the abstract West and modern as a normative frame and the concrete pattern of an immigrant society with its own course. This reference made to the inspiration from an immigrant society makes one wonder if the referential point is actually a society with its free mobility. It is perhaps a hinting gesture that the society to which he is to give an account is marked by its immobility and unfreedom. Referencing to those founding frameworks in sociology, he made an opposition between modern societies and *xiang-tu* (rural-earthy) societies:

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<sup>77</sup> In 1948, he published a series of essays on the magazine *shi-ji-ping-luen* (*Century Review*) based on his teaching materials in the course of “rural sociology” and later the collection is published under the title of *xiang-tu-zhong-guo* (*Rural Earthy China*).

In sociology, we often distinguish two kinds of societies (*she-hui*; 社會). One that is without a concrete purpose but only occurs (*fa-sheng*; 發生) by born and grown (*sheng-zhang*; 生長) together; another is the society is associated together for completing a task. To speak in Tönnies' terms, the former is *Gemeinschaft* and the latter is *Gesellschaft*; to speak in Durkheim's terms, the former is "organic solidarity" and the latter is "mechanical solidarity"; in our own terms, the former is *li-su-she-hui* (禮俗社會; ritual-custom-bound society) and the latter is *fa-li-she-hui* (法理社會; law-governed society).[...]What I want to explicate here is that for these rural folks (*xiang-min*; 鄉民) whose life are bound by earth and land (*tu-di*; 土地), what they are exposed to every day is those people and things that are given to them, just like our parents and brothers, with whom the relation is not chosen by us. It is a living condition and environment that is entirely of no need for choices, and moreover, that is prior to my existence (Fei, *Rural Earth* 5).

It is perhaps not irrelevant here to firstly take notice Fei's apparent mistake in reading Durkheim that exactly reverses the original framework. In Durkheim's theorization of social division of labor, the type of social solidarity operated in traditional societies is "mechanical solidarity" because the cohesion comes from resemblance or similarities. In the "more complex" modern and industrial society, the social cohesion comes from individuals' interdependence which is based on the social division of labor. Taken from the then flourishing discipline of evolutionary biology, the "organism" is a metaphor for complex structure of functional differentiation, by which an individual's relation to society is mediated. For Fei, as for a number of non-Western thinkers<sup>78</sup>, it seems to be much easier to conceive Ferdinand Tönnies' frame, by which one perhaps

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<sup>78</sup> For example, in *Nationalism*, Rabindranath Tagore also use the same pair metaphors (Tagore, *Nationalism*).

intuitively sees a resemblance of the alien modern machinery and the metaphor of a mechanical relationship, and, on the other hand, the natural rural scene and an organic relationship. In this reversed reading of Durkheim, the sense of the social, as the mediating organs, is lost. Fei's framework certainly resembles Tönnies' in a number of ways. In Tönnies' term, what is organic is the "real". Organicism as a whole develops in itself. Mechanics is the fictitious construction to *understand* the mechanisms and relations. The *Gesellschaft*, the (civil) society that is based on contractual relations, is then the model, the theory that renders an idea of individual possible. For Fei, even with the sliding usage of terms in a seemingly reversed orientalist frame, what concerns Fei in the comparison is not so much the distant West, to which he in any case had lost any exposure after finishing his degree, but the normative frame set by the reformist modernization imperative that was taking place in China. Therefore, for him, while the rural-earthy society is what is *de facto*, the modern society is only what is *de jure*. One would however also notice the usage of *she-hui*(society) in the last two terms *li-su-she-hui* (ritual-custom-bound society) and *fa-li-she-hui* (law-governed society). Whereas *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* are most often translated into community and (civil) society to capture two different idea types of social relations, Fei uses the same word *she-hui*(society) as the ending entity. The sense of "the social" or "sociality" from *Gesell* as free association doesn't seem

to occupy any place in Fei’s understanding of society. The two terms *fa-li-she-hui* and *li-su-she-hui* both concern the governing structure of societies—i.e. one governed by law and one bound by ritual-custom. One could argue that what contains in the conceptions of these two opposite ends of *she-hui* (society) is actually a look from the state. This look of the state however contains a double sights in its superimposition of the concepts of society/*shehui*: one is already a reversed perspective that presumes a national entity, which is the nascent nation of modern China; the other contains in it, as the word *she* (社)—the deity of land—gestures towards, the pastoral power of an ancient empire that governs and administers by its ritual practices that set an agrarian cosmos to its order<sup>79</sup>. Fei however makes an important move to name this society of which he wants to make a general theory in another term—i.e. *xiang-tu-she-hui* (鄉土社會; rural-earthly society). One could perhaps read the language in the opening

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<sup>79</sup> One perhaps finds its clues in the trajectory of its multiple translation process. The etymological root for the word *she*(社) comes from the “deity of land (or rather, earth or soil)” or the site or the ritual for this deity of land, as it is indicated in the two combined morphemes 示(*shi*; root relating to deities and rituals) and 土(*tu*; land, earth, or soil). *she-hui* (社會) is thus originally the gathering for the day of ceremony to offer to the god of land. Like many other terms used in classical Chinese in shared canons in China and Japan, the very *Kanji* is first used in used to translate the new concept “society” into modern Japanese. In the early twentieth century, the Chinese intellectual borrow it back to be the equivalent term for “society”.

chapter of book “the original countenance (*ben-se*; 本色) of rural-earthly society<sup>80</sup>”, where Fei starts the first sentence by saying that,

To see from the base level, Chinese society is of the rural-earthly nature (鄉土性; *xiang-tu xing*). I say the base level of Chinese society is of the rural-earthly nature because I have in mind there has been another level of society built on (above) this rural-earthly society which is different from it. Also, in the recent hundred years there is still another kind of very peculiar society occurs on the contacting border of the East and the West. [...] Now let’s just concentrate on those rustics(*xiang-xia-ren*; 鄉下人) who are always considered “earthly in their heads (*tu-tou-tu-nao*; 土頭土腦)”. It is these people who are the base of Chinese society (Fei, *Rural Earth* 1).

Therefore, by setting aside the “other levels” of the society, by which he means the urban area of China, including the traditional garrison town and the newly emerging metropolis, in the basic framework of this book, it demarcates a separate entity of the rural society and names it as the rural earthy society, or “rural earthy China”. It is thus from the very beginning, in framing this image of rural China, it has erased the very

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<sup>80</sup> The compound “*ben-se*(本色)” can be . *Ben* can be translated as origin, root, or ground. *Se* is for the most literally translated as color in modern days, it is however in old usage something close to form and appearance, the word to translate *rupa*. One could however detects in Fei’s endeavor here to actually recapitulate the concept of “*xiang-tu*”.

viewpoint—i.e. the doubled eyesight of the state—that envision this imagination, where the nation is deep-seated in an idea of the rural.

*Rural Earthy China* is apparently not the first book that projects a national imagination in a reformist language that is drawn from a cultural difference argument that couched China's possible future in its rural villages. One would find it in the works of those early modern thinkers who still write in, or in the language closer to, the classical written Chinese. One reads in Zhang Shi-zhao (1881-1973)'s famous essay in 1923 "The logic of agrarian country (*nong-guo-bian*; 農國辯)<sup>81</sup>", which advocates the nation to be founded on agricultural base to avoid the polarization of classes in the route of Industrial countries and to which, in the previous chapter, the young Qu Qiu-bai fierce refuted (S.-Z. Zhang, "Logic of Agrarian Country"). In Liang Chi-chao (1873-1929)'s planned but unfinished ambitious volumes on Chinese cultural history, he conceptualises for the political constitution a tradition of "rural district-governance (鄉治; *xiang-zhi*)" in China instead of the European states which consists of the self-ruling commercial cities with its associations of free citizens<sup>82</sup>. In

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<sup>81</sup> The word *bian*(辯) can be translated as judgment, distinction, or debate. Here I translate it as "logic", as Zhang Shi-zhao in his discussion on the analytic logic of ancient Chinese philosophical school of *ming-xue* (the learning of naming; 名學) and Hetuvidya mentions that the subject of logics can be translated as "*bian-xue*(辯學)"—i.e. the learning of *bian* (S.-Z. Zhang, "Intermediate Term").

<sup>82</sup> In the very beginning of the chapter on "village-governance", Liang makes the following statement in a comparative frame: "The European states (*guojia*; 國家) are consisted of cities (*shi*; 市), whereas

Mizoguchi Yuzo's discussion on the 1911 *xinhai* revolution, he uses Liang's concept of "rural-district-governance" to capture a strand of historical force of local self-governance from the 17-century county (*xian*; 縣) level to the 19 century province (*sheng*; 省) level, finally seeing the *xinhai* revolution taking the pluralistic form of independence of provinces. For him, it constitutes a repressed alternative route of modernity which is different from the normative political notions that make a clear divide between state and civil society, and with its way of framing the public and private (Mizoguchi, "Xinhai revolution"). Later, one can also see in the work of Liang Shu-ming, the prominent advocator of the Rural Reconstruction Movement, in which Fei had once participated as a student, where the rebuilding or revitalizing of a moral hegemonic force in the rural villages is the key to China's modernization (Liang, *Building the Rural Villages*). In a certain way, Fei's *Rural Earthy China* does pick up a similar line of argument, which perhaps make his work to be well conceived in the Neo-Confucianist revivalism in the post-liberalization era. However, in Fei's writing to launch an indigenous discipline of sociology, the idea of *xiang* is re-casted. In the tradition of local self-governance, *xiangzhi*, *xiang* means a local administrative territory or district. The above-mentioned usages often carried over with it a notion

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the Chinese state is consisted of "rural-district (*xiang*; 鄉)". Therefore, there is "rural-district self-rule" but no "self-rule of the cities" (Mizoguchi, "Xinhai revolution").

that is given by the administrative categories of a premodern Empire with its Confucian notion of ordering the world and the people<sup>83</sup>. For example the notion of “rural-district-governance” in Liang evolves around notions like “exhorting people to do good (*chuenshan*; 勸善)” or “mutual-helping (*huzhu*; 互助)”, which are all leading to moral practices.

However in the usage of *xiangtu*, in its adjacency to the other morpheme *tu*, the language of *xiang* is transfigured here to be firmly hinged on a sensuous figure of the soil. *Tu* (土) in its modern usage is often translated as the soil, the land, or the earth. As an adjective, it sometimes also means something vulgar and rustic with a sense of contempt, as the usage of “earthly headed (*tu-to-tu-nao*; 土頭土腦)” in the above paragraph. In his insistent usage of *tu*, Fei is reversing this debased base of rural China. The figure of the soil and vegetation recurs throughout his works written in Chinese language, portraying at the same time a life that cannot do without land and

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<sup>83</sup> From as early as around 500 BC, *xiang* has been used in official documents and records to refer to an administrative unit. The exact size of it varies according to different dynasties. In *Zhouli* (周禮; ritual-customs of Zhou dynasty), it is consisted of two thousand five hundred households. It also has other usage, such as “place”, “abode” or “direction” etc. One could perhaps be useful to think of this usage of *xiang* as something similar to the usage of *ganv* (गांव) in Indian languages. It is perhaps also useful to think along this line of Gandhi’s idea of *ganv svaraj*(गांव स्वराज) with one’s moral exemplary as its initiating motor together with the idea of *xiangzhi* (village-governance).

planting and a life as “vegetative” and immobile as planted and rooted in the immovable soil. This rural earthy China therefore is close to the English title he used for the translation of a three case studies that he did with his colleagues in the southwest during the ear—i.e. “earthbound China”. The compound word *xiang-tu* might as well be taken by Fei from a tradition of local encyclopedic kind of studies in the primary school called *xiangtu zhi* (the writings of the place; 鄉土誌), which is part of education for traditional children schooling in Fei’s childhood time<sup>84</sup>. It is actually an encyclopedic archive about different kinds of knowledges about a place, not totally bounded by the administrative boundary, from the time of beginning of the world to the present day. The novelty and eccentricity of different natures of knowledges, from official languages to hearsay, in this encyclopedic archive gives a peculiar pleasure that later develops into an interest in anthropology. One also read in modern writers like Zhou Zhuo-ren or Lu-xun using the term *xiang-tu* in the sense of home-place, an old usage can be traced to ancient allegories<sup>85</sup>. However, what is being important here is that *xiang* is now transfigured, from a governing unit or a place in the moral cosmos for one to behave in certain ways, into the *rur*, the vast land that is the base, the ground of the nation, and also into the homely home, the abode where one cannot but

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<sup>84</sup> Later in his life, Fei has mentioned this *xiangtu zhi* to be his favorite part of schooling.

<sup>85</sup> Lu-xun has once said that all the *Xiang-tu* (home-place) literature is, in fact, sojourn (*qiao-yu*; 僑寓) literature.

abides. It is actually in *Rural Earthy China*, this compound term *xiang-tu* is for the first time used as *the* predicate for the nascent nation of China. The rural earthy China is now not only partial China. It is also China as a whole<sup>86</sup>. It also makes China the *home-land* or the *home-soil*.

### **The Boundedness of Earth and its Inversion**

If one goes back to the earlier paragraph, what follows the ideas of the predecessors in sociology is a passage about *xiang-tu* society as “life[...] bound by earth and land (*tu-di*;土地) ,[...] exposed to everyday is those people and things that are given to them, just like our parents and brothers, with whom the relation is not chosen by us. It is a living condition and environment that is entirely of no need for choices, and moreover, that is prior to my existence.” It sees a similar theorization of *Gemeinschaft* in Tönnies work<sup>87</sup>. There is a strong sense in the passage a kind of life that is of

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<sup>86</sup> The way the adjective *xiangtu* and the noun *Zhongguo* are joined together in Chinese language gives an ambiguity in the meaning. It is possible to read it as a part of China that is rural and earthy, or it is also possible to read *xiangtu* as the adjective to depict China as a whole being rural and earthy in its nature.

<sup>87</sup> One could perhaps read the first paragraph of “The theory of *Gemeinschaft*”, which starts with the following: “In tune with the argument so far, the theory of *Gemeinschaft* is based on the idea that in the original or natural state there is a complete unity of human wills. This sense of unity is maintained even when people become separated. It takes various forms, depending on how far the relationship between

boundedness and unfreedom, which is not a question of choice. It gets written in the modern idea of the nature and organism. This metaphor appears later in his work as he talks about the pauperization of rural villages, where he says that the economy in rural village only “paralyzed” in the chronicle disease due to the “organic” character of petit-peasant economy, unlike the sudden “break down” in the modern industrial economy (Fei, *Rural Earth* 268). Like Tönnies’ idea type of *Gemeinschaft*, *Xiang-tu* society is also deeply associated with a notion of the naturally given. What Fei tries to meet in his notion of desire and need is perhaps something similar to what Tönnies deals with in his notions of *Wesenwille* and *Kürwille*.

Here one could perhaps recall what Liang Shu-ming’s formulation in his 1924 work *Eastern and Western Cultures and their Philosophies*, where he recast the Confucian thoughts entirely within the mold of his reading of philosophers like Henri Bergson. As against the moralism or any normative frameworks held by most of the spokesmen of Confucianism at his time, he branches a new understanding of Confucius’s thought, which is not seeing it within the bound of practical philosophy

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differently situated individuals is predetermined and ‘given’. The common root of these relationships is the all-embracing character of the sub-conscious, ‘vegetative’ life that stems from birth: human wills, each one housed in a physical body, are related to one another by descent and kinship; they remain united, or become so out of necessity (Tönnies 22).

but aiming at a certain metaphysical question, where the living-thing (*shengwu*; 生物) and to-be-living (*shenghuo*; 生活) is one but not divided as two. For Liang, as the ontology in Chinese philosophies for different schools of thought shared the notion of “yi (易; state of constant changing, becoming), the Confucian philosophy of life is to lively express the affection, the constantly changing living world through intuition. What he thinks the Confucian philosophy really wants to grasp is the “spontaneity”(zifa; 自發) that makes people act intuitively, or in Confucius’ own words, “act out of the desire of his mind (*xin*; 心) but never cross the custom rule”. The necessity and freedom thus become a unity in his notion of spontaneity. Were one to use the romantic language in Tonnies’ work, it is the pleasure (*der Gefallen*), the habit (*die Gewohnung*), the memory (*das Gedachtnis*) that constitute what in Confucius’ ideas, the ritual customs and ancestral worship. It is in a way a romantic return to a certain primordial unity. Thus, in his practical framework, he also found the proper place for this practice of life, which is the rural villages. It is a relationship of resemblance, as the rural area is where one is close to “nature”(z-iran; 自然). The peasants are exposed to the living things, which are holistic and vital as opposed to those dead, fragmented objects and segments. The “reason”(what he uses later to replace “intuition”) thus more lies in the rural village, the place more suitable for

developing reason. The village is also the origin, the base, and the home (Liang, “Eastern and Western Culture”).

Although some of the sociological understanding of Chinese society and practical agenda in rebuilding a certain kind of rural life are shared by Liang and Fei, the speculative nature of drawing the resemblance between a metaphysical understanding of the human world and then transposing a philosophical project aiming at life into a political agenda in the works of Liang cannot be the project in Fei’s social anthropological paradigm. The self-knowledge of his own community he is trying to seek is a “common sense judgment based on reliable information” (Fei, *Rural Earth* 5). It is however from the very beginning of his theorization of *xiang-tu* society, a deep awareness of the unfreedom along with the romantic idea of primordial unity. The question being asked in the different themes often comes from a divided experience, an ambivalent view of man inhabiting modern discipline and values. For example, in asking how an outsider becomes a member of the village and finding the answer being through land purchasing which is nearly impossible, he is always aware of the exclusiveness of the primordial blood tie of the community and the unfreedom that one cannot easily choose to make a change. He asks the hypothetical question about what happens if there is a system of double lineage

where man and woman enjoy equal status and ends up finding the impossibility in the structure. He is always finding a boundedness in his *rural-earthy* society.

It is perhaps in resisting the imposition of a normative frame of the modern as a doubled bind that Fei slips into a culturalist framework that makes an inversion of the unfreedom as freedom. It is where he tries to describe the principle of social organization that he introduced the term: “*cha-xu-ge-ju* (the framework of differential order)” — a basic principle for the organization of *xiang-tu* society based on the terms of Confucianism. Fei describes the basic principle of this differential order, which means that the moral cosmos is like countless concentric circles with the “self” as the centre. It is a relational network based on a continuous line from familiar to unfamiliar, which he contrasts with the moral system in the West is based on “the framework of the group”, which could not be separated from their religious idea of Christianity. The group as an entity is symbolized by God, and under this idea, there are two derivative ideas: the first is everyone is equal before God; the other is God is just to everyone. The ideas of “right”, “representative”, and “constitutionalism” are thus in correspondence with the moral system. The framework of group binds the individual with the collective with an abstract frame, and the most prominent “group” in the West is the “modern state” because no one could escape this framework. Fei views the form of modern states as only a

contingent development out of the pluralistic cultures by saying that the framework of groups might come from the nomadic economies. In *xiang-tu* society, there are only concrete ethical relationships but no abstract sense of “group.” The concept of “*ren*”, as a symbol-based character that symbolizes “two men,” could not be a universal moral law. The boundary between the collective and the self and between public and private is thus relative and flexible. The imagination of “*Chia* (literally as family, which Fei however translates as “expanded family”)” therefore is also not an entity of the group, which has a clear boundary between inside and outside as the idea of family in the West, but as a flexible extending networks that could include the servants in the house (Fei, *Rural Earth*). It is noteworthy that the treatment of *Chia* in *Peasant Life in China* is totally different. In the ethnographic work, *Chia* has to be divided due to the boundedness of limited land. The whole notion is closely associated with the inheritance of landed property and different sorts of duties. In his fieldwork, there is rarely any *Chia* that has a number of more than one couple in the village. *Chia* is only able to be extended to a certain size for those who are wealthy and stay in the town. Now the notion of *Chia* is totally turned over to be something flexible and relative to open the rigid boundary of public and private. Now the singular bounded me with all the determination turns into an undetermined expanding self. However, it is precisely the inversion of unfreedom to freedom that

makes “the framework of differential order” a self-celebrating cultural framework especially in the 1980s.

### **The Implosion of the Cycle**

During the war time, in Fei’s effort of certain general theorization, he also develops a historical understanding of the rural question. In his theorization of the rural-urban (*xiang-cheng*; 鄉城) relations, refuting the widely accepted theory of the complementary nature of urban and rural areas, Fei argues that it is rather antagonistic. The division of the village and the city has never been about the difference between the agrarian and industrial sectors in China. Historically, the village has always been the production site of both agriculture and manufacturing and sustains a self-sufficient subsistence economy. Therefore, the rural-urban relation is always based on “rent” (1993b, 1953). Following his analysis in *Earthbound China*, the rent is not based on the surplus production from the land but rather on the surplus income from various kinds of rural handicraft industries, which have always played a prominent part in rural livelihood. The Chinese cities, *cheng*, which means the garrison town, have always been the dwelling place of imperial power and the wealthier landlord class. They serve more as the centre for the consumption of the landlord class and are protected by political power. By the consumption of the daily goods of the landlord class in the towns, part of the rent

will flow back to the peasant households in the village. The modern metropolises emerging in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century China are another kind of urban area with a different nature. They were forced opened as the treaty ports by political agreement under the threat of foreign military force in the context of imperialism and are therefore with some of the traits of a colony. The emerging modern metropolis didn't facilitate rural prosperity; on the contrary, "the rise of modern Chinese cities has been paralleled by the decline in Chinese rural economy" (Fei, *China's Gentry* 109)<sup>88</sup>. Historically, the urban-rural relationship has always seen an antagonistic nature, but the new situation rapidly exacerbates the tension between the landlord and the tenants. Therefore, in the first few years of the war with Japan, "*when most of the modern coastal cities were occupied and economic relations between rural and urban areas were cut off by blockade, a period of recovery...appeared in the Chinese villages*"(ibid: 109)<sup>89</sup>. Thus comes his explanation about the intensification of the

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<sup>88</sup> After the forced opening of the market in these treaty ports, the price and quality standard of the handicrafts made in the villages, or say *tu-huo* (earthbound goods), cannot compete with the mass-produced goods imported from the West. The lifestyle and consumerism in the modern city changed the formerly much more austere lifestyle of the petit-landlord class. They start to seek for luxury goods from the West. Thus, not only do the landlords become more rigid in the rent to fulfil their new desire for luxury, but financial backflow to the village through the rural handicraft industry is also cut off. The villages start to suffer from pauperization and famine (Fei, *China's Gentry*)(Fei 1953).

<sup>89</sup> This is supported by Fei and his colleagues and students' fieldwork conducted in the villages nearby the interior city Kunming, the war time capital. During the war time, Fei and his students develop a comparative method of community studies. The outcome is the book *Earthbound China* coauthored by Fei and his student Chih-I Chang, which is a comparative work of three villages in Yunnan—the interior China— and Kiang village in the coastal area. They argue that in the area where commerce is

civil war—after the victory, the landlord class in the cities wanted to reclaim their right to rent and sought support from the military force of KMT, thereby exacerbating the conflicts (Fei, *China's Gentry; Rural Earth*; Fei and Chang). In Fei's analysis, the urban area is historically purely parasitic to the rural area. The modern experience of exposure to the world market has intensified this long-existing tragic relationship and brought it into a crisis. The war temporarily severed the tragic relationship so that the rural area experienced an unexpected revival in its economy. The vulnerable equilibrium cannot persist in its old way. The *cata-strophe* of the war is a point of no return. He sees himself as the gentry class part of the tragedy and crisis. The future now can only be based on the rural China with a “reconstruction of the rural-earth (*xiang-tu chong-jian*; 鄉土重建).

The wartime gives to his analysis of the fundamental power structure of the state apparatus in the history of China. Fei distinguished two kinds of fundamental power with very different natures operating in society, which he names as “imperial power (*haung-quan*; 皇權)” and “gentry power (*shen-quan*; 紳權)” (Fei, “Imperial Power and Gentry Power”; Fei, *China's Gentry*). In his analysis of the character of imperial

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underdeveloped, they find more occupying owners. As for the general comparison with the coastal area, In the interior, where Western industrial and commercial influences are less strong and traditional order is still maintained, the system of mutual help and fortitude with regard to material adversity helps to tide them over their financial crises...they will hold onto their land. As the result, the rate at which land is becoming concentrated in the few is slow.(Fei and Chang 1948, 305).

power in China, he says that “since the breakdown of feudalism and the unification of the empire under a centralized monarchical power (not long before 200 B.C.), the political power has never been transmitted permanently in certain families” (Fei, *China’s Gentry* 19). The way of gaining political power is through “taking up sticks” and “fighting civil wars”, which means seizing the power by violence and large-scale revolt. A commoner of peasant class or even a bandit could legitimately be recognized as the emperor. The character of the imperial power is thus based on violence and forces. The imperial power of the monarchy in agrarian societies like China has the characteristics of despotic and coercive power. The base of this despotic power is, however, weak and unstable because there is not much surplus in the peasant society. In the history of China, if the ambitious emperors want to conscript labour and collect tax to do some large-scale construction or to expand the territory, the peasant society however does not have the reservoir. the rural village suffers from the extraction of labour force and surplus of crops from agriculture. In the end the peasant starts to revolt. Afterwards, it is a period of rehabilitation for lands and labour forces. This forms a cycle. The periodic revolt, as Fei formulated in a mythic-cosmological cycle, sees a repetition of the cycle of construction (exploitation)—destruction (revolt or revolution)—rehabilitation (Fei, *Rural Earth*).

Under the menace of the despotic imperial power and the periodic revolt and destruction, the propertied class seeks for stability of the society to protect their own interest. The large bureaucratic system under the centralized regime, which is the servant of the emperor but does not share political power, provides a place for the gentry to protect their privilege—to be exempt from conscription and taxation. So, efficient governance has never succeeded in being the character of the large bureaucratic machine; conversely, inefficient bureaucracy is the ideal buffer to trap absolute power. The gentry class functions as the mediator between the absolute power of the monarch and the population in the peasant society—which is to say, on the one hand, to domesticate the potential revolt and, on the other hand, to avoid the over-exploitation of the people from the absolute power so that the stability of the society would remain. Their social position – as the possessor of the normative knowledge—legitimizes their parasitism on the rent. The leading ideology of Confucianism—which always emphasizes the “*zhong-yong* (intermediate condition)” — is thus developed in the process. The gentry class thus hold the moral leadership in the society. The political power and ethical power are separated. Therefore, the character of the imperial power is *bah-tao* (霸道; literally as “the despotic way”), and the character of the gentry power is *wang-tao* (王道; literally as “the kingly way”, or maybe in Gramscian vocabulary—hegemony). Whereas the

former is a kind of coercive power, the latter is a kind of un-coercive power (Fei, *China's Gentry; Rural Earth*).

Fei gives an analysis of how this power structure functions and operates. Historically, under the Do-nothingism ideology, the administration of centralized monarchical power would not directly reach the household or individual. The lowest level of the central administrative system is the county government—which only conveys the order of conscription and taxation and takes charge of the very rare litigation. The local public affairs are managed by a local self-governing unit, in which the leaders would be those moral leaders who do not enter the bureaucratic system to avoid subjecting to the hierarchical administrative machine. Therefore, there are two “political tracks” in operation. One is “the political track from the top down”,—which is the policy of taxation and conscription coming down through the hierarchical bureaucracy from the central monarch power. If there is public resentment toward the policy from county government, the other political track “from the bottom up” starts to function—which is that the local gentry would find ways to negotiate through his personal relation networks—his family member or relative who are in higher position in officialdom or even in the central court—until the agreement is reached. These two tracks form a safety valve between the tyranny and the local people. This historical account of the gentry and imperial power is linked to Fei’s

analysis of the crisis of the modern administrative system in China in his contemporary days. The Pao-Chia system—a means of administration of the population supposed to increase the efficiency in governance—implemented by KMT regime in the 30s has brought the political track from the top down directly to the households. The function of the mediator and the local self-governing community is replaced by the centralized system. The traditional gentry who holds the moral leadership would not enter this system; instead, the powerful position in the new system becomes a place for corruption and the safety valve is also destroyed (Fei, *China's Gentry; Rural Earth*).

Fei's formulation of the dual power structure of state apparatus of the imperial power and the gentry power resembles the Indo-European mythology of the two heads of the sovereign—the priestly and kingly power. However, in Georges Dumézil's original thesis that is taken forward in Gille Deleuze & Felix Guattari's *Nomadology*, the two opposites are actually the One divided. It is the warriors or the war machine that is the real exterior (Dumézil; Deleuze and Guattari). In Fei's formulation, it is the gentry power rather than the imperial power that is the *hegemon* that holds the kingly way (*wang-dao*; 王道). The imperative of efficient governance in the modern centralized administrative system thus gives to its own crisis of involution and the destruction of the safety valve. It amounts to saying that when the mediating power is

liquified, it is left with the One that uproars against itself and intensifies the civil wars and accelerates periodic destructions. However the question that Fei brings forth is that in this intensification and acceleration, will it still be another round in the repetition of the cycles? Or if the centrifugal force in the acceleration will project out another arc of history? The realist writer Mao-dun's work seems to be asking a similar question.

### **The Vegetative and Animated Life of Sub-sistence**

Known as the "Zola in China", Mao-dun has long been the most representative writer of socialist realism. What differentiates Mao-dun's realism from Zola's naturalism has been pointed out by the Marxian-Lukácsian critic Jaroslav Průšek that the determining force for the destinies of the characters which gives the sense of tragic is the historical development and social reality rather than those natural or biological tendencies. Therefore the language of Mao-dun is synchronic rather than diachronic, it is the stage, the juncture where all the characters stand in a still in the events that is pivotal rather than the plot or the story for any individual characters (Prusek). The way realism is connected to history in the works of Mao-dun is captured in another way in the work of David Der-wei Wang. He mentions the double influence on Mao-dun's realistic endeavor, one of which being the scientific attitude of Zola's naturalism and the other being the apocalyptic moment of history of

Tolstoy's humanism (D. D. Wang, *Fictional Realism*). The double sense is perhaps best described in the two translations of realism in Chinese—*xieshi zhuyi* (寫實主義; literally as “writing, portraying-the real”-ism) and *xianshi zhuyi* (literally as “realizing, actualizing-the real”-ism)<sup>90</sup>. On the one hand, it is a realism that writes(*xie*) what happens on the ground as history in time; on the other hand, it is a realism that accelerates and presses upon the time to urge history, or one could perhaps say, the revolutionary event, to happen, to realize. As Wang tries to redeem Mao-dun's writings from History, as he puts in the capital letter, he reads in Mao-dun's writing laden with potential “betrayal” of his intended politics. For Wang, the most exquisite and intricate craftwork of Mao-dun lies in his lucid portraits of the intriguing and conflicting psychology of the urban intellectuals, especially the women figures, and of those petit-bourgeois in the townships, in their encountering with the changing time and those historical events rather than the portrait of rural folks. Indeed, one could perhaps look at the length of the rural trilogy. Compared to his voluminous depiction of the interiority of those urban figures, the total number of pages of the three doesn't even reach seventy. As Wang pointed out, there was an ambition of Mao-dun to use different chronotopes, from villages, to townships, to metropolitan Shanghai, to

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<sup>90</sup> Lee Ou-fen(1993) has mentioned the transition from the former sense of realism to the latter in the course of the development of socialist realism and its consequence.

capture a panoramic view of an epical structure where in China is whirled into the maelstrom of capitalist history (D. D. Wang, *Fictional Realism*). To follow the metaphor of a grand epic on a mural, which J Průšek uses, it however seems that in unveiling the curtain, the vast rural land occupies a minimum space in a corner in his whole epical mural painting.

The short span and hastiness in the development of the story could be also seen to be working with a temporality that Mao-dun tries to capture. To look from Mao-dun's trajectory, he was a communist political and literary critic before starting his career as a novelist<sup>91</sup>. In Wang's words, there is always a political exigency in his writing to shorten, accelerate the time. He writes either immediately after the events on the news or even when the events are still happening and being unfolded in their courses. One could also easily detect an analytic attitude in the rural trilogy. As a part of the epic of the emergent capitalism in China, the rural trilogy is however not about opening the span of the battle and examine the different historical force that leaps on the stage, but it is about capturing a temporality that things used to be solid vanish and fall apart in every blinking moment. It is about a time of drastic deterioration of the

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<sup>91</sup> He had been associated with the communist since early age of .He only wrote his first novel dongyao(Shaking), the first volume of the trilogy called “”, right after the failure and the bloody suppression of the Nanchang insurgency ().

rural economy and the war with Japan looming around and becoming imminent. Mao-dun actually writes and publishes other non-fictional or half-fictional essays and letters in different form of prose on the same rural issues around the same time.

Mao Dun's rural trilogy, subsequently *Chuncan* (春蠶; *Spring Silk-worm*, 1932), *Quisho* (秋收; *Autumn Yields*, 1933), and the last *Candong* (殘冬; *Winter Ruin*, 1933), perhaps best illustrates the underlying question of "agrarian problems in China" in Fei's ethnographical work *Peasant Life in China*. Mao-dun's works often seem to enact a syllogistic gesture and come in the form of a trilogy in sequence. The rural trilogy basically depicts a time when the rural village life is falling apart in its encounter with the capitalist history. If one were to see the rural trilogy as a logical sequence of Maodun's political economy, the first story sees the decline of the domestic silk industry which happens with the penetrating influence of the world industrial market on rural China; and the second moment sees the subsequent bankruptcy of the agrarian economy with the debt caused by the earlier moment; and the third moment as the historical juncture where the peasants driven out from his land is to become propertyless proletariat and awaits to step onto the stage of history, even with the end being unknown (Mao-dun, "Spring Silkworms"; "Autumn Yields"; "Winter Ruins"). The storyline of the trilogy centres around a series of events dramatized to happen in a year across the seasons around a peasant family—old Tong-

bao and his two sons Ah-si and Ah-duo. In the unfolding of the sequence of the trilogy, there seems to be a movement from the outward description toward the “inner world” of the peasantry. This inner world for Mao-dun, however cannot be the interiority of individuals. It has to be located elsewhere.

In *Spring*, Mao-dun carefully brackets and footnotes the vernacular vocabularies of the labour process of sericulture which are metaphorized upon agriculture and human procreation and nourishment also with its voluptuous and erotic description of the flesh. In the unfolding of the story plot, the writing contains the most succinct but detailed description of the full sequence of the breeding of silkworms to the cocoon stage until the processing of the silk and the sale of the products with all the associated customs, rituals, and festivals. Although it is palpable that this fictional village is located in a region close to the metropolis of Shanghai, the spoken language would be familiar to Mao-dun, but the language of writing doesn't seem to be transparent to him. He carefully measures and marks the gap for the readers. In the trilogy, Mao-dun often interjects between-the-lines vernacular idioms that are put in the brackets. In *Spring*, what is peculiar is the extensive brackets for those local idioms for the labouring process of the domestic silk industry and farming, including the seasonal timings, tools for production, divination ritual, or even the market price, household account and finance...and so on, almost like an ethnographical

account(Mao-dun, “Spring Silkworms”). It is precisely these erupting brackets which de-familiarize what used to be familiar, making the realist effect in these fiction writings. What was once those habitual practices that remained unnoticeable with one’s being inside of it is now measured from a distance and zoomed in with different focal points. It is peculiar that for a novel, there are extensive footnotes made for these local idioms on the margins of the pages. It is as if these notes are an urgent anthropological recording of a certain life that is receding and vanishing soon in front of the eyes, thereby eagerly bracketing out a world that is in its ruin in history and lost in the new emergent literary language that himself is now writing in<sup>92</sup>.

The protagonist, old Tong-bao, is the representative figure of the old-time peasant, who, in facing the changing time, still stubbornly refuses anything foreign and heedfully upholds all the rituals and customs which inscribed a world of the agrarian life in this rural village manifested through all the seasonal timings and restriction and taboos to be followed. Nothing here is for sure. The seasonal timing is always for an expected unexpectedness. What will be the return, or bestowal, from the nature is always of an unpredictable nature. What one can ensure is thus only the attentiveness and heedfulness that is paid to every moment throughout the season and the sleepless intensive labour process. In this world, the rise and ebb of the cost and

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<sup>92</sup> The next section will see the discussion on Mao-dun’s view on the vernacular language and literary language.

price determined elsewhere resembles the capriciousness and fickleness of the heavenly weather and earthly outgrowth. It is merely given. The depiction of the labour process is corporeal and affective in its seamless description of colours, shapes, and numbers:

Fortunately in another day, when Aunt Si(Ah-si's wife) looked at the "cloth stuff (*buzi*, 布子)<sup>93</sup>" carefully, aha, there were few places turning green! The green was quite dazzling[...] She thus snuggled the cloth stuff closely against the flesh in her breast and then sat quietly and still, like holding in her arms a who is being breastfed, not even daring to make the slightest movement.

In the night, she held that five pieces of "cloth-stuff" into the quilt and shooed "the Fourth" away to share the bed with Duo-duo-tou(Ah-duo). Those tiny baby worms(*can-zi-er*; 蠶子兒) dotted so densely in the "cloth stuffs" were wrapped so tightly against the flesh. Quite itchy and tickling it was! Aunt Si was happy, but a little bit scared also. The time when the fetus was moving in her belly in her first pregnancy, she was just like, on the one hand, contented and exultant, and on the other, shy and frightened (Mao-dun,

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<sup>93</sup> The word "*buzi*" in the bracket, like a lot of the single words put in bracket by Mao-dun, is written in the vernacular of the region of *Wu*, the nowadays Jiangsu and Zhejiang region. Bu literally means cloth, and *zi* is only a colloquial way to end any daily used things. *Buzi* then is only the affectionate and informal way to talk about the clothes.

“Spring Silkworms” 324–25).

In the description, the breeding of the silkworms does not seem like any rural “industry”. It is perhaps not even a “craft” in the sense of the old German *Kraft*, which is about the force or the skill. The labour is figured upon the labour of a mother, perhaps more in the sense of its Latin etymological root, which is to “toil” and to “totter by a burden”. Bearing and rearing, in between the breeding and the feeding. The shaking pang and the tickling itchiness. Human flesh here is not so distinct from the soil, nor is it separate from her own tool. As in the words of Marx, she is a “member” of the common body. There is no distinction between making and what is naturally grown. The voluptuous description of the nights that the husband being “shooed out” of bed and the ticklish feeling on the breast, as a procreative organ but at the moment not reproducing the offspring of her own species, makes the whole process of silkworm breeding closely associated with the metaphor of human procreation and nourishment. In these vernacular usages that Mao-dun carefully stays with and seals in the bracket, one notices that in the usage of the vernacular idiom the full process of the sericulture is metaphorised not only upon human generation—i.e. the tiny larva called “black mom (*wuniang*; 烏娘)” and the grown up white caterpillar called “baby (*baobao*; 寶寶)—but also upon the agriculture cycle of a plant—“silkworm flower (*canhua*; 蠶花)” in place of the cocoon (*jian*; 繭) and “silk-worm-

seeds (*canzhong*; 蠶種)” stands for the fertilised egg. The human toil is rewarded by the outgrowth in accordance with the inner measure of the earth, or, perhaps, out of spontaneity, which thus needs the divination ritual to grasp its contingent and accidental nature. In a small essay called “The Strangers”<sup>94</sup>, Mao-dun in his vivid language makes the rustic religious ritual of the silk-breeding industry centres around an erotic scene:

The tomb of General Yue in Hangzhou has the villain couple Qin and Wang kneeling in front of it. Those rural folks who go to Hangzhou to burn the incense would definitely go at least once for “Babu Yue’s graveyard “, however not to pay heed to this loyal martyr, but only to touch the iron busts of Wang. It is said that by this touch the “silkworm flowers (*canhua*; 蠶花)” will come into bloom. Although the Babu of land that we are talking about here was also another loyal official, there is no devil couple

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<sup>94</sup> The title “the strangers” for the essay is actually about the two “strangers” from the modern reformed farm for sericulture seed improvement—i.e. “the foreign (silk-worm) seed (*yangzhong*; 洋種” and “fertilizer powder (*fei-tien-fen*; 肥田粉)”. Although it appears that there is a tone of ridicule in Mao-dun’s depiction of the rustic belief, he is even more dubious about what seems to try to take the centre place of the temple, literally and figuratively, which is the reformed farm. Mao-dun is critical of the fantasy that these modern tools which, on the surface seem to be scientific and progressive, would “facilitate the productive force of rural village” but actually create for the village a finance and market situation, which leads to a sucking out of the rural finance to the city and then to foreign countries (Mao-dun, 1984b).

kneeling in front of the temple, therefore also no “iron busts” to touch and stroke for these folks. Instead, if the fleshy busts of these rural women themselves are touched a bit by men before the seat of god, the “silkworm flower” should bloom. Therefore these rural women with big plump busts will have to jostle a bit in front of the seat of this Land Babu.

This is a custom that has been carried on for hundreds of years. Even after stroking the silkworm flower remains unripe, the busts are never going to be blamed, not even to mention the land Babu. Anyway, the prayer for the silkworms has to be in this Temple of Land-God (*tudi*; 土地) (Mao-dun, “Strangers” 183–84).

In the passage, the rural folks carefully abide by a ritual, a belief, which is however totally deviated from paying homage to the deity who is heroic and loyal to the empire. Conversely, it is the infidel and criminal that invokes the frivolous sexual pleasure and thus symbolizes the reproduction power that breeds a euphoric hope for a full bloom of the sericulture. The moral boundaries, animosity, and taboo are at times penetrated and transgressed with this light-minded pleasure. Although from the beginning of the story of *Spring*, the household of old Tong-bao has already sold out all their land from the debt over the previous years due to the rapid decline of the domestic silk industry, which is the main source of income, there are only some occasionally whimsical bewilderment and fragmentary thoughts, like those frothy

daydreams which never follow any thread consistently. There is also always a latent threat of an imminent war that is going to put a halt to the current life, coming from all the sayings and rumours. It is however like all the tumults that were subsisted through by the ancestral fathers and the memories of which deposited in those stories and hearsay, never exceeds the fortune or misfortune assigned to them by the heaven. The destiny is already foretold in the beginning, by the domestic toss-off divination within the sericulture; however, this gloom fades out soon at the next moment when the right timing and good numbers are bestowed by heaven to the earthly outgrowth. In the sight of mulberry trees, there is always of a persisting “hope” in the spring silkworm. Even for the younger son Duoduo, who does not believe the bloom of “silkworm-flower” will bring any chance for them to “turn over (*fanshen*; 翻身)” their own fate, he doesn’t care much. There is always an obliviousness in his daily life and labour, like what is described in a passage where after a shock by a malign act against his household by a neighbored woman, contempt in the community for her sexual frivolousness and the believed misfortune she carries, that transgress the taboo in the ritual worm-breeding, which is supposed to bring misfortune,

He didn't abhor nor did he pity Lotus in his mind, but he couldn't forget those words. He felt that there was something always not right between one person and another, but he could clearly figure out what it was or why it was so. Only after a while, he would have

just forgotten everything. The “(silkworm) babies” were robust! They just ate and ate, as if there is some magic, and never got full!”(Mao-dun, “Spring Silkworms” 330).

There is no deep awareness of the maelstrom of history nor is there a will to “turn themselves over (*fanshen*)”, a notable revolutionary trope, to be the master of their destiny. What appears through and through here is a logic of subsistence, *sub-sistere*, a life to remain and stand still, but below; a life to endure and to abide. The story ends with a dramatic contrast: a turnout of a never-seen-before full bloom of the “silkworm flower” on the one hand, and the drastic depreciation of market price and the closing down of the local factory due to the war, which in the end exacerbated their situation of debt and hunger.

### **The Memories of the Future in the Peasant World**

In *Autumn*, the second episode written after a few months, the intensified tension in the landed relationship comes more forcefully. The language in the writing has altered to some extent. To write at the transitional moment of the happening history as an acceleration of the changing time, there is indeed in the plot of Mao-dun what a modernist critic like C. T. Hsia depicted in a depreciated tone, a sense of being melodramatic. From the beginning of the story, what is on the pages is the desolate scenes of the village and the withered bodies of the whole family with the description of food shortage, starvation, and subsequent disputes. It is however only a passage or

building a stage for the emergent peasant insurgencies. Now a certain light-heartedness and indifference towards the changing world outside in the first episode seems to be no more. The changing world doesn't appear to be the circling change of seasons, nor are they the revolving turns of fortune assigned. The tumultuous outside world is not the distant alternation of dynasties or the occasional plunders that don't really change all the seeding and breeding seasons. It is also from the second episode onward that some primordial forms of insurgencies start to take place (Mao-dun, "Autumn Yields").

In facing the despair situation of food shortage and starvation at home due to the debt, both of the sons have gone out to figure out their ways. The elder son Ah-si, who is more of a modest peasant figure like his father, goes for a traditional way for financing, which is to find a mediator to take loan of rice from the usurer in the town and get deferred payment. The younger one Ah-duo, who never seems to have much hope in the outgrowth of land, took the risk and went around with the youngsters both from their village and others to "rob the hoarding rice and eat up the wealthy household (*chiang-mi-tun, chi-da-hu*; 搶米囤，吃大戶)", which could be seen as a primitive form of peasant insurgency. There is a dramatic moment that places the notion of family/home (*jia*; 家) in jeopardy. While the people led by Duoduo grabbed the little bit of rice that his brother had just loaned from the usurer, his sister-in-law

cried out to the brother, “Robber! This is for our own home (*zi-jia*; 自家; literally “one’s own home/family”)” and a village fellow replied that “everyone(*da-jia*; 大家; literally “the large home/family”) is starving now”(“Autumn Yields” 356). A dramatic turn breaks the narrative with its accumulated tension.

In the end, it turns out these burgeoning insurgencies in the larger area are not really “robbery” but actually a loan of rice, which is deferred to the harvest time and is waived of interest. The insurgencies led to a negotiation with the rice merchants mediated by the gentry. One detects that it is in fact not so different from the loan Ah-si has taken in the first place. What is abrupt in the story here is that after the event, the latter part of the story suddenly turns back to the everydayness of agricultural work, which just comes in the season. The event of robbery as a primitive form of peasant insurgency, in fact only a form of loan with deferred payment, functions as a carnival so as to turn back to the everyday order. It never transgresses the rule of give and take in the tenure relationship. It is, however, revealed in the last part of the episode that the agricultural work and cultivation of land only means a predestined doorway to deepen the debt and the subsequent loss of land. The more modern agricultural measure is applied to expect a return, the more they are trapped in it. The old Tong-bao died at the end of the second episode, which seems to mark the end of an age and a world where the crops, the “silk-flowers”, and the population bloomed at

once in the village (“Autumn Yields”).

In *Winter*, the crisis comes to full when the peasants lose the land, which means the old world order falls apart with the rooted faith in home(*jia*; 家) that is always yoked with the solid ground of earth is shattered, and is thrown into an indefinite destiny. The village is deserted, left with the corrupted modern administrative system and the hearsay of the coming of either the “truly destined emperor/son of heaven (*zhen-ming-tian-zi*; 真命天子)” or the “rebel king(*fan-wang*; 反王)”. A fraud Taoist monk spreads the rumour of omens about the coming catastrophes and masquerades a poor kid to be the “destined emperor” to make his own profits. In the end, Ah-duo happens to rescue the “destined emperor” by when he leads a group rebelling against the corrupted local army from the Pao-Chia system and realizes he is only a poor and foolish kid (“Winter Ruins”). For David Der-wei Wang, the meeting and encounter could be read as the coalescence of “revolutionary anticipation and reactionary nostalgia”(D. D. Wang, *Fictional Realism* 53). Mao-dun in his intention to set up the stage for the linear progression of history and accelerate the time for revolution, betrays another cyclical time in the rhythmic seasons of the Heavenly order (1992)(*Fictional Realism*). However one would perhaps have to ask if the cycle is the seasonal alteration and the vicissitude of dynasty changes under the heavenly order? Is it indeed a nostalgia toward the good old day working ethics of the peasant life?

How does the past and future really coalesce?

In fact, there is a thread that runs through the trilogy right from the beginning, a faint memory of the family past often overwhelms old Tong-bao, which perhaps overheard from the conversation between his grandfather and father and the hearsay. When the “revolt of Longhairs(*chang-mao zao-fan*; 長毛造反)” happened, the grandfather and his landlord Babu were captured by “Longhairs” for a few years. They both escaped together from the fortress and stealth a good fortune for the landlord from the “Longhairs”. In escaping, the grandfather had to kill a patrolling “little Longhair”. There is a hidden hint from the beginning, when the “little Longhair” is mentioned, his thought immediately comes to his second son Ah-duo. In the scene of the robbery in the second episode, old Tong-bao is horrified to see in his own son the image of the “little Longhair” coming for revenge. Mao-dun puts “Longhair” in brackets throughout but never provides a footnote as he does for the sericulture labour process like an ethnographer. As one knows that “Longhair” refers to the mid 19 century more than a decade long large scale revolt that first rose up with the peasants suffering from the famine and involved more than thirty millions people—Taiping Rebellion which launched the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom(*Tai-ping Tian-guo*; 太平天國). The initiator of the revolt self-proclaimed to be the brother of Jesus Christ and the kingdom under the name of Christendom implanted policies of abolishing private

properties and equal distribution of land. In the development of the rural trilogy, the short novel turns out to be allegorical, perhaps as Mao-dun's attempt to come close to the peasant world. As an allegorical device, it is ugly and flat. Every character is an abstract type. All the actual events are repetitions. A sign points to another. In the acceleration of the ruination of the world, the mechanical retention of the peasant memories in the hearsay perhaps tells a possibility that is apocalyptic and redemptive. In a similar way, Mao-dun rewrites the first mass peasant revolt against the ruthless cruelty of the conscription of labour in *Shiji* (Records of the Great Historian; 史記 1st century BC) in the short story *Daze Xiang* (Grand Lagoon County) which ends with the portentous inscription on the meteorite "the First Emperor died thus the land is apportioned/divided (*fen*; 分)" (Mao-dun, "Great Lagoon County" 216).

What is the language that Mao-dun employs to write about the inner world of the peasants? Here it also concerns a question of literary form. One could be reminded of a debate between Mao-dun and Qu Qiu-bai over the question of "multitude (*da-zhong*; 大眾)<sup>95</sup> literature and art" in 1931<sup>96</sup>. Qu Qiu-bai first broaches 'The Questions of

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<sup>95</sup> Here I take a more literal translation of the term *Dazhong* [大眾] which could be literally rendered as the "grand multitude" or the "grand mass". I choose the translation to keep the meaning of *Zhong* as "many".

<sup>96</sup> The two published essays by Qu and Mao-dun appeared in 1932. But Qu's reply to Mao's opinion came in four of his letters to friends 1931, mentioning one of the friend forward Mao-dun's letter concerning the question to Qu. The crossfire is perhaps first indirectly over the letters through common friends they had (Qu, "To Bro. Di 1"; "To Bro. Di 2"; "To Bro. Xin"; "To Bro. Bo-Xin").

Multitude Literature and Art’, where he criticizes how “plain-speech(*bai-hua*)” writing in new literature has developed into a form of new scripture language (*xin wen-yen*; 新文言) filled with the antique, European and Japanese grammar and entirely detached from the language of the mass. For a long time, the plebs used “plain speech” hardly with any writing. Therefore, they are only using the residues of the gentry’s written language, like the plain-speech writing of the old novel, which has always been reactionary and a dead spoken language in the past. The literary revolution has to do away with both the new classical language and the old novel plain-speech. The criteria should be “readable orally”. But this orality is not the earthly language (*tu-hua*; 土話) of “rustic folks(*xiang-xia-ren*; 鄉下人)”, which is primitive and remote. There is a new “general language(*pu-tong-hua*; 普通話)”, not the national language, forming in the metropolitan cities and modern factories where the proletariats gather, which should be the base of the plain-speech writing (Qu, “Question of Multitude Literature”). Mao-dun responds in ‘The Multitude Literature and Art in Question’ that the general language actually doesn’t exist, as there are only multiple forms of vernaculars spoken by people in different places. General language as lingua franca is too poor to bear the task of literature(Mao-dun, “Multitude Literature in Question”). Qu fiercely refutes this view and asks,

Mao-dun says that this [general] language is not enough for the expression in literature

and art, then, may I ask what language is he himself writing in? could it be possible that he is really writing in his *mother tongue*<sup>97</sup>? Could it really be in his own earthly language (*tu-hua*; 土話)? (Qu, “To Bro. Di 2” 335)

In Qu’s view, what Mao-dun is lamenting is that there is a disappearance or loss of the vernaculars [in writing] in the poverty of general language. Qu argues that there is no particular natural language that is the present general language. General language should be understood as something these vernacular languages “stand interrelation and opposite to (*dui-dai*; 對待)” (ibid: 334). In the unfolding of the new world, it is an emergent language in its “becoming”<sup>98</sup> with the most possibilities (ibid: 333). It is firstly a written language before becoming a spoken language with its possible different pronunciations in each vernacular. It is firstly a language emerging in the metropolis as the interface of the domestic vernaculars and the foreign languages and the encountering zone for the new and old things and world orders (Qu, “To Bro. Di 2”). Qu’s conceptualization of the general language can only be understood negatively and as something coming in a future tense. What Qu insists on is to write in a living language of the “tongue” that is always in its becoming and to bridge the long-

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<sup>97</sup> The phrase “mother-tongue” is written in English by both Qu and Mao-dun. It is possible the nowadays common usage of the term *myyu* (母語; literally “mother-language”) is a translated neologism and was not yet come into place at that time.

<sup>98</sup> Becoming is also written in English in the original text.

existing immense gap between speech/tongue(*hua*; 話)<sup>99</sup> and *écriture*(*wen*; 文) over the thousand years in Chinese language. In terms of the direction of the movement, Qu and Mao-dun do not seem to differ much from each other. Mao-dun's opinion of the non-existence of general language seems to be polemical and paradoxical, as he also sees there is no script to write the earthly language even if it is the ideal language to write. However for him, the earthly language is still the base for any spoken language. What he does, as he writes in *Spring*, is to mark the unbridgeable gap between the tongue and the *écriture*. For him the paradoxes, contradictory demands and any “counter-attack (*ni-xi*; 逆襲)” are part of the dialectical movement(Mao-dun, “The Manifold”). The quest for the earthly language seems to persist in Mao-dun. Later, in a debate over the history of “multitude language”, he uses the trope of “surface” versus “subsoil”. Mao dun separates “*yu-mian* (語面; language surface)” and “*yudi*(語底; language subsoil)” to think about the question of form and content of the multitude language(Mao-dun, “Multitude Language History”). One sees the parallel in the colloquial terms used by the village people, “*tian-mian* (田面; (field) surface)” and “*tian-di*(田底; (field) subsoil)”, to refer to the historical landed relationship of emphyteusis/permanent tenure right (*yong-dian-qun*; 永佃權) that was prevalent in southern China, which is captured in the chapter on “Land Tenure” in

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<sup>99</sup> The Chinese word 話(*hua*) contains the morpheme of “舌(tongue)”.

Fei's ethnographical work *Peasant life in China* (Fei, *Peasant Life in China*). He makes the polemical point that "multitude *language* literature at present doesn't have its history" against the attempt to write a literary history for multitude language literature, as the past literature only has the "surface" of multitude language as its tool but never the "subsoil" of language which is the multitude consciousness. Since "under the wide heaven, all is the king's land (普天之下，莫非王土)", there is a rare chance for the "multitude consciousness" to crystallise, but it only occasionally emerges in literature in times of the system's crisis. It, therefore, remains hidden and captive in a nebulous state which does not come in a solid form (Mao-dun, "Multitude Language History" 291). In a way the question of the "subsoil" of language as the subaltern consciousness perhaps persists for him when he writes the trilogy and moves toward the inner world of the peasant.

One sees the later development of the debate over the "national form" in wartime. In response to Karatani's "Written Language and Nationalism", Wang Hui summarizes in the 1939-1942 debate on the "national form" of literature and art after Mao Ze-Dong's 1938 talk in the party's national representative assembly, which culminated at the question of "whether the '*min-jian* language' should be the real spring/origin of national form." In the debate, the "rural" and "authentic" literary and art forms were pitted against the "urban" and "scholarly" ones. Also, the "dismantling"

and “dissolution” of the *min-jian* form into new literary and art forms was taken as castrating the “verbal nature” of *min-jian* language. Wang laid out the context of the historical moment wherein *min-jian* emerged as a problem in the debate on art and literary forms. In the late thirties, as most of the metropolitan areas had fallen into enemy hands in the Chinese-Japanese war, all the important universities and cultural institution and large amount of intellectuals moved to provincial areas. Although the appeal for “popularization of literature and art” had long been the case in the class-oriented political atmosphere, for these intellectuals, this was the first real exposure to questions of “vernacular language (*fang-yen-tu-yu*)” and “regionality”. In the case of earlier generations of *xiang-tu* literature, people were gathering in and writing from the cities on rural life, and the practice of these writings was precisely when and where the general or literary language of Chinese was founded. The reform movement of the written language, the “plain speech (*bai-hua*)” writing movement, which was part of the May-fourth movement, in the name of “verbalization”, was however not about any spoken language or phonetic system, but rather it was only an inversion of the classic/rustic valuation of the traditional written language in addition to some of translated European grammar and usage. The question of “*min-jian* language” in the debate problematized the legacy of the May-fourth language reform movement, bringing to the fore the tension within the “multitude literature and art” demand,

which is between the vernacular language, regional forms and the unified national form or the cosmopolitan trend of class solidarity. Wang ends this appendix by discussing the realist Hu Feng's 1940 famous essay, where Hu recognized the unbridgeable gap between the literary language and the spoken language by the multitude and assigned to literature the task to "*record, condense, and lift up the spoken language of the people of the nation (guo-min)...thereby providing them the weapon to reflect and criticize their own lives.*" The concept "multitude" was then given an attribute, "the national (*guo-min*)", in a way resorting to going back to the May-fourth tradition (H. Wang, "Regional Form"). Here, Wang Hui tries to say that the "phonocentrism" at the moment of nationalism, as mentioned in Karantani Kojin's "Written Language and Nationalism", is perhaps not the case for the modern reform of written language in China since the case was not a national language as vernacular to replace an empire's language, which is perhaps in accordance with his formula to see the modern state of China following neither the route of nation-state nor empire. However he has perhaps mistaken Karantani's point. For Karatani, all the positive languages are always already *langue ecrite*. Saussure is well aware of that so as to make language a negative differential system. The transvaluation always happens. In the first part of 20<sup>th</sup> century China, it is precisely because of the sense of failure, the question is manifested in the debates. The discussion culminates at Mao Ze-dong's

1942 talk at the Yen-an forum on literature and art that sees the life of the people being the real and sole origin/spring for all art and literature.

### **The Metamorphosis of the Earth**

In Mao-dun's *Winter*, when Ah-si heard his younger brother, who is more aware of the changing world and the bankruptcy of the agrarian life, urging him and his wife to search for odd jobs in the town and leave their son with the wife's father, "a piece of something" that seems to bind him to the no longer sustainable agrarian life reveals its "core":

Because they always had a home (家; *jia*), and it was one that was able to subsist with "one's own field, one's own land (自田自地; *zi-tien zi-di*)", they thought the meaning of a frugal life (做人家; *zuo-ren-jia*) was nothing more than sustaining this "home". Now if they have to tear apart this home to lead a life like a "drifting corpse", it is not only unfaithful to the ancestors, but also unfaithful to their child—little Bao. "Home", had long been their faith. How could they, as somebodies who just became propertyless and homeless, forget this long grown and rooted faith? (Mao-dun, "Winter Ruins" 382)

The awareness of the home seems to be a retrospective look which happens at a moment when people are driven out to be "propertyless" and "homeless". Here, the

conception of the home/family (*jia*; 家) is clearly associated with the landed property and the question of lineage. This very idea of the “home” and “one’s own field, one’s own land” that is supposed to stem from, to use a gain an agricultural metaphor, a “long grown and rooted” faith seems to well capture the haunting sentiment that has given the soil for a nascent form of nationalism and has thereafter carried over to be latent in our language of political imagination. A certain third-worldism also couches itself in this idea of the rural with the image of a self-subsistent peasant surviving in his homeland. The wartime however sees a metamorphosis of the trope of the earth. From its finitude and boundedness, it becomes an immense, if not infinite, plane and surface for movements and alignments that perpetually redefine the interior and the exterior.

The conceptual move is embodied in Mao Ze-dong’s 1938 “*Lun Chijiu Zhan* (論持久戰; On the Protracted War)”, a defining text for the strategies and tactics of the war against the Japanese invasion. It was, in fact, a draft of a speech that Mao gave in Yanan and later published in the magazine *Jie-fang* (liberation; 解放) in 1938 and soon circularized widely in the KMT-ruled area and Shanghai. At the time, the Sino-Japan war continued for a year; to answer those pessimistic and optimistic voices, in the speech draft, Mao wrote in the most succinct and simple, “So the question is: will China perish? Answer: It won’t perish; the final victory belongs to China. Can China

have a speedy victory? Answer: No, it can't have a speedy victory, the war against Japan is a protracted war"(Mao). The text thus begins with a concluding remark that, as a large, weak, and backward country fighting a small, powerful and advanced country that already occupied more than half of its territory, it's a necessity that China wins the war but with a deferred victory. What is the logic for this judgment and certitude? For Mao, all the real elements of the war are there, though not yet actualized; the possibility of defeat is immaterial here. In his dialectics, things turn upside down and inside out. The backward country is like the sunrise at the break of the day, whereas the advanced country is declining in its acme. Since the war is happening in China, the Japanese armies have to be besieged by the Chinese people who oppose them. The disadvantage of ununified and uneven economic development in China will become an advantage in the war. In the long duration of the war, the opposite alteration is a necessity.

The logic of occupation can only be along simple geometrical points, lines, at most some planes, i.e. big cities, some main roads, and a few plains, and occupies a sedentary and immobile position, while the war of movement and guerrilla is marked by its mobility, activity and speed on the vast ground. When the enemy is on my plane for a protracted duration, the term advance/retreat loses its ground. The long duration and spatial extensity of the war will constantly see a series of crisscrosses, as Mao

puts it, like “dog teeth”: the interior front/ exterior front (the protracted defense at the interior front as the strategy of the war and speedy decisive action at the exterior as the tactics of battles); the rear/ without rear (the guerrilla departing from the rear to fight battles without rear at the enemy’s rear), besiege/ counter-besiege (being besieged gives a new situation for counter-besieging with a few points forming a new lattice, as in the trope of Go piece); big mass/ small mass (of surface area and population; The big mass of the rural area will be in light and progress while the small mass of cities under occupation will turn into darkness and backwardness. The backwardness gives the vast rural area its autarky). By this logic, (spatial) extensity turns into (temporal) intensity. Decreasing quantity turns into ascending quality. Protraction turns into velocity. Dispersion turns into mobility (Mao).

The point here is not about military strategy. For Carl Schmitt, Mao has taken the logic of partisanship to its limit and attained its conceptual completeness in the telluric nature of the revolutionary war. He sees the force in the Chinese-Asiatic defense of the home soil with a territorially specific and real enemy. He finds a pluralistic image of *Großräumen* [large spatial areas] there. It has a world-historical significance and allows him to rethink of the concept of the political (Schmitt, *The Theory of the Partisan*). Here what could give a new contour of the earth is not the sovereign power that decides. The telluric nature of the war is perhaps also not really

about the limitedness of the territory. But by dint of violence of the external power, it sees the passivity of the force that is always inner to the earth solicited to give an expression. But will the anti-colonial force give rise to a new nomos of the earth as the new world order<sup>100</sup>? Whichever is the answer, as Mao uses the trope of a long river for the war for its contingency and fluidity<sup>101</sup>, the long river that flows through has changed the contour of the earth. The meaning of the earth has changed. It is no longer the patch of homeland that the abiding folk see integral to his personality and find his own finality but the impersonalized vast ground perpetually deterritorialized and reterritorialized for the swift guerrilla warriors.

Earthbound China has gone out of bounds.

### **Bending towards the Heart**

Mao's formulation in the war piece about the "subsoil" transformation of the human psyche(*renxin*; 人心), as one of the most essential aspects of contrasting forces in the

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<sup>100</sup> Schmitt, "Die Ordnung der Welt nach dem zweiten Weltkrieg," op. cit, p. 15: "Anti-colonialism is a phenomenon that attends the destruction of this spatial order. It is oriented solely backwards, to the past, and has as its goal the liquidation of a state of affairs that has remained valid until now. But, aside from the moral postulates and the criminalization of European nations, it has not created any idea of a new order. Determined fundamentally by a spatial idea, if only negatively, anti-colonialism does not have the capacity to forge the beginning of a new spatial order in a positive way." (Quoted from Ulmen Schmitt, *The Nomos of the Earth* 31)

<sup>101</sup> The trope is used to explicate the third subjective principles in the war—i.e. "projectivity" (the other two being "activity" and "flexibility"). If the war is a flux in its absolute fluidity, then at every point there is a relative fixed projective tack that can be taken and abolished, perhaps like a vector with a certain direction.

war, is taken by the rural reconstruction thinker Liang Shuming(1893-1988). Liang was once despaired of the doomed fate of the extinction of China as a nation before he met Mao in the cave in Yen-an. Years later, in *Renxin yu Rensheng* (人心與人生; *Human Psyche and Human Life*) he formulated his idea of a certain Confucian “psychology” where the psyche(*xin*; 心 ) is seen as the impetus of life/generation(*sheng*; 生) in evolution which is the movement *ex nihilo* and gives anew Mao’s wartime thinking of “self-conscious movability” as the specific trait of human sees the possibility of human beings actively perishing as a species (Liang, *Human Psyche*)<sup>102</sup>.

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<sup>102</sup> Liang’s work needs a careful analysis which I couldn’t fulfill in this thesis.

## Chapter 4: The Sky

We see the sky in its infinite openness. We see it by *not seeing* anything. When we raise our heads and stare into the sky, it is often a moment of vertigo as if peering into the abyss of nothingness. We often need the earthly sensuous image to name it. The metaphoric substitution thus stands clear. Even the word sky is etymologically shadowed by the clouds which cover and conceal<sup>103</sup>. In modern Chinese language, we often refer to the sky with the compound noun *tian-kong*(天空). The character *tian*(天) sees one stroke above the figure of the human. In *Shuowenjiezi*, it is explicated with the homophonous word *dian*(顛), the top, the front head, which is what is “the most high without an above”. The trope thus gives a certain moral cosmos<sup>104</sup>. However, in its conceptual history, *tian* is often talked about only negatively<sup>105</sup> or as the generic name for nature (*ziran*; 自然)<sup>106</sup>. The character *kong*(空) derives its meaning from the earthly hole to signify what is hollow and empty, and extends its usage to mean the

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<sup>103</sup> The word sky has its etymological root from the old Norse word *sky* which means “cloud”. It comes from the Proto-Indo-European root *(s)keu-*, “to cover, conceal”.

<sup>104</sup> In *Shuowenjiezi Zhu (The Annotations of Shuowenjiezi)*, it mentions the Confucian moral order where “subjects see rulers”, “sons see fathers”, “wife see husband”, and “people see food” as *tian* (as what is on the top of them).

<sup>105</sup> *Kangxi Zidian* (The dictionary compiled under the emperor Kangxi) refers to the 3BC Confucian canon *Xunzi*, “*Tian* has no substantial form; what are above the earth and most empty (*zhixu*; 至虛) are all *tian*”.

<sup>106</sup> *Kangxi dictionary* refers to the line of the 11<sup>th</sup> C thinker Shaozi, “Outside *ziran*[what is itself as such] there isn’t another thing called *tian*”. The idea of *ziran* will be discussed later in the chapter.

vast and to exhaust<sup>107</sup>. In the history of East Asian Buddhism, the Chinese character *kong* has long been used to translate the words *sunya* and *sunyata*. In modern times, the historical consciousness sees its turning away from the heaven-directed gaze toward the finitude of the earth. The chapter however tries to see a moment of thought where the trope of the sky, *tian* as certain naturalness, and *kong* as emptiness comes together and lends itself to broach a mode of modernity.

One sees the conceptual movement embodied in Zhang Tai-yen's 1911 detailed exegesis on a short text in the corpus of the 4<sup>th</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> BC (the pre-Qin empire warlord period) ancient thinker Zhuang Zhou (Zhuangzi), *Qi-wu-lun* (*A discourse on equalization of things*)<sup>108</sup>. It is a re-interpretation of Zhuangzi's text through the

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<sup>107</sup> In *Shuowen*, the character of *kong*(空) derives its meaning from the morpheme *xue*(穴), the cave, and its sound from *gong*(工). It is explicated with the character *qiao*(竅), the hole, or the aperture. In *Annotations*, it says, “between the sky and earth it is also a hole(*kong*; 孔)”.

<sup>108</sup> It is difficult to translate the title of Zhuang-zi's treatise, as it is difficult to determine the part of speech or punctuation in reading the ancient texts. Literally, the character *qi* (齊) can be translated as adjective equal, same, even, uniform, in good order, complete and so on; it can also be translated as a verb, to make equal, to arrange, to alloy, to adjust, to ascend and so on. *Wu* (物) is usually translated as “thing”. *Lun* (論) can be translated as a thesis, discussion, discourse on certain things. Jean Francois Billeter has captured the long debates between different commentaries, which is divided mainly by reading the title as “qi ‘wu-lun’”, as “to put an equal foot on the discourses on things”, or rather as “‘qi-wu’ lun”, following the older commentary tradition until Tang dynasty (7-10 C), as “considering as equivalent all the things”. By considering the text's place in the corpus and the content, Billeter thinks it is obvious the second interpretation is more truthful. However one of the most prevalent English translation by the missionary linguist James Legge (1815-1897), following the later tradition, translates the title as “The adjustment of controversies”, as it considers the text to be self-evident about the “adjusting” or “harmonizing” the dissention and disparities between different discourses, as he finds the evidence from a passage of a supplementary commentary in the Ming dynasty (14-17C) (Zhuang-zi,

Yogacara or Vijnapati-matra Buddhist concepts and lexicons. In the earlier chapters, in the writings on the idea of the rural which set up a certain foundation of the modern Chinese writings, one often sees a trait of the Yogacara strand of Buddhist thoughts and its lexicons, including the ostensive “revolutionaries” like Qu Qiu-bai and Lu Xun, the most famous advocate for rural reconstruction Liang Shu-ming, or the so-called “pastoralist” writers Shen Congwen. Here, the attempt is to find a way to look at the tectonic shift of certain premodern templates for the thinking that perhaps gives the ground to the moments of thought in the previous two chapters<sup>109</sup>. Zhang Tai-yen’s text offers an insight. Being a person who lived through the late Qing and early Republic period, Zhang Tai-yen is a controversial figure in the transitional time who

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*The Sacred Books of China* 128–29). Another option is to follow A.C. Graham’s translation, “The sorting which evens things out”, where the wording follows the daily usages, which is proximate to the experience of the lived world. To translate *qi* as the gerund “sorting”, instead of discourse (Zhuang-zi, *Chuang-Tzū*). I basically agree with Billeter’s choice of, as he says, “freely translates” the title in French as “*Toutes choses égales*”, as he understands the title as “all things being recognized as equal (*toutes choses étant reconnues pour égales*)(Billeter, ). However if one follows Zhang Tai-yen’s reading of the text, it might be more pertinent to translate *qi* in its verb form instead of the adjective form. I thereby for the purpose here, also with reference to Tsuyoshi Ishi’s rendition, translate it as “A discourse on the equalization of things” instead of “the sameness, or equality, of all things”. I also incline to refrain from the quantifier “*toutes* (all)” in Billeter’s translation as “all” involves a notion of totality.

<sup>109</sup> I will add a very small digressing footnote on Karatani’s Japan-psycho-analysis, where he turns over Maruyama Masao’s understanding of the “the ancient stratum” and tentatively says that without the cut of all the religious civilization, if there is anything that can be said of as “Japanese” or “Japanese thing” perhaps is closer to a psychotic experience, where the Name-of-the-father is never set in place. The constant conversion is then the mirroring of the alter-ego. This “Japanese thing” as a psychotic experience perhaps becomes in confluence with the current of globalization, where the subjects of “ordinary psychosis”, to use JA Miller’s phrase, become prevalent.

seems to embody a lot of contradiction of his time. He is seen by some as a fervent revolutionary and others as a restorationist, once an advocate of almost ethno-nationalism but also affiliated with radical anarchism and socialism. Trained as a philologist in the late Qing period, he is one of the most important classicists who insisted on writing in the most formidable classical Chinese but also the master of those most prominent first-generation modern writers and language reformers who advocated for abolishing the use of the classical Chinese written language. Lu Xun and Zhou Zuo-ren were once his students in his class on etymological studies. In his entire corpus, a large amount of works are devoted to the historico-phonological and etymological-exegetical studies(*yin-yun-xun-gu*; 音韻訓詁)—i.e. what is called “petit learning (*xiao-xue*, 小學)” in the traditional classification. For Zhang, all the learnings take “language as the essence” and “truth as the final home”. Kiyama Hideo has captured the tension between the seemingly contradictory movement of what he calls “literature revolution”, represented by Lu Xun brothers, and “literature restoration” by Zhang Tai-yen. The latter is in fact a prehistory to the former. For Kiyama Zhang’s ethno-nationalist revo demanded for a renaissance which largely influenced from the beginning the language and lexicons Lu Xun brothers employed as writers and translators. Paradoxically Zhang’s insistence on the classical language(*wen-yen*; 文言) makes him more radical than the May 4<sup>th</sup> writers in terms of supporting to write in

vernaculars, as the earthly language is a repository for sounds and words pass down from antiquity (Kiyama).

Before the 1911 revolution, Zhang Tai-yen have written a series of essays on the newspaper that supported the revolution which one could perhaps call it “religio-political thoughts” in the lexicons and concepts of Yogacara Buddhism (T. Zhang, “On Building a Religion”; “A-Theism”; “On Four Confusions”; “On Five Nothingness”; “On Nations”; “Answer Tie Zheng”; “On Differential Evolution”). Zhang however regards the exegesis as the quintessence of his thought. The attempt here is to see how transformation is understood therein in a text Zhang himself deemed as “political”.

### **The Void as the Originary Fund**

I bring in two francophone sinologists, François Jullien and his opponent Jean François Billeter, as Zhang’s interlocutors, for the notion of a void (*xu-kong*; 虛空), or a topological ring (*huan-zhong*; 環中) as the pivot that is central to Zhang’s political thought. To begin with, Jullien and Billeter differ in their ways to approach the Chinese archive as sinologists. Jullien foreground his “philosophical strategy” in *L’ecart et l’entre* which is to take the detour through what is exterior to the whole tradition of philosophy to return<sup>110</sup> back to the place of the unthought and the

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<sup>110</sup> Jullien also uses in his work a lot of the word “retournemnet” as the flipping and reversal to “the other side”.

repressed in what is taken as self-evident in the Western mode of thinking and familiar philosophemes. The two movements happen at the same time. He uses the notion *écart* (distance, gap, divergence), which certainly produces certain *l'entre*, “in-between-ness”, to replace the notion of *différence*, which presupposes identity. For difference is to distinct but *écart* is to distant. It is about displacement instead of category. This detour is to see how far the thoughts go and can go, as a counter-shooting of the arc, from the original fold(*pli*) of the thought to what he calls “the possible mode of coherence”, or “the possible intelligibility”. This strategy is certainly an attempt to try to move away from the prevalent discourse of cultural difference. The reason for him to detour through “Chinese thoughts” is that he thinks that the Chinese language is an outsider and stranger to the Indic-European language-thought, which is to say it is exterior to the whole Western tradition. For him, he wants to look at another possible mode of language-thought (*langue-pensée*), by which he means the fund of language that thinks itself. What he wants to look at is “infra-philosophy”. Here, he emphasizes on the absence of any grammatical inflection in the Chinese language. It does not will to construct. This emphasis is to detour from the basic philosopheme of the verb “être”, the thought around the Greek *on*, to what he calls the “*entre*”, which retour as the unthought of the forgotten *metaxu* and *a-topos* in Greek (Jullien, *L'écart et l'entre*).

Billeter perhaps is the one who launches the harshest criticism on Jullien's strategic thought with his almost militant kind of pamphlet *Contre François Jullien*. He does not see Jullien really leaving the terrain of the cultural comparative framework. Billeter points out that Jullien usually prioritizes a singular concept and makes it the pivot of a book, like how he translates *tao* as "process" in *Procès ou création* or "propensity" in *Propension des Chooses*. There is certain forcible nailing of the word in a much narrower meaning to make manifest the concept. However, for Billeter, this produces an artificial effect of estrangement and exotic feeling that makes certain concepts the mode of Chinese thought. It leaves out the tension between the different exegeses or the possible criticism of the canonic ones. For him, to posit a "philosophical China", as the other (l'autre) or the reverse side (l'envers) of the West, Jullien's thought turns out to be more and more self-referential. The reason for him to write such a polemical pamphlet is that Jullien locates "Chinese thought" purely as a thought of immanence, absent with any concepts of transcendence, as opposed to the West, and thus focuses on the concept of efficacy, propensity, and operation of power. It is totally in congruence with the governing logic of the empire and the state (Billeter, *Contre François Jullien*). Billeter also opposes the prevalent strategy of Sinology to leave the word like *tao* untouched. Polysemy exists in all languages. It does not stop one from translating it into different words or expression

in different context. The reason for him to do so is also that all these usage of words in antiquity that precedes the canonization are often simple street words. In the time of Zhuang-zi, the word of *tao* did not have a fix meaning not to say form any sacred concept. It can be translated as “the function of the things”, or simply as “the way” or “the action” at different places. Billeter would rather read the singularity, and perhaps almost certain heterodox, of Zhuang-zi as his interlocutor. For him, the translation of the passage is the beginning of the work. The decision to translate the archaic Chinese language in a language in its most simplicity and contemporaneity is to approach the “fundamental physics of subjectivity” in Zhuang-zi’s writings that is “infinitely proximate” and “almost immediate” (*infiniment proche et presque immédiat*) to the experience through the deep description in all the anecdotes and allegories (Billeter, *Four Lectures*).

In Billeter’s reading of Zhuang-zi, *xu-kong* (*le vide*; the void; 虛空) is the pivot of the changing of the regimen(*régime*)<sup>111</sup> between sky<sup>112</sup> and human(*tian-ren*). The regimen of the human is the intentionality and consciousness, which is where all the imperfection and mistakes occur. The regimen of sky is how the things function as

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<sup>111</sup> I use the word regimen to translate the French word *régime* for the reason that regimen carries the both the meaning of English word regime and the diet or the treatment for health.

<sup>112</sup> Billeter translates the word *tian* as *le Ciel*. I avoid the word of Heaven in English translation as Billeter’s emphasis is on the unction of the things.

they are<sup>113</sup>. He refers to Kleist's puppet theatre and Montaigne on the folly to aid to the explanation of the two different regimens or apparatuses. Thus, in Zhunag-zi, "the ciel is the interior; the human is the exterior". Billeter's concern is about the spontaneity of the subject which is at once the necessity of nature. Here he sees the affinity between Spinoza and Zhuang-zi. But what then is here the mechanism for changing between the regimen? In his lecture titled "An apology for Confusion", Billeter discusses the notions of "*wang* (oblivion; *s'oublier elle-même*)" and "*you*(wander)" as the crucial mechanism. He uses the word confusion to translate *hun-tun*(*hun-tun*), which is also often used to translate the chaos. This chaos is precisely the mind's wander at the beginning of the things in its primordial indistinctness. It is a certain retreat that involves the cessation or suspension of intentionality, which functions like a valve or a threshold<sup>114</sup>. It is what Zhuang-zi calls "*xin-zhai*(the fasting/regimen of the mind)" as the void that is a pure opening. Thus he establish a paradigm of subjectivity as a fecund void (*un vide fécond*) that opens to the things (Billeter, *Four Lectures*).

Jullien also make the notion of the void central in the Chinese thoughts. It is

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<sup>113</sup> The anecdotes of the Butcher's technique, the drunk person falling from the carriage without any injuries, and the Confucius mistaking a rustic person swimming in torrent as suicides and enquiring about his way of swimming are there to describe the regimen of the ciel.

<sup>114</sup> Billeter also goes into the etymology of *hun-tun*, which is also associated with *hu-lu*(the calabash with a middle narrow part that joins the two round parts but is indistinguishable with which part it belongs.)

however far from any retreat. As mentioned above in the discussion on *écart*, Jullien tries to move away from the whole question of ontology. *Écart* is the in-between-ness which is also a non-substantive void. This void is however not like the notion of *sunya*, which is still something ontological. For Jullien, the void is a passage, a “passing through”. As he explicates by the Chinese word “*wu* (無)” used by the 3<sup>rd</sup> century thinker Wang Bi, which he translated as “*il n’y a pas*”, to distinguish with the ontological thinking of being and nothingness, it is a nothingness that is operative to profit what is to be. It is the passage which produces the effect. Jullien cites Zhunagzi’s here to talk about this void (*le vide*) as the passage: “It never gets filled with the pouring and never gets exhausted with the drinking” (Jullien, *L’écart et l’entre* 63). In *Du “temps” Elements d’une philosophie du vivre*, he discusses about the notion of time in the Chinese language (Jullien, *On “Time”*). In the absence of the question of being and the grammatical tense that distinct the past and future from the present, he sees that the Chinese notion of time, *shi*(時), which is not abstracted and independent from the things, to be more adequately translated as “moment” which is associated with “*ji*(occasion; 季)”. The agrarian notion of *shi-jie*(seasonal moment; 時節) is deeply associated with the idea of *sheng* (living/life; 生) plays an important part in the antiquity. The seasonal moment is not the event that happens or irrupts(*sur-vient*) but is stemming from (*provient*) the *in-flux* of the immanence of life (*On “Time”* 54).

Jullien most of the time uses the gerund “living”, as he calls a “philosophy of living”, to place the emphasis on the passage, transition and process. *Sheng* refers to not only life, living, something that is already or a continuous passage, but it more often also means to emerge, to give birth, to bring forth. For Jullien this emergence or bringing forth is innate in the in-flux of the process, which is like an auto-effect that comes only “timely”. As the notion of time here is not the measurement of movement with a beginning and end, the present instance does not produce the predicament that is solved with the notion of distention. It also bypasses the question of eternity that is outside the time. What he emphasizes here is the notion of transition and passage in the Chinese notion of time, where the opposite of going and coming(*wang-lai*) is the same and happens at once. The “past” (*gu*; 古) is departing and the “now”(*jin*; 今) is arriving. The transition is constant. With the contrast he makes between distention and transition, he then sees this notion of time disassociated with the subject(*su-jet*) that projects out. It is not ahead of itself. Time is purely the opening and closing. This links the question of time with the void, where he also uses the same passage of Zhuang-zi to talk about how the time as the fond manifests itself through the way of “*xu-dai*(虛待<sup>115</sup>; being available; *disponible*)”(On “Time” 172). He removes this

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<sup>115</sup> Jullien uses Disponibilité to translate *xu-dai*. I temporarily use the word availability. In the Chinese compound, *dai* can be associated with awaitedness. But it also means to host, to treat, to receive. *Xu* refers to the void, the emptiness, the negative, the feebleness, or the virtual.

being available from any interiority but sees this as this void as the only substance that is produced with the effect of time's self-unearthing(*creusement*)(173). It is a pure opening to and of the time that is always in its fullness<sup>116</sup>. One only acts *à propos*<sup>117</sup>with the auto-effect of time. The transformation thus is always the “silent transformation(*mo-hua*; 默化)” that is invisible at each moment as it is contained at the fond that is subterranean (Jullien, *The Silent Transformations*). For Jullien, all these thoughts however are also the ethico-political thoughts which is the *in-fluece* of the power. This void thus is also the center of the power that begins “timely” with the minimal potential situation. All the effect then comes “naturally” as the auto-operation and auto-effect<sup>118</sup>. Thus the void is also central to the power of ruling in the entire tradition, which is Billeter's criticism centres upon.

### **The Auto-Affection of the Pipe of the Sky**

Zhang Tai-yen's reading of Zhuan-zi is however far from any notion of naturalism or living. Instead of living or birth, he brought forth a negative notion of “*wu-sheng* (無

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<sup>116</sup> Jullien uses an anecdote in *shi-shuo-xin-yu* to explain this effect of time: One snowing a person suddenly woe up from sleep. Suddenly he is remembering a friend. He then took a small boat overnight to reach the friend's place in the morning. Then he came back without seeing the friend. People ask him why. He said “I went with this rising-up (*xing*; 興) (of time), and returns when this rising-up finishes. Why do I need to meet him?” It is the auto-affection of the time that opens and closes.

<sup>117</sup> Jullien takes the usage “*à propos*” from Montaigne's *Essaie*. The Chinese translation happens to render it as “*suishun*(隨順)”(Jullien, *On “Time”* 126), a concept that is important to Zhang Tai-yen's thinking.

<sup>118</sup> Jullien cites the Zhunag-zi's here to talk about this void(*le vide*) as the passage: “It never gets filled with the pouring and never gets exhausted with the drinking.”

生; no-birth)", the Buddhist notion of "ajati", at the core of his writing. His exegesis is mainly a reinterpretation of Zhuang zi's treatise from his reading of the Vasubandu's vijnapti-matra texts and the *Lankāvatāra-sūtra* based *Mahāyāna śraddhotpada śāstra*. The first publicized version of the text was usually considered to be written between 1905-1911. The text is attached with a postscript offered by his sangha friend Huang Zong-yang ending with the date "October, the year of *xinhai* (1911)", the very month of the *xinhai* revolution whence the new republic was born. The revised and finalized version was published in the year of 1914, while he was under house imprisonment by the restored monarch Yuan. One might have in mind that between the years of 1903-1906 Zhang was incarcerated in Shanghai's *ti-lan-qiao* jail for the sentence in his piece on *su* newspaper (*su bao*; 蘇報) that ridiculed the emperor as a clown. While his co-prisoned young associate died of the toil of hard labor and torture, the obstinate "lunatic" survived. In the years of imprisonment, the only available reading materials in the prison then were the religious books. Besides the drudgery labor of tailoring, he acquisitively the time with the only. After being released from prison, he was immediately banished from the country thus exiled to Japan. It is almost the same period when his wrote the series of political essays successively published in the revolutionary newspaper *Minbao* (People's Newspaper). One might indeed wonder, as a fervent participant of the revolution, why would

Zhang spend the most intense time of the revolution in prison and exile working on a detailed exegesis of an ancient text, finding the affinity between the two traditions and meticulously translating the text line by line into the vijnapti-matra lexicons? Even his student who edited the text lamented the idealist tendency as a waste of time, but only sees the limited political value in the more apparent criticism of the civilization task of the West through the critique of the ancient utilitarian thinker Mohist's notion of "universal love". But why does Zhang Tai-yen say that for politics, one must read Qi-wu-lun, which is often seen as a discourse of the mystic?

But what is Qi-wu-lun about? The famous ancient text begins with an anecdote of a man in a trance state as though he had lost the counterpart of himself. When asked how his form could seem like a withered wood and heart like dead dust, he answered "I seemed to have lost myself." And asked the person if he had heard the piping of the human, the piping of the earth (*di-lai*; 地籟), and the piping of the sky (*tian-lai*; 天籟). "The piping of the Earth is simply that which come from its myriad apertures; and the piping of Man may just be compared to those which (are brought from the tubes of) bamboo—allow me to ask about the piping of the sky." He answered, "Blowing the myriad differences, so that each can be itself—all take what they want for themselves, but who is it that does it?"<sup>119</sup>(Zhuang-zi, "Qi wu lun")

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<sup>119</sup> A.C Graham translates the same passage as "Who is it that puffs out the myriads which are never the

In the traditional exegeses, the pipes of the sky mostly refer to the spontaneity of naturalness. The term we nowadays invariably used today to translate “nature” in modern time “*zi-ran*(自然)” comes from the writings of Laozi and Zhuangzi, what is called the taoist tradition today, which one could translate literally as “so of itself”, “in-itself” or “so of its origin”, as the character “zi(自)” signifies “whence, from, and the origin”. It is perhaps literally closer to the word with the Latin root—“spontaneity”—*sua-sponte*—of one’s own accord. There is also a sense of necessity in spontaneity in Zhuangzi, as another associated term “*bu-de-yi*(不得已)”, that which “cannot cease [to be]”, indicates this spontaneity is in accord with that which is inevitable and “cannot be otherwise”(Graham). The most important exegesis came in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century by the East-Jin dynasty scholar Guo Xiang(252-312AD)’s exegesis. It was also a historical period in turmoil among the warring states when a certain discussion on, if one may at all put it this way, the ontological question of “there is not (*wu*; 無)” or “there is (*you*; 有)”, because in Chinese there is no clear distinction between a verb and a mass noun. Guo is one among those who give primacy to “there is”. He anchors his thought on his exegesis of *Qi-wu-lun*. From Guo’s exegesis, a thing is so, so of itself, not knowing why it is so. *Zi-ran* 自然, what is so of itself is also to say, *kuai-ran*(塊然), *jue-ran*(掘然), *tu-ran*(突然) what is so of lumping all

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same, who in their self-ending is sealing them up, in their self-choosing is impelling the force into them?” (Zhuang-zi, *Chuang-Tzŭ* 49)

alone, so of raising up abruptly, and so of heaving up suddenly. The question of contingency thus is brought in and grasped as necessity in the notion of *zi-ran*. I translate here his exegesis on the passage of the piping of the sky:

This is what the piping of the sky is. For what is celestial piping, how could it be once more a separate thing? This is to say that for the kind of multiple apertures and adjoining bamboo tubes, [they are] connected to the category of that which generates, [so they] assemble and together become one [that is the] sky (*yi-tian*; 一天). [If what] there is not(*wu*; 無) in as much as it is(*ji*; 既) [what] there is not (*wu*; 無), then [it] is not possible to generate/gives birth to(*sheng*; 生) [what] there is (*you*; 有); [if what] there is be not yet generated/give birth to, it is not possible to further make [any] generation. Thus so then who is that which generates [after] generates (*sheng-sheng*; 生生)? It is as such lumping alone (*kuai-ran*; 塊然) and self-generated(*zi-sheng*; 自生). [It is] self-generated but not I-generated(*wo-sheng*; 我生). Since I am not able to generate things, things also cannot generate me; then I [am] as such of itself(*zi-ran*; 自然). From itself(*zi-ji*; 自己) thus as such(*ran*; 然), then it is called as such of the sky(*tian-ran*; 天然). The sky is being as such(*tian-ran*; 天然), not [any] making/doing(*wei*; 為), so [one use] the sky to say(*yen*; 言) it. [To say by the sky], is to illuminate that it is as such of itself, how can it be the talk about the ashy blue [above]? And perhaps some would say the sky piping employs things to its service and make them subordinate to itself. However the sky cannot

own/owe(*you*; 有) itself, let alone can it own things! Thus, what is called the sky is the common name for the myriads of things. If not supposed to be the sky, who is in charge of (*zhu*; 主) the employment of things? Thus, things are by themselves self-generated and have no [place to] come from/about(*suo-chu*; 所出); this is the way(*dao*; 道) of the sky” (Guo et al. 49).<sup>120</sup>

In the passage, the sky is the common name for all things; there is no other thing called the sky. This is also to say that he does not separate appearance from a deeper reality. Also contingency as necessity is not grasped as any law nor even causal relations. From the self-generation and as such of itself of things, he derives at the central idea of his thought, *du-hua*(獨化), the individuation of all things, as the becoming of the ones all alone. To add a marginal note, in Wei-Jin period, there was not only the interest of re-reading the heterodox Taoist traditions against or along with the orthodoxy, Confucianism, if one is to borrow Max Weber’s terms, it was also the first-time certain Buddhist thoughts became prevalent, including the import of the

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<sup>120</sup> The original Chinese text writes: “此天籟也。夫天籟者，豈復別有一物哉？即眾竅比竹之屬，接乎有生之類，會而共成一天耳。無既無矣，則不能生有；有之未生，又不能為生。然則生生者誰哉？塊然而自生耳。自生耳，非我生也。我既不能生物，物亦不能生我，則我自然矣。自己而然，則謂之天然。天然耳，非為也，故以天言之。〔以天言之〕（一）所以明其自然也，豈蒼蒼之謂哉！而或者謂天籟役物使從己也。夫天且不能自有，況能有物哉！故天者，萬物之總名也，莫適為天，誰主役物乎？故物各自生而無所出焉，此天道也。物皆自得之耳，誰主怒之使然哉！此重明天籟也。”

early Prajnaparamita thoughts and the Sarvastivada influenced Abhidharma school. The debate over *wu*(無)/*you*(有), “there is not” or “there is” emerged with the entwinement of these two strands of thought. It is also to say that the translation of the Buddhist texts also heavily relies on the lexicons of these debates. In Japan, once *zi-ran* was used as the early translation of the word *svabhava*.

Zhang Tai-yen’s exegesis brings a different reading of the trope of the sky pipe. He seems to never have much interest in a transcendent or immanent notion of *tian* as heaven or nature, as in one of his essay, he sees the Confucian sacrifice ritual only demands people to act “as if *tian* was there”. He also speculates with his phonological studies that the word *tian* can be traces to the word *diva* in the Indic language. There meaning and sound changes, oscillating between what is concrete and abstract(T. Zhang, “Answer Tie Zheng”). Here in one line he makes two moves, “that which blows the myriads in the heavenly piping is a trope for *alaya-vijnana*, the myriad is a trope for all the *bija* (the seeds) in *alaya-vijnana*, which is perhaps what is also called *a priori* concepts (categories) in later time”(T. Zhang, “Exegesis Final Text” 78),. Firstly the blower is now the fundamental cognition, *cang-shi*(藏識), *alaya-vijnana*, literally the storing or hidden cognition. In a stroke, the nature that is often seen as externality seems to be turned within. Or to be more precise, the topology of the interior and exterior is rendered inapplicable from the beginning. Zhang Tai-yen In the

beginning, To be brief about the technical terms of Yogacara Buddhism, the vijanapti-matra (*wei-shi*; 唯識) is often translated as “representation-only” or “mere-consciousness”. Eric Frauwallner’s rendition “mere-cognizance” is perhaps apposite to Zhang Tai-yen’s reading in the text (Frauwallner). Vasubandhu’s *Triṃśikā-kārikā* (‘Thirty Verses’) differentiates eight processes of cognition, the last one is the fundamental cognition, *alaya-vijnana*, the locus or repository of the seeds and what supports the cognizance of the objects. The seeds of language and actions are imprints from the past, the maturation of which at a different time gives rise to another cognizance as its fruit. The penultimate 7<sup>th</sup> cognition, *manas*, thinking, is what mistakenly grasps the fundamental cognizance as the I. The rest six are the processes of cognizance of the objects (*visayavijnapti*), including the five sense-perception, which conceive the “unreal object” by the differentiating conceptual knowledge.

There are certain efforts by contemporary Buddhist scholars to associate *alaya-vijnana* with the Freudian unconscious, or they would prefer the word subconsciousness, as it seems to be a hidden trove of certain knowingness (Wu). To my mind, there is perhaps a parallel in the sense that in early Freud, the scientific project or interpretation of dreams, he sees consciousness as a transitory and ephemeral phenomenon. Freud always talks about consciousness (Cs.) in analogous to Perception (Pcpt.). Consciousness is the perception of the inner reality (the psychic

reality). However the unconscious is this reality whose innermost nature is as unknown as the external reality. The perception system (also Cs.) is susceptible to being excited by “qualities”, while the unconscious system is only a “quantitative process”(Freud, “Project”). In this formulation about the unconscious, thought processes are in themselves without qualities. In a sense, they are pure quantities. To acquire qualities, they are associated with the residue quality of verbal memories. There is an invocation of the unconscious even in Jean François Billeter’s commentary on the same passage of the trope of the sky, which he deems to be the pivot to understand the entire text of Qi-wu-lun. He focuses on the meditative practice as a change of regimen to access the “fundamental physics of subjectivity”. The regimen of the human is intentionality and consciousness, which is where all the imperfections and mistakes occur. The regimen of the sky is how things function as they are. Thus, he also reverses the inside-outside relationship as “the heaven is the interior; the human is the exterior”. His concern is about the spontaneity of the subject which is at once the necessity of nature (Billeter, *Leçons Sur Tchouang-Tseu*).

If one looks at the second move Zhang Tai-yen makes, it is more perplexing. As the seeds are mostly seen as the imprint of language and actions, deeds in the past, what does it mean to say it’s the a prior concepts and categories? Although he simplifies the categories (to time, space, mathematical, object, action, cause-effect, I),

as he finds Kant's 12 categories and both Mahayana and Hinayana's 24 categories too complicated (T. Zhang, "Exegesis Final Text"), it seems to make the seeds prior to any contents and experiences. In another line he makes a distinction, "for the piping of the earth, that which blows and that which is blown are not the same; for the piping of the sky, that which blows and that which is blown are not different" (T. Zhang, "Exegesis Final Text" 78), it seems that the *alaya-vijnana* is something that turns on itself or grasps itself, a certain auto-affection. In Vasubandhu's doctrine, one cognizance has twofold, the apprehended (*grahya*) and the apprehending (*grahaka*). There are in fact two different strands of readings that understand the process of the transformation (*parinama*) of cognition differently, which have an almost parallel development in India and China. One follows Dharmapala's commentary to focus on this duality, a separation of one cognizance to the subject-part (*jianfen* 見分; *dristi*; the seeing part) and the object-part (*xinagfen* 相分; *nimitta*; the image of the object), setting up the phenomenological world, a strand that is often seen as a certain idealism. Another strand follows Sthiramathi's commentary that focuses on the doctrine of momentariness, to see the transformation as the simultaneous extinguishment and generation of two cognitions. The most influential commentator in China Hsuan-Tsung accepts the Dharmapala strand. Here Zhang Tai-yen also places the primal separation as the transformation of cognition, a holding together of the non-jointure

and non-separation of the subject-part and object-part. It is how he reads the line in Zhuang-zi: “the one who thingify the thing (*wu-wu-zhe*; 物物者) and “thing (*wu*; 物)” as the seeing-part and the object-part. It thus set apart the phenomenological and the noumenal, or his own words, the worldly(*su* 俗; *loka-samvriti*) and the real (*zhen* 真; *paramartha*). Here it seems that what is a thing is no more than the *nimitta*, the image of the object in the phenomenological world. In fact in the corpus of his philological studies on the etymology of words, there is a succinct essay on the word of *wu*(物). He seems to take the evidence that the word is not what is usually said as stemming from the left side ideograph of “the cow” being the basic “large thing” but from the other part of the ideograph of the brush of the pen. It is to say that what we called the thing is the presentation of the image of the thing. He also associates the ideograph with the flag, the ensign to say that the thing is the “flagging” of the thing. The compound phrase *fang-fu*(彷彿; as if, just like, similitude) is actually the phonetic variation of *pang-wu*(傍物; the thing at side)(T. Zhang, “About ‘Wu (Thing)’”). This is to say that the thing is only the “as-if-ness” of the thing.

However why does Zhang Tai-yen the a prior categories as the seeds? For his concern, the question about the a prior categories is not about the transcendental ground for the possibility of experience<sup>121</sup>. Since mere cognizance is merely the *xin*

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<sup>121</sup> To add a note that at times one would ask if the interest in *xin* is close to the Husserlian

(psyche) grasping itself, *a priori* categories as the pure concepts of understanding are the seeds that give rise to the grasping of the self of the person (*ren wo zhi* 人我執; *pudgala-nairatmya*) and the self of reality (*fa wo zhi* 法我執; *dharma-nairatmya*), which is the ground for the discursive concept or distinction (*fen-bie* 分別; *vikalpa*) of names (*ming* 名) and attributes (*xiang*). He sees the trope of the pipe of the earth the moment when the. It is for *xin* (psyche) to return to *xin* that the seeds can be transformed. The 1914 final version of the text “first speaks about the loss of the ego and finally illuminates the change (metamorphosis, transformation) of things.” The first part of the text “the loss of the ego” finally thus reaches at the psychic-quantity/measure (心量 *xin-liang*) as the real.

The latter part of exegesis is about “the transformation of things”. In the discussion, he does not limit cognition (*shi* 識 *vijnana*) to human beings nor living beings(有生; that which has life, gives birth, is generates). The cognition seems to be the only bearer of change, which turns around to divide into the apprehended (*grahya*) and apprehending(*grahaka*). The distinction of the living and non-living, (organic and mechanical) does not really hold; the usage is only to conform to the conventional sayings. He gives the example of gold. As it can be extended, it also has cognition.

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transcendental ego or transcendental apperception, as many contemporary scholars did make the effort to read the Yogacara tradition as the Husserlian phenomenological reduction (Wu Rujun, Kitayama, Lusthaus and so on). However in the case of Zhang the comparison could perhaps only be made in a very limited sense as the gravity of the endeavor seems to lie somewhere else.

From the allegory of “the penumbrae query the shadow” Zhang’s “the passing sundial shadows, the unabiding shady minute (gui-ying-qian-chi, fen yin bu zhu; 晷影遷馳，分陰不住)” is a query about co-dependent origin (pratitya-samudpata). It is for the same passage that the term duhua(獨化; individuation) and wu-dai(無待 non-awaiting, in-dependence) appears in the 6<sup>th</sup> century Guo Xiang’s exegesis. For Guo, the penumbra are not caused or conditioned by the shadow, and the shadow by the body-form. The three are co-originating/generating/birth (*ju-sheng* 俱生). Everything individuates at the original darkness(*xuan-ming* 玄冥)(Guo et al.). Zhang also reads it as a query about conditioning and causality, however what he seems to more focus on is the ceaseless movement instead of the separate entities of the (body)form, the shadow and the penumbra, as he says “the trotting-flow of light-shadow” is constantly seen by everyone. There is however no inference and perception that can be made. The infinite regression of causes here could only be traced back from a movement (*dong* 動) to another movement. If there is a first movement, it is *xin* that is ignorant that moves. Zhang however considers nature (*zi-ran* 自然) as the phenomenal world, which belongs to the register of the “conventional truth”. Different from Guo Xiang, Zhang makes the point that there is no generation/birth(*wu-sheng*), as at the moment of generation there is also extinction; at the moment of birth, there is also death. To say generation or birth, it is only conforms to the conventional saying.

## The Turn or the Return

How does he connect the two worlds in his practical philosophy, if one were to use the term? In Zhang Tai-yen's earlier text on religion, he goes along with the Kantian division of the two worlds, the world of nature, which is the world of appearance, and the world of freedom. However to introduce an afterlife, the immortality of the soul, for the purpose of the world of freedom for him is to unnecessarily makes time into actual existence and set forth a bad infinity of ceaseless progress (T. Zhang, "On Building a Religion"). How do the two worlds relate to each other in his thought? The clue perhaps lies in a crucial "turn" in the text, which is when Zhang-taiyen takes *Da Sheng Qi Xin Lun* (大乘起信論 ; *Mahāyāna Sraddhotpada Sāstra* (MSS; The Awakening of Faith)'s interpretation where *cang-shi* (藏識) / *alaya-vijnana* and *ru-lai-cang* (如來藏) / *tathāgatagarbha* (the womb/embryo of as-such-ness) as non-separated (not one and not two)) to read Zhuangzi's treatise. In the text, one psyche (*xin*; 心) generates two gates/aspects(men; 門). One is the gate of psyche in terms of the suchness (*zhen-ru*; 真如 *tathata*), and the other is the gate of psyche in terms of the transitory phenomena (*sheng-mie* 生滅; *samsara*; birth and death), which is mutually inclusive. In terms of suchness, *xin* is the one locus of reality(*fa-jie* 法界; *dharma-dhatu*) which in its essence(*ti*; 體) is unborn and imperishable(Yoshito). In this framework, the awakening of *xin* or the turning-over of *vijnana* is a return to itself in its home ground.

Here I want to take a detour to give a brief note on the critical Buddhism (Hakamaya Noriaki, Matsumoto Shirō) debate in Japan in the 1980s, which rejects the tathāgatagarbha as Buddhist thoughts for its monism of an atman-like all-encompassing one that is unborn and imperishable. Hakamaya frames the debate as “*kritische Philosophie*” versus “*topische Philosophie*”, referring to Giambattista Vico’s implicit response to Descartes, where “*topaica*” is prior to “*critica*”, the *ars inveniendi* that gives *verisimilis* over the *demonstratio* of truth, thus focuses on *sensus communis*, in which Hakamaya sees a strand of indigenist thought in the West. Hakamaya’s critique of the “*topische Philosophie*” is also a response to the involvement of the ideas in the Tokyo school of modern philosophy, from Nishida Kitaro to Nishitani Keiji to Watsuji Tetsuro, in the Japanese jingoism, especially the *bashoron* (philosophy of the *topos*; 場所論) and the idea of absolute nothingness (as the absolute identity of identity and difference (Hakamaya). For Hakamaya, there is a “turn” from the temporal co-dependent origin (*pratitya samutpada*) in the original Buddhism to a certain spatiality that is singular and invariable. Mastumoto detects in the grammatical locative absolute in the usage of “*tasmin sati*” in tathāgatagarbha thought, *dhatu*, the substance-like *kitai*(基體)<sup>122</sup>, and *alaya*, the locus, the residence, not only being the locus but also the cause(*hetu*). Thus the *dhatu* as the singular one

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<sup>122</sup> Can one think of Mizoguchi Yuzo’s understanding of the Chinese revolution bases on his theory of *kitai* 基體論, which is a critique of the Takeuchi Yoshimi’s lens of the negative.

encompasses *dharma* as the many, which also vindicates the existing social discrimination. The debates thus pit “Buddhism as critique” against the *dhatu-vada*, a term coined by Mastumoto(Matsumoto). For the fervent critics in this endeavor, *Qi-Xin-Lun* or Mahāyāna śraddhotpada śāstra, attributed to Asvagosha, is the seminal text that is responsible for giving ground to a certain indigenist “contamination” of the Buddhist thought, whether the thought of original enlightenment in Japan or the thought of *zi-ran*(naturalness) in China. For the Chinese part, interestingly, compared to the “heterodox” Taoist (Laozi and Zhuangzi)’s thoughts on *ziran*, they tend to be more sympathetic to the “orthodox”—i.e. Confucianism, and see it as a kind of practical philosophy that is other-oriented and based on the demonstrative function of language. It seems that there is a repetition of the same fissure in East Asian Buddhist history. In Frauwallner’s famous essay, there are both disputes in both China and India, parallel to the Sthramathi and Dharmapala strands, on whether one should see *alamavijnana*(the stainless cognition) and *alaya-vijnana* (the fundamental cognition) as two or one (Frauwallner). It is noteworthy that Zhang Taiyen also engaged in an early debate in modern time around if *Qi-Xin-Lun* is a forged text and deemed it to be truly the work of Asvagosha (T. Zhang, “On Mahayana”).

For the conundrum I take help from Takeuchi Yoshimi’s 1959 essay “Overcoming Modernity” where he recapitulates the notorious “overcoming modernity” symposium,

that happened in 1942 during the Pacific War<sup>123</sup>, as a failure to “dissolve *the war’s double nature*, that is to say, its failure to objectify the aporias of modern Japanese history *qua* aporias” (Takeuchi, *What Is Modernity?* 146). What he captures in the essay is a moment in history which is the mirroring side of the “protracted war” in the previous chapter—i.e. the idea of eternal warfare and total war in Japan’s declaration of the Pacific War. In his long discussion on the difference between the official documents of the Imperial Declaration of War from Japan’s past three major wars, one sees that Takeuchi detects a certain attempt at “re-apportioning” a new nomos of the earth in the Great East-Asian war. The legitimacy of declaring the war does not come from the sovereign nor the nation-state but rather the “souls of [the] Imperial ancestors”. In the Declaration he cites, “The Emperor of Japan” is substituted with “The heavenly Emperor of Japan”. Observance of international laws and regulations is not given as a condition. As he says, “Thus it is action that makes law. In other words, war itself has become the goal”(129). He depicts the air of the “intellectual trembling” in the declaration of the pacific war. Takeuchi refuses the ideological critique which for him is an ahistorical view that comes retroactively as a result of the defeat in the war. This does not cancel the problem that emerges at the time and sees its consequence in what he consider to be the colonial nature of Japanese modernity.

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<sup>123</sup> It was a symposium constituted by the intellectuals from the circles of the *Literary World* group, the Kyoto School, and the Japanese Romantic School in August 1942.

Thus the actual idea must be separated from its symbolic value. For him, the conundrum of Kyoto school's engagement in the idea of total war and eternal war does not lie in the philosophical thought too much engaged in what is world-historical; but on the contrary it lies in their dogmatism in its perfect logic and schema that is indifferent to history which actually lends itself to the war thought and the post-war ideological criticism<sup>124</sup>. The “sive/non (即非; *sokuhi*)” with its paradoxical structure sees an immediate identity of the absolute contradiction to see war slogans like statements “true peace, Yamato, is the same as war” or “absolute action is absolute nothingness” (Takeuchi, *What Is Modernity?*)<sup>125</sup>. It is noteworthy that the trope of the sky appears in the text, when Takeuchi comment on Yasuda Yojuro's prose style that lacks a grammatical subject to bear the responsibility as a thinking subject, he uses the phrase “This may be the voice of heaven (*tian-lai*; 天籟) or earth, but it is not human language” (*What Is Modernity?* 144). The trope of the pipe of the sky as a mysterious natural force seems to be prevalent in the war time. Tsuyoshi Ishii mentions in his essay that right after the war in 1945, the Editorial of a

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<sup>124</sup> Takeuchi discusses the other symbolic event, the three-part “World-Historical Viewpoint and Japan” symposium, held by the Kyoto school philosophers, with the respective titles of “Thirteen Days Prior to the Imperial Declaration of the Greater East Asian War”, “The Ethics and Historicity of the East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere” and “The Philosophy of Total War” published in the January and April 1942 issues of *Chūōkōron*.

<sup>125</sup> The philosophers of the Kyoto school need a separate discussion to do justice to the problem. This is what I couldn't achieve in this thesis.

newspaper called *The Imperial Rescript on the Termination of the War*, “The Pipe of Heaven on August 15th” , mysteriously transmuted Japan into a peaceful state (Tsuyoshi, “Reflecting Enlightenment”).

Takeushi’s position is to internalize the negativity of the defeat and recognize the failure in the intellectual effort to transform the nature of the war. In a similar way, to “prune” the deviation from the tree, like the critical Buddhist endeavor does, perhaps bypass the historicity of MSS as a popular text<sup>126</sup>. In fact the opening paragraph of the entire exegesis starts in the language of *Qi Xin Lun*:

What is equalization of things(*qi-wu*; 齊物) is what has been talked about equality (*ping-deng*; 平等). To be precise about its meaning, it is not only to regard the sentient beings (*you-qing*; 有情) as equal, without being superior or inferior. Because *to detach from the trait of language and speech, to detach from the trait of names and inscriptions, to detach from the trait of, in its final limit(bi-jing; 畢竟) is equality(ping-deng; 平等), which is appropriate to the meaning of equalization of things (qi-wu)*”(T. Zhang, “Exegesis Final Text” 73).

Here I wish to bring in two contemporary critics’ commentaries on Zhang’s text, which emphasizes on Zhang’s ethico-political thoughts and the question of historical

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<sup>126</sup> I take the trope from the title of Hakamaya and Matsumoto’s book *Pruning the Bodhi Tree*(Lin et al 2002).

transformation. Tsuyoshi Ishii juxtaposes Zhang Taiyen and Maruyama Maso's thoughts regarding the "basso ostinato"(Maruyama), the obstinate "natural" pattern of the culture at the subterranean. In the end after concluding the purposeless infinite turning and generation and extinction of things in the empty phenomenological order, he makes the query about *xin* bend back toward history. *Cangshi/alayavijnana* should be in-between the subjects and has a temporality which gestures toward certain historical sediments. Although leaving the question open, he gestures towards Zhang's long-time emphasis on the practice of written language, as historical sedimentation of senses, and suggests it as a potential public space(Tsuyoshi, "Zhang and Maruyama").

C.H. Liu, in her book on the archaeology of modern Chinese political thought, titled "One Divides into Two (*yi fen wei er*; 一分为二)"<sup>127</sup>, partly disagrees with Tsuyoshi for his view of the transformation as infinite purposeless turning. For Liu Zhang Taiyen holds a critical historical perspective that sees infinite co-origination as his historical ontology. As everything has a mark of its time, his endeavor is to cleanse the names and attributes(*ming-xiang*; 名相). She uses Zhang's phrase "taunting the powerful, transforming the tradition, changing the constant" to capture the endeavour of historicising thus advocating for radical equality based on difference. Liu sees the

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<sup>127</sup> An explicit reference made to the eventful debate in 1964 in China on the nature of contradiction in dialectics and Badiou's early essay of the same name and his commentary small book on the Chinese Hegelian philosopher Zhang Shi-ying's "On the 'reasonable core' of Hegelian dialectics".

movement in the dialectics as contradiction, the self-positing through the mediation of self-othering(J. C. H. Liu). However it is the crucial question of *fen* (the division, the cut, the apportioning) in Zhang Tai-yen’s exegesis seems to be the primal separation of object-part (*xiang-fen*) and subject-part (*jian-fen*) from the turning of the *vijnana*. Tsuyoshi, in another essay, focuses on Qi Xin Lun’s place in Zhang Taiyen’s writings and formulates the concept of “conformable (*sui-shun*; 隨順) subject”. As discussed above, in the sastra, one mind has two gates/aspects, one is the phenomena (*samsara*) and the other is the suchness (*tathata*), which are mutually inclusive. It sees the illusion, or ignorance(non-enlightenment) and enlightenment as non-different. The notion of *sui-shun*(隨順) comes from the sastra which I temporarily render as “conformable”<sup>128</sup>, so as to retain the root *con-* as together. It is based on the limit and the contradictory nature of language, which cannot speak but speak about the ineffable. In Tsuyoshi’s reading, the political choice of Zhang is to take a subject-position suspended in-between the two aspects, the worldly and the suchness, the I and non-I. As Zhang sees language as an arbitrary convention, the conformable subject is to be conformable to the limit of the historical world, the limit of convention, the limit of language, to efface language by language(Tsuyoshi, “Conformable Subject”).

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<sup>128</sup> It is difficult to translate the compound term. *sui* could mean to follow, along with. *Shun* could mean to obey, docile, smooth, along...and so on. I almost use the term “a propos” that Jullien takes from Montaigne. However to conform to the convention and the worldly is a secondary choice. It is perhaps still closer to the meaning of “to conform”.

I follow Tsuyoshi here. *Qi Xin Lun* and Zhaungzi's *Qi Wu Lun* both have the limit of language at their core. In Zhang Tai-yen's exegesis, the question of language and negativity is also central. In Zhang's words, speech and language has their essence in their being an-nihilative, or returns to nihility (*huan-mei-xing* 還滅性). One notices in his formulation the double negation at work in speech and language. (The often used compound term for "negation" is *zhebo*(遮撥), which has a sense of both cover and uncover (turn). *zhe-quan*(遮詮) is the Chinese translation of *apoha*, the apophatic expression). Here writing seems to be the locus that contains the transience of transience of language. It perhaps links his reading of Zhuang-zi's idea of "round(vessel)-language"(*zhi-yen* 卮言) to what in his philological works described as the "mutual pouring" of words. He sees the hidden meaning, as it is often the earlier meaning, of the Chinese word for "word"—*zi* 字 as *ziru* 孳乳, as breeding, offshoot, derivative, dissemination, in contrast to the Sanskrit word *shabda* as the voice. In the exegesis, there are many passages on the question of language, which is about the fundamental fissure or to be more precise the non-relation. There is a relation of non-relation between word and meaning, the signifier and the signified. For the non-relation between word and meaning, Zhang Tai-yen returns to the question of conform to convention.

*Sui-shun*—to conform to the limit of convention the historical world central in

Zhang Tai-yen's religio-political thinking. To conform is to conform to the other-dependent self-nature which is a path to the perfected self-nature. This persists in his essay on nations, on five nothingness, on religion and so on. However for Zhang Tai-yen, convention(俗) is always from the earth. Convention is always affective convention (*su-qing* 俗情; *qing-gan-chuan-xi* 情感串席), which involves the question of *xin* which is also the repository of *cangshi*/alaya-vijnana. This perhaps returns to Zhang's reading of the last allegory of "Zhuangzi's dream of being a butterfly" which he sees as a trope for the conventional sayings about transmigration, the transformation across the division of individual life spans, that he returns to the core of the exegesis on the question of *xin*(心)/*citta*.

Zhang conclude with a path of two observances at two aspects, one with speech and one with silence: on the one hand, one opens oneself to the world to its most possibility to "take the *xin* of the people/multitude(*baixing*/百姓) as one's own *xin*; on the other hand, one returns to the primordial dark ground, as he refers to "the beginning of things" in Zhuang-zi, and be one with "thus coming"(*rulai*; 如來; *tathagata*).

## **The Dark Sky and the Yellow Earth: in Lieu of a Conclusion**

[...]Nature displays itself in the universal elements of Air, Water, Fire, and Earth: Air is the enduring, purely universal, and transparent element; Water, the element that is perpetually sacrificed; Fire, the unity which energizes them into opposition while at the same time it perpetually resolves the opposition; lastly, Earth, which is the firm and solid knot of this articulated whole, the subject of these elements and of their process, that from which they start and to which they return;

-- Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel



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## List of Publications

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- (1) 2020. “The Negative Transference in the inter-Asia Encounters: Rabindranath Tagore and Qu Qiu-bai, 1924”, *Chung Wai Literary Quarterly* 49(4): 155-202. Special issue on “mediation”. (in Chinese).
- (2) 2020. “Introduction to the Special Issues: Mediation and its Remains”, *Chung Wai Literary Quarterly*, 49(4):15-23. Special issue on “mediation”. (Co-authored with Ding Nai-fei and Liu Jen-peng. In Chinese).

### 2. Book Chapters

- (1) 2021. “The Negative Transference in the inter-Asia Encounters: Rabindranath Tagore and Qu Qiu-bai, 1924”, in 2020. “The Negative Transference in the inter-Asia Encounters: Rabindranath Tagore and Qu Qiu-bai, 1924”, in *Penumbrae Query Shadow II: Thing-in-between* (ISBN : 9789865470487). edited by Naifei Ding, Jen-peng Liu, Hsin-wen Chang, Wing-kwong Wong: 75-124. Hsinchu: National Yang Ming Chiao Tung University Press. (In Chinese).
- (2) 2021. “ ‘Thing-in-between’ Methodology”, in *Penumbrae Query Shadow II: Thing-in-between* (ISBN : 9789865470487): 19-49. Hsinchu: National Yang Ming Chiao Tung University Press. (Co-authored with Hsing-Wen Chang, Jen-peng Liu, and Naifei Ding. In Chinese).

### 3. Conference Papers

- (1) Wing-Kwong Wong (2023, Jul). “From the Intimate Enemy to Intimating the Enemy? Rethinking Wars at the Colonial and Cold-War Conjuncture”. **Inter-Asia Cultural Studies Biennial conclave** July 27-29, 2023 Ahmedabad: Post-Pandemic Futures: Re-Mapping Inter-Asian Routes, Ahmedabad, India.
- (2) Wing-Kwong Wong (2019, Aug). “The Negative Transference in the Inter-Asia Encounters”. **Inter-Asia Cultural Studies Society Conference** 2019, Silliman University, Dumaguete City, Philippines.
- (3) Wing-Kwong Wong (2016, July) “Human and/or *Ren* and its Double Mark”. **The**

**Future of the Humanities and Anthropological Difference: Beyond the Modern Regime of Translation**, Cornell University, Ithaca.

- (4) Wing-Kwong Wong (2013, Jan). "A Day as Long as a Small Year--A Note on Everydayness and Historicity from Reading Shen Conwen's Border Town and Other Works". **Cultural Studies Workshop**, 2013, Santiniketan, West Bengal.

**4. Book Preface**

- (1) **2021**. "Preface: For the Worst of Times, yet also the Best of Times: *Creating a Nationality: The Ramjanmabhumi Movement and Fear of the Self*— A Memorandum for a Non-deceitful Realism". In Ashis Nandy, Shikha Trivedy, Shail Mayaram, Achyut Yagnik, *Creating a Nationality: The Ramjanmabhumi Movement and Fear of the Self*. Translated by Xiao-zhi Li. Taipei: Taishe: 5-38. (In Chinese.)

**5. Edited Volume**

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**6. Translation**

1. From Chinese to English

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2. From English to Chinese

- (1) **2015**. Ashis Nandy, "Towards A Third World Utopia", Published in *Renjian Thought Review*, 9: 107-141.

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- (3) **2015.** Ashis Nandy. “Memory Work”. Speech given at the Modern Asian Thought Annual Lecture, 2014, on 14 July 2014. Published in *Renjian Thought Review*, No. 9, 41–56. (Translation with Hsing-Wen Chang .)
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- (5) **2012.** Partha Chatterjee. “Talking Our Modernity in Two Languages.” Published in *Renjian Thought Review* No.2, 92–115. (Translation with Hsing-wen Chang).



## **Brief Bio-Note**

Wing-Kwong Wong has her PhD from the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi. Her doctoral thesis is on the idea of the rural in Chinese modernity.