LITERARY MODERNITY:
STUDIES IN LU XUN AND SHEN CONGWEN

by

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ABSTRACT

Being an integral part of cultural modernity, literary modernity is an on-going, self-negating, and self-rejuvenating process. It has always been engaged in a dialectical relationship with tradition and is inseparable from the quest for reality based on artistic autonomy and communicative intersubjectivity. In the first half of my thesis, I attempt to show how and why literary tradition has played a decisive role in the process of literary modernity, how and why the Chinese literary tradition is different from its Western counterpart; how and why Chinese literary modernity is influenced by, but different from Western literary modernity; and what is the specific path that Chinese writers have been taking to achieve literary modernity, as is distinct from the route that has been followed in the West, i. e., from romanticism to realism to modernism and to postmodernism. The second half of my thesis comprises a detailed study of two of China's foremost writers, Lu Xun and Shen Congwen, by way of illustrating my arguments.

The first two chapters investigate some core concepts in the Western and Chinese literary traditions and the formative roles that they have played respectively in shaping the process of literary modernity in the West and China. In our study of Chinese literary modernity and modern Chinese writers, we should pay special attention to the important role of the Chinese literary tradition, while taking into consideration the impact of Western literature and China's historical contingency. The
interactions between these three factors constitute the special character of China's literary modernity.

The third and the fourth chapters deal with respectively the fiction of Lu Xun and Shen Congwen, as well as their conceptions of literature. Through a close investigation of a few selected stories by these two writers, I wish to demonstrate how their works embody the general ideas of literary modernity, and at the same time reveal the peculiar features of China's own literary modernity.

In conclusion, I suggest that modernity and tradition have always been intertwined in a complex, dynamic, and dialectic relationship, which has proved to be not only the motive force, but also the unfailing source for the achievements of modern literature, both Chinese and Western; and subjective reflection should be integrated with the lifeworld, and combined with intersubjective communication.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract ii  
Table of Contents iv  
Acknowledgements v  
INTRODUCTION 1  
Chapter One  Mimesis and Literary Modernity in the West 9  
Chapter Two  Chinese Literary Modernity and the Concepts of Dao 道, zhi 志, qi 氣, and qing 情 45  
Chapter Three  The Ironic, the Lyrical, and the Parodic: Lu Xun's Modes of Fiction 89  
Chapter Four  Shen Congwen: A Relentless Experimentalist 155  
Conclusion 234  
Bibliography 252
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"Modernity" is at once a fascinating and confusing word. Having been at the center of intellectual life in the West for the past several hundred years, it is an issue that has caused both excitement and controversy. The amazing achievements of modernity have changed not only the visions and ideas of man, but also the world in which he lives; and the effects of modernity are all-pervasive: they permeate every aspect of our culture and society. However, the polemics that modernity has entailed are almost as varied and wide-ranging as its achievements and effects. There have been even diverse opinions about the date when modernity was inaugurated, not to mention the numerous debates about its nature and consequences. ¹ Often associated with the present, "the new," "modernity" seems to stand in opposition to the past, "the old," and tradition.

Contrary to what one usually expects, the word "modern" is a very old one and has a long prehistory. As Jürgen Habermas has observed, the term "modern" in its Latin form "modernus" was first used in the late 5th century in order to distinguish the present, which had become officially Christian, from the Roman and pagan past. Later, the term "modern" appeared and reappeared in different periods in Europe "when the consciousness of a new epoch formed itself through a renewed relationship to the

¹ Although opinions about the inception date of modernity in the West vary, quite a few people tend to view it as a process with more than one starting point. The Enlightenment of the eighteenth century may be seen as a convenient beginning date, particularly with regard to modern science and philosophy, but the Renaissance, which preceded it, actually contributed no less to the formation of modern culture in the
ancients." 2 Today, when we speak of "modern" or "modernity," what we have in mind is certainly the most recent modernity in both Western and non-Western countries. In the West, modernity has been the major concern for at least over two hundred years, if we take the eighteenth-century Enlightenment as its starting point, and it still remains, to quote Habermas's phrase, "an unfinished project." 3 In China, the quest for modernity began in the mid-nineteenth century when the country was still under imperial rule. Since then it has continued unabated until the present day.

Max Weber was one of the three great thinkers in the West who provided the background for the debate over modernity. 4 He attempted to explain the world-historical process of modernization as a process of rationalization. Weber discussed the specific and peculiar features of Western rationalism from the perspective of culture. He regarded as forms of cultural rationalization modern science and technology, autonomous art, and law and morality that had become detached from the religious-metaphysical worldviews in which they were first imbedded. With the emergence of cognitive, aesthetic-expressive and moral-practical elements from tradition, there appeared a differentiation of three cultural spheres of value (science, morality, and art), with each of

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3 The title of Habermas's speech delivered in 1980 on his acceptance of the Theodore W. Adorno Prize awarded by the City of Frankfurt is: "Modernity: An Unfinished Project." Later in 1981, he reiterated in New York that "the project of modernity has not yet been fulfilled." See ibid., 102.

them following its own inner logic. Although he himself did not give an ordered and systematic analysis of these value spheres, Max Weber nevertheless surveyed them in a descriptive and inductive way, relying himself on the Kantian concept of value. Weber also points out that in the process of rationalization, not only the “inner logics” come into consciousness but also the tensions between these spheres grow along with their differentiation. As regards societal rationalization, Weber chooses to see it as a result of the institutionalization of what he called Zweckrationalität, or purposive rationality, closely tied up with the imperatives of economic and administrative action. The increasing expansion of purposive rationality, namely, the progressive rationalization of economy, bureaucracy, and specialized empirical sciences, would lead to an increasing imprisonment of modern man in a dehumanized society, or an “iron cage” (to use Weber’s own famous metaphor), from which there is no escape.5

When explicating and commenting upon Max Weber’s theory of rationalization, Jürgen Habermas points out that by the end of the eighteenth century, science, morality, and art had already freed themselves from the confines of religion and metaphysics as a result of an internal history (i.e., the rationalization of the traditional worldviews), and become three autonomous cultural spheres of value, established according to their respective “inner logic.” For Habermas, as well as for Weber, this differentiation of three cultural spheres represents an achievement of modernity. Habermas argues that

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from the very beginning, the achievement of modernity, i.e., the progressive rationalization of cultural spheres, has been accompanied by a distortion of reason, which means wanton, illegitimate extensions of subject-centered reason into the intersubjectivity-based *Lebenswelt* ("lifeworld," a key Habermasian concept embracing culture, society, and individual persons). However, as Habermas expounds further, a "counterdiscourse," i.e., a critique of excessive subjectivism and its consequences, has also accompanied the Enlightenment from the very start. Instead of our claiming the demise of the principles of the Enlightenment, what we should do is to counter modernity on its own terms and redeem the promises of the Enlightenment. Therefore, far from being a bygone endeavor, the quest for modernity is still "an unfinished project."

Literary modernity is closely tied up with cultural modernity. As a matter of fact, the former is an integral part of the latter. Sharing the same paradoxical and dialectical nature as cultural modernity, literary modernity is both self-negating and self-regenerating. It has always been engaged in a dialectical relationship with tradition and is inseparable from the quest for reality based on artistic autonomy and intersubjective communication. Beginning at the end of the eighteenth century with the emergence of romanticism, which rose in rebellion against the premises of classicism and in defense of subjective experience and emotional feelings, the process of literary modernity in the West has followed a course of shifting literary trends: from romanticism to realism to

modernism, and arguably, to postmodernism, with each new trend reacting against its immediate predecessor. In China, literary modernity started with the New Culture movement and the May Fourth movement in the early decades of the twentieth century. Since its introduction to China at the end of the Qing dynasty, Western literature has exerted a great impact on Chinese literature and its process of modernity. An enthusiastic appropriation of Western literary values and techniques has drastically changed traditional conceptions of literature and modern Chinese literary discourse. The anti-traditional iconoclasm which has its roots in the May Fourth movement and the immense influence which foreign literature has exercised on Chinese writers tend to overshadow the formative and decisive role that the Chinese literary tradition has played in the process of modernity.

In the study of modernity, there are at least two things we should be especially aware of: firstly, as "a world-historical process," modernity has many varieties and consists of many variables. This is true of Western as well as non-Western countries; even in the West where the historical process of modernization first began, modernity does not refer to any simple entity but a body of widely diverse phenomena involving profound tension and confusion. Secondly, the opposition of tradition and modernity has proved to be an unwarranted claim that actually rules out the complicated and dynamic interaction between the two. As Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph pointed out as early as 1967, "The assumption that modernity and tradition are radically contradictory rests on a misdiagnosis of tradition as it is found in traditional societies, a misunderstanding of modernity as it is found in modern societies, and misapprehension
of the relationship between them." Therefore, in our discussion of modernity, we should attach greater importance to the formative role that tradition has played in the process of modernity.

While cultural modernity (literary modernity included) is deemed a world-historical process irrespective of differences among nations and cultures and may assume a general paradigm of development, the course it takes nevertheless differs from culture to culture as a result of confrontations between internal and external factors. In approaching the problem of Chinese literary modernity, I wish, first of all, to make a comparative study of some core concepts in the Western and Chinese literary traditions. Through this comparison, I attempt to show how and why the Chinese literary tradition is different from its Western counterpart; how both tradition and Western influence have shaped modern Chinese literary discourse and the discourse of modernity; why tradition has played a decisive role in the process of literary modernity; and what is the specific path that China has been taking to achieve its literary modernity, as distinct from the path of literary modernity that has been followed in the West, i.e., from romanticism to realism to modernism to postmodernism. In the meantime, I wish to look at Chinese literary modernity in the context of the world-historical process of cultural modernity and

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7 "Discourse" as a term of literary criticism was first used by the New Critics to make distinctions about such things as literary genres. Thus we can speak of "poetic discourse" or the "discourse of the novel." Nowadays the term has gained special prominence and acquired social and political connotations due to its use in poststructural criticism. It is often associated with such concepts as power, knowledge, institutions, and the role of intellectuals. I am using this term basically in the sense of "the expression of ideas in speech or writing," as defined in the *Webster's*
find out what significance the Western project of modernity holds for China. Viewed in this light, China's literary modernity appears much more complicated than its Western counterpart. It can be seen as the extension of the age-old quest for reality in literature into the modern era, which has acquired its modern meaning by a revitalization of the modern potentialities of traditional concepts and an appropriation of Western literary values and trends since the Enlightenment. On the part of the writer, this means a self-conscious and conscientious effort to engage in a relentless quest for reality by constantly searching for the most appropriate modes of expression according to his/her aesthetic predilection, and to represent and render modern existence with all its tensions and contradictions, vigor and vitality through subjective reflection and intersubjective communication. Writing according to the inner workings of literature and tapping its communicative potential, the writer can bring literature as close to life and social reality as possible. Thus literature as a special form of communicative action can play its part in overcoming the defects brought about by the process of modernization and contribute to the reproduction of the lifeworld, i.e., cultural renewal, social integration, and the formation of personal identities.

In the first and second chapters, I wish to investigate some key concepts in the Western and Chinese literary traditions and the roles that they have played respectively in shaping the process of literary modernity in the West and China. Then, through a comparison of these two traditions, I attempt to show how and why the passage to literary modernity in China is drastically different from that in the West. The third and

Third New International Dictionary.
fourth chapters are devoted to detailed discussions of two of China's foremost writers: Lu Xun and Shen Congwen, by way of illustrating my viewpoints. Through a close examination of a few selected stories by these two writers and their conceptions of literature, I wish to demonstrate how their fictional works embody the general ideas of literary modernity, and at the same time reveal the peculiar features of China's literary modernity.
Chapter One:

MIMESIS AND LITERARY MODERNITY IN THE WEST

Since antiquity, the quest for reality in literature and the arts has always been the pivotal concern of all writers and artists in the West. The central question in this quest is how to perceive and represent reality through literary and artistic works. As a matter of fact, this involves the perennial and somewhat enigmatic relationships between consciousness and external reality, between subject and object, and between art and nature. In the West, the concept of mimesis is perhaps one of the most important ideas which can help us arrive at a better understanding of these relationships, particularly between works of art and reality.

A transliteration of the original Greek word, mimesis has somehow managed to find its way into the English language by keeping its original connotations and co-exist with "imitation" and "representation," both of them being its common English translations. Although it may well have been in use centuries before Plato's time, mimesis was first extensively used in Plato's Dialogues in a number of senses that sometimes contradict one another. Plato employed the term "mimesis" in both aesthetic and nonaesthetic contexts; however, it is the concept of mimesis in Book X of the Republic that has been the most influential. In the dialogue in Book X of the Republic, Plato has Socrates reach the conclusion that no poetry should be admitted to the ideal state except hymns to the gods and songs in praise of good men. The main
reason for the banishment of poetry is mimesis. As Arne Melberg points out, "The
reasons poets cannot be accepted into the ideal community are both epistemological
and moral, but whatever the reason they have a word in common: mimesis." According to Plato, artists only imitate things not as they are, but as they appear. They
copy the appearances of men, animals, and other things in the physical world, and
what they get is only the image of an object. In Plato's eyes, the distinction between
reality and image is almost the same as that between truth and falsehood. A bed made
by a carpenter is already removed from the only archetypal bed existing in nature, the
perfect one made by God. An artist's bed is just an imitation of the carpenter's bed.
So an artist cannot be called a maker or artificer; he is only an imitator. His product is
third in the descent from nature, and hence thrice removed from the truth.
Furthermore, poetry not only has an inferior degree of truth, but also appeals to an
inferior part of the soul. By awakening and nourishing this part of the soul, poetry
renders the reader irrational and unable to discern great from small, and good from
bad. As we can see, Plato's accusations of the poets can be boiled down to two points:
first, since what poetry imitates is only the image of things, it is far removed from
reality and truth; second, since poetry caters to the irrational nature within us, it tends
to be harmful instead of beneficent. From Plato's epistemological point of view,
mimesis only yields a poor copy of the object and the phenomenal form of things,
which is a far cry from the Ideas. The world of poetry is a world of appearances and
phenomena inhabited by mortals, with all its temptations and evils. Therefore, it can

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1 Arne Melberg, *Theories of Mimesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 10
only lead to untruth and deception, and is not welcome in the good state.

Being a thoroughgoing idealist, Plato is certainly more concerned with his world of the Ideas and the highest realities — Truth, Goodness, and Beauty. However, his opinion of poetry is not entirely one of disapproval. He showed elsewhere in his dialogues that he admired an ideal poetry which aimed to reveal the perfection of human life as it should be lived. The actual and the immediate in human experience definitely had no place in this kind of poetry, since they were the farthest removed from the "idea," and, because of their association with matter (the dark and unreal element in life), and the emotional impact they could produce on human personality, they would very likely impair the morality of Plato's ideal republic and model city.

Plato's deprecatory remarks about poetry may have made devotees of literature feel uncomfortable for more than twenty centuries. However, we did not have to wait that long for a rebuttal of Plato's view. Near the end of Book X of the Republic, Plato announced his challenge to champions of poetry:

And we may further grant to those of her defenders who are lovers of poetry and yet not poets the permission to speak in prose on her behalf: let them show not only that she is pleasant but also useful to the States and to human life, and we will listen in a kindly spirit; for we shall surely be the gainers if this can be proved, that there is a use in poetry as well as delight.


Erich Auerbach said that it was Plato's discussion in book X of the Republic — mimesis ranking third after truth — that started him on the writing of his Mimesis, which was finished in 1945 and later became a classic. See Erich Auerbach, Mimesis: The Interpretation of Reality in Western Literature trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953) 554.

In Aristotle, one of Plato's brightest pupils, we find a good champion of poetry, who obviously took up the challenge and wrote his famous Poetics in defense of poetry, although no allusion was made either to Plato's name or to his works.

For Aristotle, poetry is also a mimetic art, but of an entirely different kind. Aristotle gives mimesis a new turn, and uses the word in ways quite different from Plato's. As Gerald Else has observed, "It [mimesis] becomes in his [Aristotle's] hands a really new idea, having little more than the name in common with Plato." 4 With his Poetics, Aristotle attempts to give a defense of poetry with emphasis on the following two points: first, whether poetry (which imitates a world of human beings in action) can have any access to truth and reality; and second, whether the emotional side of poetry which arouses certain feelings among us (e. g., pity and fear) is harmful. As we can see, Aristotle's arguments are opposed to Plato's. Whereas Plato regards poetry as an imitation of images which can only lead to untruth and deception, Aristotle thinks that poetry gives us certain truths about human beings and the way they act by working according to its own inner logic; whereas Plato reproaches poetry for its impairment of social mores, Aristotle thinks that it can better one's personality by giving aesthetic pleasures and producing healing effects (catharsis). Aristotle admits that poetry imitates, but what really counts is what and how it imitates, and in what way it can be humanly valid.

4 Gerald Else, Aristotle's Poetics: The Argument (Cambridge: Harvard University
Despite the vicissitudes it underwent, Aristotle's *Poetics*, along with his concept of mimesis, held a prestigious position in the West for a very long time—until the demise of neoclassicism.\(^5\) Since the emergence of romanticism, literary trends have come and gone under different names, and mimesis appears to have lost its intellectual centrality. However, watching the ebb and flow of literary movements in the West, we can detect a palpable interplay between antimimetic and mimetic poetics. Even in an age characterized by the prefix "post-" in the West, mimesis seems to have staged a comeback with a vengeance: works of hyper-representation (e.g., photorealism) and deadpan realism keep turning up, and our present world itself is increasingly immersed in a sea of simulacra ("mimesis in reverse," so to speak):

Future World, Disneyland, the Frontier, German Town, etc., in which the boundaries

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\(^5\) The influence of the Aristotle's poetic theory on posterity through different historical periods is a topic that has been dealt with by many scholars. Unlike the "exoteric" works published in Aristotle's lifetime, the *Poetics* belongs to his "esoteric" works that were only circulated in his school (the Lyceum) as lecture notes. It was about two centuries after his death that these "esoteric" works (as part of the larger group of Aristotle's "acroamatic", i.e., complete, works) were copied and studied with great zeal for the "real," secret doctrine. The *Poetics* obviously survived in this period, but only one half of it had this luck. As Gerald Else's brief survey of its history indicates, the *Poetics* was little known to the Aristotelian commentators of the third to fifth centuries A.D. When it finally survived into the Middle Ages, it was just one of the rhetorical treatises in an anthology by various authors. Then it arrived in Italy not long after the fifteenth century. It was around 1660, when Racine studied the *Poetics*, that the work started to rise to its dazzling height. Else also points out that for all his good will and good sense in vindicating the treasures of the Greek literary tradition, Aristotle ignored an important aspect of the greatest Greek literature: its religious dimension. However, this weakness turned out to be an advantage which made it possible to become eventually a literary Bible for Renaissance classicism, because it contained no Hellenic deities that would conflict with Christian dogma and sensibilities. See Gerald F. Else, *Aristotle Poetics* (Ann Arbor: the University of Michigan Press, 1967) 4-12.
between what is real and what is imitated are blurred, and the gap between reference
and referent seems to have disappeared. Maybe it is no exaggeration to say that the
concept of mimesis still lies at the very core of Western tradition and life.

In what follows, I wish to explore the "modern potentialities" ⁶ of the
Aristotelian concept of mimesis in an attempt to give my initial answers to two
questions. The first question is: how and why has the project of Western literary
modernity which began with romanticism actually evolved around some basic
precepts of mimesis first formulated by Aristotle? The second one, which I will leave
for later treatment, is: how and why has this Western concept of mimesis influenced
the Chinese literary discourse of modernity through its direct descendant:
-- nineteenth- and twentieth-century realism?

As has been mentioned before, Aristotle's concept of mimesis differs
dramatically from Plato's. Quite a few scholars have called attention to the radical

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⁶ The concept of "modern potentialities" of tradition was proposed by Lloyd I.
Rudolph and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph in their study of Indian modernity. They write:
"Increased attentiveness to the variations and potentialities of traditional society not
only yields insights into the connections between it and 'modernity' but also, when
combined with attentiveness to 'traditional' aspects of modern societies, raises
questions about the meaning of modernity." See Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne
Hoeber Rudolph, The Modernity of Tradition: Political Development in India
on their concept in formulating his notion of "belated modernity" in the study of the
modernization of Greece, a country characterized by some as the earliest Third World
country. Drawing upon their insights, Kirk A. Denton has come up with his own fresh
ideas about modern Chinese literary thought in his general introduction to Modern
Chinese Literary Thought: Writings on Literature, 1893-1945 (Stanford: Stanford
University Press, 1996). The concept of "modern potentialities" within tradition has
been very helpful in developing my ideas about literary tradition, both Chinese and
divergence between them and emphasized that the Aristotelian concept of mimesis is creative and productive. This is in sharp opposition to Plato's notion of mimesis, which is purely imitative. As Gerald Else says,

A poet, then, is an imitator in so far as he is a maker, viz., of plots. The paradox is obvious. Aristotle has developed and changed the bearing of a concept which originally meant a faithful copying of preexisting things, to make it mean a creation of things which have never existed, or whose existence, if they did exist, is accidental to the poetic process. Copying is after the fact; Aristotle's mimesis creates the fact.\(^7\)

Paul Ricoeur points out that Aristotelian mimesis "is the emblem of the shift that ... produces the 'literariness' of the work of literature."\(^8\) Behind this distinction between imitation and creation hides a major difference in the conception of poetry or literature. In the Platonic scheme of things, poetry is assessed from the ontological, epistemological, and ethical points of view. Poetry is inferior to philosophy because it imitates appearances; it errs for being only a copy of the image, and it grips our delicate and innocent mind and rouses it to frenzy. Obviously, Plato conflates poetry with philosophy and ethics, and passes his judgments in nonaesthetic terms. For Aristotle, poetry creates according to its own rules and should hold its own ground. This does not mean that Aristotle severs poetry entirely from philosophy. Philosophical-minded as he is, Aristotle is certainly concerned with the universal and permanent values. He claims that poetry is more significant than history or chronolo-

\(^7\) Else, 332.

gy. For him, the creativity of poetry lies precisely in its unrestrained handling of fact without distorting the universal, or poetic truth.

Thus in Aristotle's aesthetics, mimesis is inseparable from creativity. As Paul Ricoeur observes, "On the one hand, it [mimesis] expresses a world of human actions which is already there; tragedy is destined to express human reality, to express the tragedy of life. But on the other hand, mimesis does not mean the duplication of reality; mimesis is not a copy: mimesis is poiesis, that is construction, creation." 9 Mimesis and poiesis (the active process of poetic composition), imitation and creation, these two concepts, both antithetical and complementary to each other, constitute the paradox of Aristotle's conception of literature. What interests us most is precisely this paradoxical nature of Aristotelian mimesis with its dynamic, productive mechanism capable of self-negation and self-rejuvenation. Tzvetan Todorov once made an interesting and revealing metaphor about Aristotle's Poetics. He compares it to a man with an already graying mustache who is about to emerge from his mother's womb. 10 Bizarre as it may appear, this analogy nevertheless captures the essential quality of mimesis -- its capability to rejuvenate itself. Despite its apparent recession from the centrality it once enjoyed, mimesis has managed to keep its vitality even after the debut of romanticism by engaging in a dialectical relationship with various literary trends.


As has been said earlier, Aristotle investigates poetry within its own sphere and in its own terms. At the very outset, Aristotle restricts the use of mimesis only to the realms of art. The first four chapters of the *Poetics* are devoted to a discussion of the three components of mimesis, namely, the media employed, the objects imitated, and the mode of imitation. The media refer variously to rhythm, melody, and language, either separately or in combination, depending on the art in which they are employed: music, dance, or poetry. The objects of imitation are “men in action.” As for the mode of mimesis, Aristotle tells us that it may be a combination of narration and dramatization, or it may be straight narrative, or straight dramatic. With the differentiation of the three component parts of mimesis, Aristotle actually gives us a definition of art: its nature, representational means, and manner of representation. It is important to note here that the mimetic artist is given a great deal of leeway with respect to the media and mode in his artistic activities. Aristotle speaks of them in rather general, unprescriptive terms. It is up to the poet to decide on the appropriate media and mode to be adopted for their creative literary endeavor. In the case of poetry, language was the medium, which writers of later generations have stamped with their personal marks and turned it into idiosyncratic “styles.” In the *Poetics*, Aristotle attaches unusual importance to this aspect of mimesis. Later in his famous definition of tragedy, Aristotle elaborates further on language, “... by means of language which has been made sensuously attractive, ...” By ‘language made
sensuously attractive’ I mean language that has rhythm and melody, ....” 11 Clearly what Aristotle has in mind is a more refined, poetic language with musical cadences that lends tragedy a “literary” quality different from everyday speech, thus placing a more stringent demand on the creativity of the poet. This sounds remotely similar to the proposition of the Russian Formalists in which a distinction is made between the literary use and the ordinary use of language, and a special emphasis is laid on the “literariness,” i.e., the distinctive formal features of linguistic signs that have made a literary work what it is.12

In chapters 19 and 20, much more space is devoted to the issues concerning the communication of thought through speech and verbal expression, as well as the technicalities of language. Various elements of language are dealt with, involving different aspects of linguistics which are now called phonology, morphology, and syntax. In chapters 21 and 22, Aristotle talks specifically about poetic language and poetic style. It may seem a truism to say that the medium of poetry is language. However, if we understand the goal of literature as creating and communicating,}

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12 The Formalists’ focus on technique led them to view literature as a special use of language in contrast to the "practical" use of language. Victor Shklovsky (1893-1984), a well-known Russian formalist, wrote in his essay titled "Art as Technique": "In studying poetic speech in its phonetic and lexical structure as well as in its characteristic distribution of words and in the characteristic thought structure compounded from the words, we find everywhere the artistic trademark -- that is, we find material obviously created to remove the automatism of perception; .... Thus poetic language gives us satisfaction. According to Aristotle, poetic language must appear strange and wonderful; and, in fact, it is often foreign, ...." See Victor Shklovsky, "Art as Technique," The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends ed. David H. Richter (New York: St. Martin Press, 1989), 746.
designating language as one of the three component parts in mimesis is quite a significant act. This is in fact a refutation of Plato's assertion that mimesis is but a "mirror" that only passively reflects surrounding objects, a process in which the media such as language seems of little importance. However, in isolating language as a medium, Aristotle seems to treat the matter of language (style) as having an independent value in itself, thus leading the way to formalism, as it has been accused by some critics.\textsuperscript{13} For good or bad, stressing the importance of language and its vitality in literary creation is an act with far-reaching significance. If we take into consideration what language means to modernists, structural theorists, and philosophers of the twentieth-century, Aristotle's prophetic vision and insight are indeed remarkable.

As regards the objects of mimesis, however, Aristotle is quite specific. In this terse phrase "men in action," all the words are key words. First of all, poetry should concern the world of human beings; mimesis only acquires significance in the human context. This emphasis on human beings endows poetry with a humane nature, which is precisely what distinguishes the arts from philosophy and other sciences. Secondly, it is not human life in its entirety that should be imitated, but only "men in action," or actions of human import. This emphasis on action is further underscored by an enlargement and amendment of his original formulation. Later in his definition

\textsuperscript{13} For example, John D. Boyd says in his The Function of Mimesis and Its Decline, "Unfortunate dichotomies, later developed, between 'matter' and 'form,' 'form' and 'content,' as well as the various tendencies to separate language and meaning, all derive, to some extent at least, from thinking of language in poetry as a medium of expression." See John D. Boyd, The Functions of Mimesis and Its Decline (New York: 1970), p. 146.
of tragedy Aristotle points out that “Tragedy, then, is a process of imitating an action which has serious implications, ....” Aristotle points out further that “tragedy is an imitation not of men but of a life, an action.”

The mode of imitation actually refers to the specific way or form in which media are employed. Aristotle speaks of three “modes” of imitation: 1) Mixed, 2) Narrative, and 3) Dramatic. It should be borne in mind that the Poetics was actually written with a view to refuting Plato's negative conceptions of mimesis. In Book III of the Republic, Plato, who distrusts the value of emotionalism, seems to suggest that the narrative mode of poetry is not imitative, and therefore it is the least pernicious. On the contrary, the dramatic mode in which characters perform imitation is the most damaging, since it appeals to the emotion of the audience. In contradistinction to Plato's view, Aristotle thinks that all the three modes of representation are imitative, and moreover, he considers the dramatic mode the best instead of the worst. What he upholds in the dramatic mode is its artistic effectiveness and emotional impact since it imitates characters as acting and dramatizing the incidents of the story. Obviously, Aristotle endorses the mode that complies fully with the humane character and artistic nature of poetry. However embryonic and primitive Aristotle's modes of representation may appear, they nevertheless point to an important aspect of literary representation. With the passing of time, there are more and more ways of representing an object, with some of them

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14 Aristotle, Poetics, 25.
15 Ibid., 27.
becoming established as “genres,” and some of them being just personal modes of literary creation.

Surely there are some deeper reasons underlying Aristotle’s stress on action, which can be further investigated from the perspectives of his epistemology and ontology. For him, nature is intelligible and all reality exists in a dynamic process of constant becoming. Poetry is a form of knowledge which aims at imitating men in action, and it is hoped that by so doing it can reveal the universal. There is a cognitive element inherent in mimetic poetry, but it is different from that found in either history or philosophy. Unlike Plato, for whom the ultimate principles of the world transcend empirical experience, Aristotle views them as immanent in the physical world inhabited by human beings. There is a world out there, and it exists and manifests itself by its forms. As Aristotle says, “Hence also poetry is a more philosophical and serious business than history; for poetry speaks more of universal, history of particulars.

‘Universal’ in this case is what kind of person is likely to do or say certain kinds of things, according to probability or necessity; that is what poetry aims at, although it gives its persons particular names afterward; while the ‘particular’ is what Alcibiades did or what happened to him.” 16 Aristotle makes it very clear that poetry also aims to express the universal, but its “universals” are different from those of philosophy. Poetry is also a higher thing than history, since it speaks more of universals, but the universals conveyed by poetry are arrived at through an imitation of particulars of life “according

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16 Aristotle, Poetics, 33.
to probability and necessity." This is perhaps the earliest possible theory of literary realism which eventually leads to the thriving of realist fiction in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As John D. Boyd puts it, "What organic union there is in the Western critical tradition of poetry's needed realism and autonomy is largely derived from Aristotle." 17

In the Poetics, one of the most problematic and controversial terms is "catharsis." There have been so many interpretations of the word over the centuries that what we find is naturally a wide spectrum of divergent views. 18 Although it is hardly possible to reach any consensus, the dominant view shared by many schools is to regard catharsis as essentially a matter of emotional experience. Furthermore, whether the interpretations are moral, psychological, structural, intellectual, epistemological, or even pathological, they all agree upon the positive effects of catharsis. Again, it should be kept in mind that the concept of catharsis was raised in the Platonic context. Aristotle's objective was first of all to establish the autonomy of tragedy, and secondly, to find a good reason for the emotional impact that tragedy may produce on the audience. Being the son of a doctor, Aristotle found a medical word for this function: catharsis, whose primary meaning in Greek is the powerful action of a laxative.

17 Boyd, 18.
An objective orientation and an emphasis on universal human values comprise the core of the Aristotelian concept of mimesis and are indicative of Aristotle's empirical thrust of mind, which is basically opposed to the subjective school of philosophy. Aristotle's stress on propriety, his conflation of poetry with rhetoric, and the treatment of style as a value in itself all seem to lead to formalism. As John Boyd has observed, "Aristotelianism, the most methodical of methods, at best made for clarity and a realism of sorts, at worst for formalism." It is quite understandable that the usual allegations against Aristotle's poetics are often focused on the lack of a subjective vision which prohibits the expression of the private ego, and the tendency to encourage formalism with all its rhetorical decorum and poetic diction. These accusations are true to some extent. However, even with the first apparent weakness in Aristotelian aesthetics, opinions vary. For example, unlike many people who think that Aristotle and Coleridge represent two extremes in literary criticism, George Whalley proposes that there exists the Aristotle-Coleridge Axis. He claims:

The heart and substance of Coleridge's poetic theory and practice is strongly Aristotelian -- even though he himself may have thought otherwise. Over a long period of time Aristotle's *Poetics* has been 'lost and found and lost again and found again'; so, in a much shorter span of time, has Coleridge's.

Coleridge, as we know, is a prominent romantic poet. The publication of *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), a seminal romantic work written by Coleridge in collaboration with

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19 Boyd, 219.
William Wordsworth, is usually considered the beginning of the Romantic Movement in English poetry.

The isolation of language as an independent element of mimesis appears to be typical of Aristotle's way of analysis, and his treatment of style, which in large part consists of grammatical elaborations, seems to have little to do with poetics itself. Therefore, Aristotle has been accused of separating the two-fold meaning of the *logos* (*ratio* and *oratio*) and confusing style with rhetoric and grammar. According to these criticisms, the deficiencies in Aristotle's poetics would very likely lead to the separation of form and style from the inner movement of the poem. It is true that Aristotle's stress on language as the means of mimesis and his dwelling on its technicalities may appear irrelevant from the standpoint of poetics, but if they are put in the larger context of literary creation and human communicative action, they not only indicate a significant act but also reveal Aristotle's prophetic insight. Earlier we have mentioned that Aristotle's special interest in language has made us associate it with the views of the Russian Formalists on literary language. It is interesting to note that Jürgen Habermas, a prominent contemporary philosopher who is also concerned with aesthetic problems, places great weight upon language, too, as is evident from the following remarks:

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21 For example, in his book *Aristotle's Poetics: The Argument*, Gerald F. Else refuses to discuss the chapters on style in the *Poetics* because "they have very little -- astonishingly little -- connection with any other part of Aristotle's theory of poetry.... These strictly grammatical definitions and discussions offered a more tempting field for emendation and interpolation than any others in the *Poetics*, because grammar -- unlike the theoretical understanding of poetry -- did in fact make great strides after Aristotle." See Gerald F. Else, *Aristotle's Poetics: The Argument* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957) 567.

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The human interest in autonomy and responsibility is not mere fancy, for it can be apprehended a priori. What raises us out of nature is the only thing whose nature we can know: language. Through its structure, autonomy and responsibility are posited for us. Our first sentence expresses unequivocally the intention of a universal and unconstrained consensus.22

Later, in explicating his theory of communicative action, Habermas further elaborates on the importance of language as a medium of communication:

Language is assimilated to stylistic and aesthetic forms of expression. Only the communicative model of action presupposes language as a medium of uncurtailed communication whereby speakers and hearers, out of the context of their preinterpreted lifeworld, refer simultaneously to things in the objective, social, and subjective worlds in order to negotiate common definitions of the situation.23

It is almost commonplace to say that language has a central bearing on Habermas's hermeneutic process of dialogue and communication, as it does in the case of Aristotle's theory of mimesis. However, from Aristotle's time to the present day, there has always been an intense interest in the nature of language and its role in literary creation. Linguists are not the only people who are interested in language. As a matter of fact, language, along with the ontological, communicative, and hermeneutic problems it involves, has drawn a great deal of attention from literary critics and philosophers alike. Aristotle's particular emphasis on language sends out a message that may still ring true today when language is under attack by some of the deconstructionists, but when we put deconstructionists' views about language (such as Derrida's reversal of the

relationship between speech and writing, and his theory that language entails “a
production of a system of differences -- a differance) under scrutiny, we will find that for
all their effort to deconstruct language and words, their writings disclose something to the
contrary: they seem to be under the spell of the power of language and words. As J.
Hillis Miller, one of the proponents of deconstruction, has claimed, “[l]anguage is not
an instrument or tool in man's hands, a submissive means of thinking. Language rather
thinks man and his ‘world,’ including poems, if he will allow it to do so.” 24 In his
attempt to subvert the metaphysical hierarchy in language, Derrida has labored
painsstakingly to coin new words, such as trace, archiecrature, and differance, which
would, as one might hope, stay clear of the influence of the old structure. Despite
Derrida's claim that they are neither words nor concepts, they are, however, nothing more
than terms of a new scheme, or new hierarchy, in the strategy of deconstruction.

Whether deconstructionists like it or not, they seem to be very much under the bonds of
logocentrism which they have taken pains to explode, and, words, despite their effort to
sever them from meaning, have proved to point to much more than only traces and
differences.25 The essentialist error of logocentrism, the origin of which Derrida traced
to Aristotle, can hardly be remedied by an equally essentialist mindset. Furthermore,

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24 Quoted in David Lehman, Signs of the Times: Deconstruction and the Fall of
25 David Lehman mentions an anecdote about how the late novelist Walker Percy
defined a deconstructionist. Percy described him as an academic who claims that texts
have no referents, but who leaves a message on his wife's answering machine
requesting a pepperoni pizza for supper. The message is a text, and the pizza is a
referent. What the deconstructive critic expects is certainly that the kind of pizza he
refers to will materialize for his supper, not otherwise. See Lehman, 113.
whether we can blame Aristotle for the logocentric view that has been quite prevalent in the West is something that deserves further questioning. In the *Poetics*, Aristotle speaks of six important elements which constitute a tragedy; among them, "verbal expression" ranks fourth. Aristotle says, "Fourth is the verbal expression of the speeches. I mean by this the same thing that was said earlier, that the 'verbal expression' is the conveyance of thought through language: a statement which has the same meaning whether one says 'verses' or 'speeches.'"  

We can hardly find any traces in this statement made about two thousand years ago that could have led to the spread of the logocentric idea in the West.  

Certainly we cannot deny the fact that formalism (in the neoclassical sense), along with its stress on rhetoric, poetic diction, and "the Rules," is what caused the decline of the concept of mimesis at the end of the eighteenth century. This decline might have its roots in some of the weaknesses in Aristotle's poetics, but what is important for us is to rediscover the rational potential in mimesis which has been overlooked or dismissed as of limited consequences, and try to find how they can be related to later literary trends and the modern quest for reality in literature and the arts.

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27 Jonathan Culler, one of the expositors of Derrida's theory, explicates the term "logocentrism" as follows: "As portrayed by Derrida, the logocentric system always assigns the origin of truth to the logos -- to the spoken word, to the voice of reason or to the Word of God." See Jonathan Culler, *Ferdinand de Saussure* (Harmondsworth, 1977) 119. If we understand that the error of "logocentrism" lies in the idea that the concepts of the words refer to real essences in the world existing independently of language and hence comprise the origin of truth, then Aristotle's statement is not logocentric at all: what he says simply conforms to our understanding of what language is, i.e., "a system of communication, a medium for thought, a vehicle for literary expression ...." See William O'Grady et al., *Contemporary Linguistics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).
If the Aristotelian concept of mimesis was at the core of the quest for reality in art from classical antiquity to neoclassicism, it seems to be still lying in the depths of Western tradition, exercising its influence and swaying the course of literary modernity in the West. Because of its objective orientation and realistic epistemology, its emphasis on poetic truth and humanist concern, its desire to represent and communicate with others, and its aesthetic bent on the formal aspects of art, mimesis was in the center of the Western literary tradition for over twenty centuries. With the rise of modern rationalist thought and the establishment of an autonomous art, it seems that the time was ripe for the withdrawal of the time-honored mimetic tradition to give way to new, fresh poetics based on subjectivity and individualism. However, as a much revered concept deeply entrenched in Western cultural tradition, mimesis may be temporarily dormant, but it is never dead.

As literary modernity (which was started by romanticists) moves forward, the solipsistic subjectivity-centered reason has been gradually exhausted and the creative ego has been increasingly subjected to the encroachment of economic and bureaucratic imperatives. In its development, literary modernity is faced with an impasse in which the reification and institutionalization of literature itself have detached it from the lifeworld and hence turned it into esoteric forms of the expert, and unchecked subjective expression and rebellious aesthetic experiments have come to a cul-de-sac. The way out of this dilemma of Western literary modernity, as is suggested by Habermas for the cultural modernity as a whole, is a paradigm change: from the


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paradigm of consciousness to the intersubjective paradigm of communicative action. In this process, mimesis, with its rational potentialities in representation and communication, certainly has an important role to play. As a matter of fact, having built-in mechanisms for accommodating and adapting to changed realities, mimesis has undergone a metamorphosis and assumed new roles in influencing modern literary trends with its emphasis on subjective-oriented representation and intersubjective communication.

The quest for reality in literature and the arts gained its modern meaning only after the Enlightenment. With the emergence of romanticism, the premises of classicism were questioned and a long-subdued yearning for autonomy and subjectivity in artistic articulation began to assert its legitimacy. As Habermas has rightly pointed out, "Modern art reveals its essence in Romanticism; and absolute inwardness determines the form and content of Romantic art." 28 The exaltation of modern science and reason in the era of the Enlightenment shattered the illusion of representing a reality which actually had many unknowns. To imitate such a world by following the tenets of mimesis was out of the question for romanticists. The only things that writers and artists could be true to were their own subjective feelings and emotions. Thus the serious doubt raised by modern science about the validity of the traditional conception of mimesis turned writers toward their inner world and subjective feelings for truth in the wake of the Enlightenment. Romanticism, by taking expressive self-realization as the principle of

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28 Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 18.
art and striking a stance of artistic autonomy and independence, took the first step on the
march toward literary modernity. But what appealed to romanticists most was the
expression of personal imaginative perceptions which tended to speak a nobler truth
transcending not only the actual and the immediate, but also the private and the
individual. As Gerald Graff has well remarked, “The equation of romanticism with
‘subjectivism’ is, of course, a misunderstanding of the intentions of the major
romantic thinkers, who glorified not the idiosyncratic subjectivity of the private ego but
the transcendental subjectivity of universal man, sometimes identified with the Absolute
itself.” 29 In their obsession with the subjective truth and indulgence in autonomous
imagination, there is apparently no room for the concept of mimesis. However, as
Jeffery Adams and Eric Williams observe, even romanticists exhibit a “mimetic
desire” in establishing verisimilitude between self and other as an attempt to render
reality intelligible. They write:

In their narcissistic idealism, the Romantics would no longer seek truth on
the surface of the phenomenal world; but their speculations on the transcendental
identity of self and non-self nevertheless reveal the human need, a mimetic
desire, for a reassuring reciprocity between subject and object. 30

According to them, the Romantics, and the German Romantics in particular,
have displayed an intrinsic tendency of narcissism which seeks the confirmation of the
self in others and attempts to unite the spirit with whatever is other or external, be it

29 Gerald Graff, Literature Against Itself: Literary Ideas in Modern Society
30 Jeffery Adams and Eric Williams eds. Mimetic Desire: Essays on Narcissism in
German Literature from Romanticism to Post-Modernism (Columbia: Camden House,
nature, world, or other human beings. Probably derived from the post-Aristotelian concept of art holding the mirror up to nature, this mimetic desire differs somewhat from Aristotelian mimesis in terms of epistemology; yet it shows that there is still a mimetic relationship between the Romanticists' subjective construction of reality and the external world reflected through the inner eye of the mind.

However, the unwarranted belief in the revelation of truth through arbitrary imagination and subjective construction was doomed to failure because the romanticists' glorification of artists as demigods and their self-enforced alienation from the real world of order and value closed them off from their community and impeded meaningful communication. In spite of their gallant endeavor to bridge the gap between subject and object, the self and the world, and the conscious and the unconscious, the premises of romanticism finally had to give way to a new, fresh poetics.

With the emergence of realism in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century, literature in the West seemed to have returned to the old tradition of mimesis, but with a new turn. First, the emphasis was placed on the representation of contemporary and

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31 When discussing the notion that art is like a mirror, M. H. Abrams mentions that the mirror image was quite popular among aesthetic theorists after Plato and Aristotle, and it remained a favorite analogue in literary criticism up to the middle of the eighteenth century. As Abrams explicates, "Between the two poles (i.e., the Platonic and Aristotelian concepts of mimesis) we have the post-Aristotelian theories which, almost without exception, reverted to the mimesis much closer to the attributes of a literal reflector." See M. H. Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp (New York: Norton, 1953) 34.
social reality, and then, it was shifted to the subjective presentation of life by engaging in innovative experiments in form, style, and subject matter. If the nineteenth-century realist fiction of Europe and America subscribed more or less to the conventions of a traditional mimetic aesthetic, the twentieth-century has witnessed a major shift from an objective portrayal of visible reality to a subjective, self-conscious pursuit of the nature of the external world. This signals a drastic change from the classical conception of mimesis, and represents a further assertion of the principle of subjectivity and an earnest quest for reality through the writer's own unique perspective and modes of representation.

Changes in style, the object to be represented, and the mode of representation notwithstanding, nineteenth- and twentieth-century realism in Europe and America seems to be the direct, legitimate descendant of classical mimetic aesthetics. When Georg Lukács says that “the central category and criterion of realist literature is the type, a peculiar synthesis which organically binds together the general and the particular both in characters and situations,” 32 we hear a distant echo of Aristotle's exposition on the particular and the universal.

As early as the eighteen thirties, the term “realism” was used to describe a feature observed in some of the writers (such as Hugo and Merimée) who would be classified today as romantic. 33 However, realism as a literary movement first appeared

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33 See René Wellek, "The Concept of Realism in Literary Scholarship," Concepts of Criticism (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965) 227. In the same essay,
in France around the middle of the nineteenth century, with a galaxy of such great names as Stendhal, Balzac, Flaubert, and the Goncourts as its exponents and practitioners. This literary trend soon spread to other European countries, such as England and Russia, and to America as well. In a relatively short span of time, realism thrived in the West, producing great masters of fiction whose works were quickly canonized. Although it is difficult, if not impossible, to sum up the premises that different realists subscribed to, they had nevertheless at least one thing in common: a mimetic aesthetic which originated in classical antiquity, but had evolved to accommodate changed realities. In other words, realists were the inheritors of the Aristotelian concept of mimesis, which consists of both *mimesis* and *poeisis*, i.e., both representation and creation. If Stendhal is representative of the realist writers who stuck to the basic tenets of traditional mimesis, in Flaubert and later in Henry James, we find an aesthetic impulse which was biased more toward the other extreme of mimesis: a more subjective and autonomous representation of the external world. This is a trend that Auerbach describes with keen observation toward the end of his book *Mimesis*: "At the time of the first World War and after, ... certain writers distinguished by instinct and insight find a method which dissolves reality into multiple and multivalent reflections of consciousness." 34 Stendhal still abided by the old image of the mirror (a concept in the post-Aristotelian poetics, not the Platonic

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Wellek gives a brief account of the use and the spread of the term "realism" in France, England, America, Germany, Italy, and Russia. It is interesting to note that critics at that time sometimes confused realism with romanticism. For example, Thackery is contrasted as "a novelist of what is called the Real school," with Dickens, "a novelist of the Ideal or Romantic school."
analogue for poetry) in his theory of the novel, whereas Henry James stressed the formal and thematic qualities of fiction and spoke of “producing a reality” from the writer's impression and ideas. Henry James is usually regarded as a writer who bridges the transition from the nineteenth-century realism to modernist fiction of the twentieth century.

Another important aspect of realism that we should not overlook is its hidden agenda of ethical concern and social comment. Theoretically, if we understand realism to be the objective representation of contemporary social reality, it should not be bent to any social purpose or criticism. However, as René Wellek has observed, “[i]t is a simple fact of literary history that the mere change to a depiction of contemporary social reality implied a lesson of human pity, of social reformism and criticism, and often of rejection and revulsion against society.” This actually involves the complicated problem of how literature affects its audience. According to Aristotle, poetry cherishes serious human values. Therefore, it naturally becomes a positive agent in forming an individual's personality. The enrichment of the mind comes spontaneously from the pleasurable contemplation of poetry. For Aristotle, mimesis offers an organic union of aesthetic enjoyment and cognitive pleasure. This is not only different from the Platonic concept of ideal poetry in which the didactic value far outweighs any aesthetic concern, but also from the Horatian poetic theory

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34 Auerbach, 551.
36 Wellek, 242.
that the ultimate aim of poetry is to "teach and delight (aut prodesse aut
delectare)." Although often regarded as a commentary on Aristotle's Poetics in the Renaissance, Horace's Ars Poetica actually offers a misconception of mimesis, but its "teach-and-delight" formula has exercised a great influence on subsequent writers and critics.

There is nothing wrong with a realism, which, with its implicit ethical teleology, attempts to offer a poetics which would harmonize the two sets of values, viz., aesthetics and ethics, in a way similar to the organic union of pleasurable contemplation and illuminating insight. If we are in favor of the "ethical criticism" proposed by Wayne Booth, we shall find that an ethics of reading presupposes ethical values in the works we read. As Booth writes when commenting on a passage from the book The Ethics of Reading by J. Hillis Miller, "Still, with that qualification, I would join those who care as much about the ethics of reading as about the ethical values of 'works in themselves,' whatever we take such problematic creatures to be." 37 As if in response to Booth's statement, John Updike, an "experimental realist," as he is called by some critics, 38 has made the following remarks:

38 John Updike is one of the contemporary American writers who still basically adhere to the realist tradition, but his is a modified version that accommodates and adapts to the dynamic, constantly changing realities. He is characterized by Richard Ruland and Malcolm Bradbury as "an experimental realist, an excellent parodist, ..., a poet and serious literary critic. His work has attempted to test what remains of the realistic and the romance traditions of American fiction, and he writes with a vivid sense both of moral hunger and aesthetic purpose." See Richard Ruland and Malcolm Bradbury, From Puritanism to Postmodernism: A History of American Literature (London: Routledge, 1991) 318.
I have from the start been wary of the fake, the automatic. I tried not to force my sense of life as many-layered and ambiguous, while keeping in mind some sense of transaction, of a bargain struck, between me and the ideal reader. ... My work is meditation, not pontification. ... My first thought about art, as a child, was that the artist brings something into the world that didn't exist before, and that he does it without destroying something else. A kind of refutation of the conservation of matter. That still seems to me its central magic, its core of joy.

However, with the kind of realism which follows the line of the Horatian formula, the tension between description and prescription, between truth and instruction seems to be an insoluble one.

With the rise of modernism in the early decades of the twentieth century, realism seemed to have fallen into disrepute. Modernism subjected the premises of realism to austere scrutiny and found that as a literary mode committed to reality, realism was both naive and inadequate in its epistemological inquiry. When reality came to be seen as absurd and chaotic by some after World War I, it could hardly lend itself to easy comprehension and representation. In a world where reality became to many unreal and fantastic, the most "real" thing that modernist writers could have recourse to seemed to be their own subjectivity. Therefore, writers started to experiment in form, style, and subject matter, resulting in a dazzling array of new techniques which undermined the basic conventions of earlier prose fiction: non-linear narration ignoring cause and effect, multiple point of view, fragmented utterances, violation of traditional syntax, the stream-of-consciousness method, the appropriation
of myths and dreams, etc. However, the perception of reality as "unreal," “absurd” itself assumes the existence of a reality. As Gerald Graff well observes,

The assumptions about the world found in such efforts to demystify mimesis and realism and to proclaim the reign of indeterminacy and undecidability bear marks of resentment against conditions that are obviously all too objectively real and determinate. Anti-mimetic theories derive from an understandable but distorted reaction to the loss of the sense of reality. 40

Although seemingly conflicting with the tenets of realism, relying on one's subjectivity for the perception and rendering of reality does not necessarily imply a break with the mimetic principles, still less a break with the notion of poiesis -- the other pole of the Aristotelian concept of mimesis. As Graff points out further:

Far from discrediting the mimetic view of literature, the fact that reality has become problematic seems only to demand it more strongly, for the perception that reality is problematic is itself a mimetic perception, presupposing an objective distance between the observer and what he observes. 41

As long as a writer remains committed to reality (or unreality, if he prefers to see it that way) and engages in an active interaction between consciousness and the external world, whatever ingenious literary modes or techniques he invents or adopts can only give new dimensions to the changing concept of mimesis and the eternal quest for truth. Viewed in this light, modernism is in a sense the continuity or natural extension of the kind of realism which stresses more subjective reflections on reality and shares with the reader the writer's idiosyncratic meditation. As a matter of fact, despite its novel

39 Quoted in Wayne Booth, The Company We Keep, 497.
40 Graff, 9.
experiments in form and style and appropriation of new conventions, modernism demonstrates an intense humanistic concern. Thus it would not surprise us at all when we find that Erich Auerbach places Virginia Woolf as the great culmination of the tradition of realism in his book *Mimesis*, and Woolf, as we know, is seen by many as one of the greatest modernist writers. As a matter of fact, we see not only realism and modernism co-exist in one writer, but these two literary trends co-exist or alternate with each other in our time.

David Lodge, in his inaugural lecture delivered at the University of Birmingham in 1976 when he assumed the Chair of the English Department, spoke of two kinds of writing existing in twentieth-century England: the modernist and the antimodernist. He compared them to the movement of the pendulum, swinging incessantly back and forth.

"Antimodernist writing" is his thinly disguised name for realism, as is evident from the following words:

... but not all writing in the modern period is modernist. There is at least one other kind of writing in this period which, for want of a better term, I have designated in my title as antimodernist. This is writing that continues the tradition modernism reacted against. It believes that traditional realism, suitably modified to take account of changes in human knowledge and material circumstances, is still viable and valuable.42

David Lodge is not only a professor of English, but also a prolific writer whose fiction is "basically antimodernist, but with elements of modernism and postmodernism," to quote his own words. And this brings us to the problematic

41 Ibid., 11.
42 David Lodge, *Modernism, Antimodernism and Postmodernism* (Birmingham: the
To try to define and describe “postmodernism” runs the risk of making universalizing and systematizing statements that postmodernism is deadly opposed to. Yet critics and theorists (including postmodernist advocates) have kept offering different kinds of totalizing views about postmodernism and postmodern fiction. For example, the central characteristic of postmodernism is often described as “a radical epistemological and ontological doubt,” whereas “indeterminacy” and “immanence” are specified as the “two central constitutive tendencies” in postmodernism. As for postmodern fiction, while some of its early critics and practitioners viewed it as a radical revolt against modernism, later critics tend to see its links with the latter. For David Lodge, postmodernism continues the modernist critique of traditional realism, but, as Lodge points out, “it [postmodernism] tries to go beyond or around or underneath modernism, which for all its formal experiment and complexity held out to the reader the promise of meaning, if not of a meaning.”


45 As Hans Bertens points out, "It [postmodernist art] is seen by its practitioners and by its early critics such as Fiedler and Sontag as a radical departure from Modernism, with a value system all its own. However, later critics tend to see continuing links with Modernism (Graff) or with the Avant-garde of the modern period (Hassan and others)." See Hans Bertens, "The Postmodern Weltanschauung and its Relation to Modernism: An Introductory Survey," *A Postmodern Reader*, 35.

46 David Lodge, 10.
Despite the fact that the opinions about postmodern fiction are as diverse as postmodernist fictions themselves, one thing remains true: if postmodernist fiction is to be recognized as an innovative literary endeavor at all, it must not depart from the communicative goal of literature, and it must reveal its unique conventions of communication so as to make it accessible to the reader, whatever these conventions might be. It is from the perspective of communication that Gerhard Hoffman et al. have pointed out the difference between modernism and postmodernism:

From a communicational point of view, modernism seems to stress the relationship between the creative sensibility and the work of art, between addresser and message, post-modernism that between message and addressee.\(^47\)

Postmodern fiction is often described as nonmimetic or non-representational as if it were insulated from the lifeworld in which it is produced. If this were true, then it would be hardly possible to talk about its ability to communicate. Intersubjective communication must necessarily presume the existence of commonly acknowledged codes born out of life. In other words, whatever innovative fiction there is, it must be mimetic to a greater or lesser degree in the sense that it is cognitively, sensuously and substantively related to somebody's real life experience. Therefore, for postmodern fiction to be an accessible literary form, it has to be life-referential (in its own idiosyncratic way), no matter how nonreferential or nonmimetic it may appear. Gerald Graff distinguishes two kinds of postmodern fiction: one in which techniques of

\(^{47}\) See Hoffmann, Gerhard, Alfred Hoornung and Rudiger Kunow, "'Modern', 'Postmodern' and 'Contemporary' as Criteria for the Analysis of 20th Century
reflexiveness and self-parody are used to engender a pathos “at the absence of a transcendent order of meanings;” the other is the “more celebratory forms of postmodernism” which celebrate energy, “the vitalism of a world that cannot be understood or controlled.” 48 Borges’s fiction belongs to the first category, because it “retains a link with traditional classical humanism by virtue of its sense of the pathos of this humanism’s demise;” whereas the writing of Mailer, Burroughs, and Pynchon falls into the second, because its style “expresses a facile excitement with the dynamism of technological process.” 49 What is significant about Borges’s fiction is that in presenting a world of solipsistic distortion, it acknowledges the concept of the normal and offers an implicit realist comment, thus bestowing on his work a critical power. In contrast, the fiction of the “celebratory forms” embraces indiscriminately whatever is chaotic and is thrilled with the dawning of an age when “dissolution of ego boundaries ... is viewed as a bracing form of consciousness-expansion and a prelude to growth.” 50 Whether we agree with Graff or not, we can see that even the second group of postmodern fiction is not devoid of its cognitive and emotive relevance to the lifeworld.

Thus far we have discussed the concept of mimesis in art and its important role in the process of literary modernity in the West, hoping that it would throw some light on the question of why literary development in the West has taken a road peculiar to

48 See Graff, 55-8.
49 Ibid., 58.
the Western tradition. The centrality of mimesis is not manifest in art only. As a concept deeply ingrained in Western cultural tradition, mimesis has become one of the mediatative mechanisms which acts -- through arts -- an antithetical force to the infringement of reification in the process of modernity. The aesthetic critique of modernity has continued to the present day since the Romantic Movement. As we have seen, whatever forms this critique may have taken, they are only variations of the same basic theme -- mimesis, which, as the Other of reason, has worked in its ever changing role to reconcile the egocentric, excessive, solipsistic, and sometimes repressive subjectivism.

For Theodor W. Adorno, rationality must combine with a mimetic principle so as to free itself from instrumental reason. Art as a form of mimesis is thus conceived of as a non-reifying spirit in contrast to the instrumental spirit.\(^{51}\) In Habermas's theory of communicative action, the mimetic moment is already integrated with the rational moment, and this unity is rooted in the nature of language. The rational potential of mimesis can be released only after a change in the philosophical paradigm:

The rational core of mimetic achievements can be laid open only if we give up the paradigm of the philosophy of consciousness -- namely a subject that represents objects and toils with them -- in favor of the paradigm of linguistic philosophy -- namely that of intersubjective understanding or communication -- and put the cognitive-instrumental aspect of reason in its proper place as part of a more encompassing communicative rationality.\(^{52}\)

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\(^{50}\) Ibid., 57.


While agreeing with the critics of enlightenment that the paradigm of subject-centered reason is exhausted, Habermas argues that we should not renounce modernity as a lost cause. All we need now is a paradigm change: from the paradigm of consciousness to the intersubjective paradigm of communicative action. It is only by dint of this new paradigm that the project of modernity will be revitalized and move incessantly onward.

As far as literature and the arts are concerned, this implies a trend toward an art emancipated from self-centered aesthetic subjectivity. However, the increasing institutionalization of art has turned it into a sphere of experts and hence distanced it from the larger public. One of the aims of Habermas's project of modernity is to release the cognitive potential of each of the three domains (science, morality, and art) and set them free from their esoteric forms for the enrichment of everyday life.

Seen in the perspective articulated by Habermas via Weber, the different literary trends which have come and gone since the Enlightenment all centered around this entangled relationship between an art that gained its independence from religion and metaphysics in the era of the Enlightenment and the effort to bring it into a more harmonious reconciliation with life. Aesthetic-expressive rationality works according to its inner logic, and aesthetic modernity requires that this specialized cultural domain be utilized for the betterment of everyday social life. Therefore, writers are thrown into the perennial tension between aesthetic experience and social reality. According to Habermas, the way to the solution of this problem lies in the communicative rationalization process. As he argues, in every communication, cognitive meanings,
moral expectations, subjective expressions and evaluations must relate to one another, and in order to carry out a communicative act, we need a cultural tradition which covers these three spheres, or in John Searle's terminology, we need "the Background" and "the Network" for any speech act to function. In the Western tradition, the time-honored concept of mimesis, which is "sensually receptive, expressive, and communicative" by its very nature, holds the key to the revitalization of the process of aesthetic modernity.

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53 John Searle maintains that meaning and intentiality of a speech act are only determinable given a set of background capacities, abilities, presuppositions, and general know-how, and within a network of knowledge, beliefs, desires, etc. He calls the set of background capacities, the "Background," and the network of intentional phenomena, the "Network." See John Searle, "Literary Theory and Its Discontents," ed. Wenell V. Harris, Beyond Poststructuralism: The Speculations of Theory and the Experience of Reading (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996) 105.

54 Wellmer, 4.
Chapter Two:

CHINESE LITERARY MODERNITY AND THE CONCEPTS OF DAO 道, ZHI 志, QI 氣, AND QING 情

It is interesting to note that in the Chinese literary tradition, the concept of mimesis is basically absent. The external world for ancient Chinese writers was first and foremost an object for intuitive meditation, rather than for imitation. How to attain an intuitive apprehension of Nature through contemplation in the creative process and how to give expression to one's thought and feelings constituted the major concerns of Chinese poets. The two most-often quoted aphorisms in Chinese literary criticism are “Poetry expresses the zhi” 詩言志 and “Literature (wen) conveys the Dao” 文以載道. Despite the fact that because of repeated quoting they have almost become platitudes, we should not underestimate the enormous influence that they have exerted on Chinese writers and critics due to the canonical and cosmological weight that they carry with them.

One thing which deserves our special attention in dealing with classical Chinese literary criticism is that many of its terms are quite elusive and ambiguous.

1As Kirk A. Denton points out, "A measure of consensus exists among scholars of Chinese literature that traditional Chinese literary thought lacked the well-developed conception of mimesis that has dominated Western literary values." See Kirk A. Denton ed., Modern Chinese Literary Thought: Writings on Literature 1893-1945 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996) 31. James J. Y. Liu was perhaps the first person who called to attention the relative absence of the concept of mimesis in the Chinese literary tradition. See James J. Y. Liu, Chinese Theories of Literature

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and may have different layers of meaning depending on the context and their relations with one another. This is true of the concepts of Dao, zhi, and wen in the above two quotations, as well as of qi, and to a lesser degree, qing. There are no exact equivalents of these words in English.

The conventional English translation for the Dao is “the Way.” Used by both philosophers and literary critics, the Dao may acquire different meanings in different contexts. In the domain of metaphysics, it is a term shared by both the Daoist and the Confucian. As a matter of fact, the doctrines of Confucianism and Daoism are in many ways complementary rather than opposed to each other. In Lao Zi's Dao de jing [Classic of the Way and its virtue], the Dao, or the Way, is the principle underlying and governing all beings and existence, human or natural. However, this first principle is essentially indescribable and known only through a mystic intuition. It is empty, formless, actionless, ungraspable, unnamable, and beyond all categories of space and time. It both transcends all human values and is immanent in everything in Nature. As described in the Dao de jing,

The Tao (Way) that can be told of is not the eternal Tao;
The name that can be named is not the eternal name.
The Nameless is the origin of Heaven and Earth;
The Named is the mother of all things.²

Only by engaging in self-oblivious rumination and writing poetry, is the poet able to attain a kind of apprehension of Nature, which will ultimately lead to an

² Wing-tsit Chan trans. and ed., A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy (Princeton:
intuitive union with the *Dao*.

In Confucianism, which has a strong humanistic orientation, the concept of the *Dao* naturally stresses human virtues and the moral order. As Confucius says in the *Analects*, “Set your will on the Way. Have a firm grasp over virtue. Rely on humanity. Find recreation in the arts.” The pursuit of the Way is of paramount importance, so much so that when one “hears the Way in the morning, [he will] die content in the evening.”

Chinese literary critics in ancient times used the term in an eclectic way, embracing both the Confucian and Daoist concepts of the word. To put it in a crude fashion, we might say that the *Dao* refers to the Way of Nature (with its cosmological and ontological connotations) as well as the Way of Humanity (with its moral and social implications), and the latter should maintain a harmonious relationship with the former.

Like the term *Dao*, *zhi* is also a polysemous word for which there is no exact English equivalent. It has been translated into English variously, depending on the context, as “will,” “heart's wish,” “mind's intent,” and “what is intently on the mind,” “idea,” “sentiment,” “emotion,” etc. Although the concept of *zhi*...
is basically associated with an individual's consciousness and is thus subjective, and that of the *Dao* addresses the universal truth and objective moral principles, there is no absolute antithesis between the two notions in ancient Chinese thought: since heaven and man are one (*Tian ren he yi* 天人合一), one's *zhi* ought to be in line with the universal *Dao*.

*Wen*, again, is another polysemous word with a whole spectrum of meanings ranging from "pattern, configuration, embellishment," to "cultivation, culture, writing, literature." According to the literary critic Liu Xie 劉勰 (ca. 466-532) of the Liang Dynasty (502-556), there is an intrinsic link between *wen* as literature and *wen* as the pattern of the physical world. As a matter of fact, Liu Xie traces the origin of literature to the beginning of the universe, as we shall see later.

The idea that literature is a manifestation of the principle of Nature is perhaps one of the most ancient concepts in Chinese theories of literature, and its origin can be traced to *Commentaries* (易傳) on the *Book of Changes* (易 經), one of the Confucian classics. Despite controversies over the date and authorship of the book, the prevailing view is that the text, or "canon," was written approximately in the 12th century B.C., and the commentaries were written by various Confucian scholars around the third century B.C.⁶ A passage from the commentaries reveals what James Y. J. Liu calls "the metaphysical concept of literature" in its embryonic form:

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⁶ says that *zhi* can be translated as "sentiments," and "emotions," or "will" and "idea," though he chooses to translate it into the former. See *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons* trans. Vincent Yu-chun Shih, xi.
Contemplate the configurations [wen] of heaven to observe the changes of season; contemplate the configurations of man to accomplish the [cultural] transformation of the world.⁷

Although it is not concerned with literature, as we now understand it, the passage nevertheless contains the word wen, which, as we know, has a whole range of meaning, including literature per se.

It was not until the Western Jin dynasty (265-316) that Lu Ji 陸機 (261-303), a famous literary critic, wrote explicitly of the function of literature as the manifestation of the principle of the universe: "The functioning of literature lies in being the means for all natural principle." ⁸ Lu Ji was also the first person who came up with a definition of poetry in which the concept of qing was elevated to the same status as the zhi, as we shall see later. However, the fully developed concept of literature as a manifestation of the Way is only to be found in The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons (Wen xin diao long 文心雕龍), a monumental work by the pre-eminent literary critic Liu Xie 刘騫. This is a book dealing exclusively with the issues of literature: theories of literature, literary history, style, genres, and techniques. It is the most comprehensive and systematic work on literature ever written in pre-modern China.

Conspicuously titled "Yuan Dao", 原道, which means "tracing the origin
of the *Dao,*” or in the context of the book, “literature originates from the *Dao,*” the opening chapter delves directly into the origin of *wen* (literature) and identifies it with the *Dao.* Throughout the chapter Liu dexterously plays on the word *wen,* and by exploring its different layers of meaning attempts to establish an analogy between *wen* as literature and *wen* as patterns of the human and physical world. The book begins with the following passage:

The power of *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 that cleave to Heaven. Rivers and mountains are glittering finery, unrolling forms that give order to Earth. These are the patterns of the Way.

The *wen* in the beginning sentence can be understood either as literature, or the patterns of the physical world, thanks to the ambiguity of the word. Thus literature is linked at the very outset with the patterns of the physical world: Heaven and Earth, sun and moon, mountains and rivers.

Next, Liu goes on to introduce the human being, and to discuss his unique position in a universe of binary divisions, and to trace the emergence of literature:

Considering the radiance emitted above, and reflecting on the loveliness that inhered below, the positions of high and low were determined, and the two standards were generated. Only the human being, endowed with the divine spark of consciousness, ranks as a third with this pair. And they were called the Triad [Heaven, Earth, and human beings]. The human being is the fine essence of the elements: in fact, the mind of Heaven and Earth. When mind came into being,
language was established; and with the establishment of language, *wen* (literature) became manifest. This is the natural course of things, the Way.  

After locating the human being's unique position in the universe and delineating his special endowments, Liu explores the relations between the cosmic order and the human mind, between mind and language, and between language and literature. Liu points out in particular that the human being is “the mind of Heaven and Earth.”

In the following section, however, we shall find that the pattern of words is now the “mind of Heaven and Earth”:

The origins of the human pattern began in the Primordial. The Images of the *Book of Changes* were first to bring to light spiritual presences that lie concealed. Fu Hsi marked out the initial stages [by producing the trigrams of the *Changes*], and Confucius added the Wings [exegetical and cosmological tracts accompanying the *Changes*] to bring the work to a conclusion. Only for the two positions of Ch’ien and K’un did Confucius make the “Patterned Words.” For is not pattern in words “the mind of Heaven and Earth”? And then it came to pass that the “Yellow River Diagram” became imprinted with the eight trigrams; and the “Lo River Writing” contained the Nine Divisions. No person was responsible for these, which are the fruit of jade tablets inlaid with gold, the flower of green strips with red writing (*wen*): they came from the basic principle (*li*) of spirit (*shen*).
In this passage, Liu dexterously shifts from *wen* in the sense of culture (*ren wen* 人文) to *yan zhi wen* 言之文 (pattern of words), which is actually another way of designating literature. From natural *wen* to human *wen* to linguistic *wen* and finally to literary *wen* — Liu Xie leads us to trace smoothly the origin of literature through the key word *wen*, and literature is thus linked to the origin of the universe and accorded a status of cosmic significance.

The frequently-quoted axiom “literature conveys the *Dao*” actually dates back to a much later period: it was a statement made by Zhou Dunyi 周敦頤 (1017-73), a famous philosopher in the Song dynasty generally known as a pioneer of Neo-Confucianism. In his treatise entitled *Tong shu* 通書 [Penetrating the *Book of Changes*], he writes:

> The reason that literature is the vehicle of the Way is to be understood thus: If the decorated wheels and shafts of a carriage are not put to use, then the decorations are in vain. How much more so in the case of an empty carriage! Literature and rhetoric are arts; the Way and virtue are realities. When someone devoted to these realities and skilled in writing writes down the Way, if it is beautiful, then people will love it, and if they love it, then they will pass it on.  

As we can see, the Way here has a strong moralistic inclination and the whole

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12 Zhou Dunyi 周敦頤, "Tong shu wenci" 通書文辭 [The chapter on rhetoric in *Tong shu*], *Zhongguo lidai wenlun xuan* [Selected writings of Chinese literary criticism through the ages] ed. Guo Shaoyu 郭紹虞, Vol. 2 (Hong Kong: Zhonghua shuju, 1979) 60. 文之所以載道也，輪轅飾而人弗庸，徒飾也，況虛車乎。文辭，藝也；道德，實也。篤其實者而藝者書之，美則愛，愛則傳焉。The English translation is mine. All subsequent English translations of Chinese texts are mine unless otherwise indicated.
passage is permeated with the Confucian concern about the utilitarian aspects of literature. From then on, "literature is the vehicle of the Way," or "literature conveys the Dao," became a motto for generation after generation of Chinese writers and critics.

"Poetry expresses the zhi" is an even older concept than the idea that literature is a manifestation of the Dao. This laconic aphorism represents a primivistic notion of poetry in remote antiquity. Its origin is often traced to the Book of Documents (書經), which contains the following passage:

Poetry expresses in words the intent of the heart, songs prolong the words in chanting, notes follow the chanting, and pitch-pipes harmonize with the notes.\textsuperscript{13}

These words are traditionally attributed to the legendary sage Emperor Shun (2255-2208 B.C.). Although many scholars are doubtful about this saying, evidence shows that similar statements which embodied the same concept were current in the Spring and Autumn and the Warring States periods (722-222 B.C.). For instance, in "the 27th year of Duke Xiang," in the Zuo zhuan 左傳 [Zuo commentary], we find the words "poetry is used to verbalize the zhi" 詩以言志; and in the Zhuang Zi 莊子, we find "poetry is used to articulate the zhi" 詩以道志.\textsuperscript{14} However, it was not until the Eastern Han dynasty (A.D. 25-220) that the formulation "poetry expresses

\textsuperscript{13} See James J. Y. Liu, 69. 詩言志. 歌永言, 聲依永, 律和聲.

\textsuperscript{14} See Fudan daxue zongwen xi 復旦大學中文系 [the Chinese Department of Fudan University], Zhongguo wenxue piping shi 中國文學批評史 [History of Chinese literary
the zhi” found its most exhaustive elaboration. In the “Great Preface” to the *Book of Poetry*, which is commonly believed to represent the opinions of the majority of Confucian scholars in the Warring States and the Han periods, the nature and function of poetry are given the most authoritative treatment. In the “Great Preface,” we find the following passage:

The poem is the place where one’s zhi heads for. In the mind it is the zhi; articulated, it becomes a poem. The emotions are stirred within and take on form in words. If words alone are inadequate, we speak them out in sighs. If sighing is inadequate, we sing them. If singing them is inadequate, unconsciously our hands dance them and our feet tap them.¹⁵

Despite the ambiguity of the word zhi, this passage clearly shows how the poem comes into being as a result of the spontaneous expression of “what is intently on the mind.”

As to what this zhi is, different people interpret it in different ways, thus giving rise to both the “expressive” and “pragmatic” theories of literature, to borrow M. H. Abram’s terms.¹⁶ If the formulation “poetry expresses the zhi” is understood to be the subjective expression of an individual poet’s emotions (zhi interpreted as “heart’s wish” or “emotional purport”), then it can be taken as a statement of the expressive view of poetry; if the zhi refers to “mind’s intent” or “moral purpose” and “ethical concern,” then it is seen as a defense of the utilitarian function of

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¹⁵ Owen, 40. 詩者，志之所在也。在心為志，發言為詩。情動于中而形於言，言之不足故嗟嘆之，嗟嘆之不足故永歌之，永歌之不足，不知手之舞之，足之蹈之也。

¹⁶ In his seminal work *The Mirror and the Lamp*, M. H. Abrams proposes four literary theories (mimetic, pragmatic, expressive, and objective) to characterize the
literature. As a matter of fact, these two views are often intertwined and woven with each other, and their complicated and entangled relationship is concealed by the ambiguity of the word *zhi*. In the holistic way of thinking peculiar to the Chinese tradition, the inherent antithesis between these two conceptions of literature seems to be dissolved and transformed into a unity in which Chinese writers have found themselves justified to engage in the two different kinds of literary activities. The formula “poetry expresses the *zhi*” provides them with a solution to compromise the two conflicting views, although it has proved to be far too weak under the cosmological and moral weight of the statement “poetry conveys the *Dao*.”

Standing at the other extreme is the concept of *qing* 情, which may be translated as “emotion,” “feeling,” “sentiment,” “passion,” “affection,” etc. in English. Like its English counterparts, it has a great deal to do with a person's private ego and subjective feelings. It was first used by Xun Zi 荀子 (fl. 298-238 B.C.), founder of the naturalist school of Confucianism, when he wrote that “music is delight, which is inevitable in human emotions (*ren-qing* 人情).” 17 We also find it used in the “Record of Music” in the *Book of Rites* written in the Western Han dynasty (206 B.C.- A.D. 8): “All tones are engendered from the human mind. Emotions stir within and are expressed in sounds.” 18 However, it was in the “Great Preface” that the importance of *qing* was fully recognized and given due elaboration.

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17 See "On Music" in *Xun Zi*, quoted in *Fudan daxue zhongwen xi*, 37. 18 華樂者，人情之所以不免也.
There are a number of places in the "Great Preface" in which the concept of qing is discussed with emphasis on its role in the emergence of music and poetry and its relation with the notion of li 禮 [rites]. The most well-known is the remark that "the changed feng poetry is produced from emotions (qing), but it goes no further than rites and moral principles (li)." 19 Another passage, obviously influenced by the "Record of Music" in the Book of Rites, stresses further the role of emotions in the development of songs and poetry and how they are related to the government of the state:

Emotions are expressed in sounds, and when sounds are organized in patterns, we have tones. The tones of a well-managed age are peaceful and happy, which shows that its government is in order. The tones of a chaotic age are full of grievances and anger, which shows its government is perverse.20

Of course the concept of qing is not raised here to contradict the Confucian doctrine and challenge the authority of the Dao. Well aware of the role of emotions and feelings in poetic production, the authors of the "Great Preface" think it wise to channel them into the main current of the Way. To the mind of Confucian scholars, it would be much better to confine them within the bounds of rites and morality than let them go unchecked. If well guided, qing can work as a force to counterbalance the rites, which, while having the function of regulating the social relations through a system of distinctions, could be a destructive force when out of balance. As is clearly

18 Ibid., 41. 凡音者, 生人心者也. 情動于中, 故形於聲.
19 "Shi da xu" 詩大序 [the Great preface], Zhongguo lidai wenlun xuan, Vol. I, 44. 故 变風發乎情, 止乎禮義
20 Ibid., 44 情發於聲, 聲成文謂之音. 治世之音安以樂, 其政和; 亂世之音怨以怒,

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stated in the “Great Preface,” “Feelings can be sung in a song to criticize those above.” 21 Only by striking a balance between the expression of emotions (qing) and the observance of the rites (li) could the Way prevail. This is of course an idealized Confucian scheme. The crucial question is: when the importance of qing is recognized and given a legitimate status, will it always stay within the bounds of rites and go no further? This question is exactly what some of the more conservative Confucian scholars worried about the most.

The most famous remark about qing, however, was made by Lu Ji 陆机 (261-303) in his “Wen fu” 文賦 [Exposition on literature] written in the fu [ryhmeprase] form. A brilliant literary work in its own right, “The Exposition on Literature” explores the creative process and the writer’s relation with nature in an aesthetic imbued with Daoist ruminations. Lu Ji writes: “Lyric poetry springs from feelings and is exquisitely ornate;/The rhapsody gives form to an object, and is limpid and clear.” 22 What is significant about this saying is that in offering a definition of poetry, Lu Ji substituted qing for zhi. This was of course no small alteration. It was tantamount to openly declaring that qing was at least as important as zhi in poetic production. This statement in fact marked the beginning of a new era in Chinese literary thought. Since then, despite the efforts of orthodox Confucian scholars to trivialize it, the idea of qing has been established as an important critical concept to

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counterbalance the didactic view of literature. As Zhu Zijing 朱自清 remarked insightfully, Lu Ji's fresh expression actually highlighted the poetic trend of his time when more and more five-character poems were written in an emotional vein.\(^{23}\)

In this connection, I would like to mention a famous saying made by Confucius in the *Analects* which can also be seen as an illustration of how the difference between the pragmatic and expressive views of literature is contained within the authoritative power of Confucianism and the expression of personal emotion is placed alongside the utilitarian functions of poetry. In the *Analects*, Confucius is fond of making incidental remarks about literature. The following is perhaps one of the most well-known:

> Young men, why do you not study the *Poetry*? It can be used to inspire, to observe, to make you fit for company, to express grievances.\(^{24}\)

In this passage, emphasis is obviously placed on the utilitarian aspects of poetry: “to inspire, to observe, to make fit for company, to express grievances.” Although there is no shortage of exegeses concerning the interpretation of the four uses (expressed by four Chinese characters: *xing*, *guan*, *qun*, *yuan* 興, 観, 群, 怨), nor of their English translations, one thing that has often been ignored is that whereas the first three uses are mainly concerned with the utilitarian aspects of poetry from the point of view of the reader as well as the writer, the last one -- “to express

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\(^{23}\) See "Shi yan zhi bian" 詩言志辨 [An analysis of the idea that poetry expresses the *zhì*], *Zhu Ziqing wenji* [Selected works of Zhu Ziqing], Vol. 4 (Hong Kong: Wenxue yanjiu she, 1972) 1151.

\(^{24}\) See James Liu, 109. 小子何莫學乎詩? 詩可以興, 可以觀, 可以群, 可以怨.
grievances" — is, however, essentially pertinent to the creative process of the writer. *Yuan*, which may mean "grievance," "sorrow," "anguish," "woe," etc. in English, has to do only with the private feelings or emotions of the poet: he may express these personal feelings by composing a poem. This clearly points to the emotional dimension of classical Chinese poetry.

A reader may have the same feelings as the poet and find resonance with his poetry. He may also quote it on some occasions to express similar sentiments. However, the echoes one finds in the poem can only offer further evidence to testify to the fact that poetry can be the product of the poet's personal emotions. This is also an important aspect of poetry, one that is no less significant than the other more pragmatic and didactic uses. As Qian Zhongshu 錢鍾書 has remarked, "This concept [Poetry can be used to express grievances] was not only a familiar saying in literary criticism in ancient China, but also a formula in the actual practice of writing. Since we have seen and heard of it so often, we tend to forget it and fail to point out its conceptual importance in Chinese literary criticism." 25

To include these four functions of poetry in one statement is an embodiment of the effort to harmonize the two conflicting impulses in poetic creation and relate the emotional aspect of poetry to its other virtues. As is expounded further in the "Great Preface," "grievances and anger" often appear in "the tones of a chaotic age." 26

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25 Qian Zhongshu 錢鍾書, "Shi keyi yuan 詩可以怨 [Poetry can be used to express grievances]," *Ye shiji 也是集 [Barely a collection]* (Hong Kong: guangjiaojing chubanshe, 1984) 2.

That is a time which calls for *bian feng* 變風 [altered feng poetry] to criticize the misconduct of the government. However, as has been mentioned previously, the *bian feng* poetry, which is produced out of emotion (such as "grievances"), does not step beyond the boundaries of the rites and moral principles. Thus the expressive impulse in literature, as one might expect of Confucius's concern with a good society based on a good government and harmonious human relations, was subsumed in the universal *Dao*.

Cao Pi 曹丕 (187-226) was the first person who voiced the yearning for an autonomous literature capable of expressing personal emotions and feelings. In his essay "Lun wen" 論文 [Discourse on literature], which is one of the only two essays in his book *Dian lun* 典論 [Authoritative discourses] that have survived. The importance of this writing lies in the fact that a new concept, *qi* 氣, was introduced for the first time in Chinese literary criticism. Like the terms that we have discussed so far, *qi* is also a word with multiple meanings. Used originally in Chinese cosmology, it has been translated into English variously as "material force," "vital force," "vital power," "matter energy," and "spirit," in addition to its transliteration: ch'i, or *qi*. In literary criticism, particularly in the case of Cao Pi's essay, the concept of *qi* is understood as "individual genius based on temperament," or "that by which all other elements which contribute to the formation of a poem -- talent,

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28 See Chan, 784.
29 See Liu, 70.
learning, personality, the affections -- are animated,” although its transliteration is still the preferred form.\(^{30}\)

In his “Discourse on Literature,” Cao Pi claims:

In literature \(ch'i\) is the dominant factor. \(Ch'i\) has its normative forms -- clear and murky. It is not to be achieved by force. Compare it to music: though melodies be equal and though the rhythms follow the rules, when it comes to an inequality in drawing on a reserve of \(ch'i\), we have grounds to distinguish skill and clumsiness. Although it may reside in a father, he cannot transfer it to his son; nor can an elder brother transfer it to the younger.\(^{31}\)

For the first time, a new poetics was put forward in which what was most decisive in literature was neither the \(Dao\) nor the \(zhi\), but \(qi\). As pointed out by James J. Y. Liu, when applying the concept of \(qi\) (\(ch'i\)) to literature, Cao Pi made two significant modifications:

First, he conceived the difference in \(ch'i\) between individuals to be not only quantitative but also qualitative, for he remarked that the \(ch'i\) could be pure [or light] or impure [or heavy]; secondly he rejected the idea (shared by Mencius and the compilers of the Huai-nan Tzu) that the \(ch'i\) is subject to the control of the will (\(chih\)).\(^{32}\)

This resulted in a theory of poetry in which priority is given to the individuality of the poet and the spontaneous expression of his personal sentiments.

Cao Pi's idea of \(qi\) was further developed by Liu Xie. Being a good syncretic

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\(^{30}\) See Owen, 67.

\(^{31}\) Ibid., 65. 氣以氣為主, 氣之清濁有體, 不可力強而致, 執諸音律, 曲度雖均, 節奏同按, 至於引氣不齊, 巧拙有素, 雖在夫兄, 不能以移子弟.
like many Chinese scholars, Liu was not hesitant to embrace different views about literature in his *Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*, although its main thrust was still Confucian. In Chapter 27, "Tixing" [Style and personality], Liu claims:

Talent resides within, and is born of the physical vitality of the blood [i.e., *qi*]. This physical [and hence temperamental] vitality gives substance to the *zhi*, which determines the form language will take. The beauty one imparts to his language depends, therefore, entirely on his emotions and personality [*qing-xing*].

In this passage, Liu makes it abundantly clear that a poet's *qi* is what substantiates his *zhi*, and his *zhi* is what determines his personal style (language), whose beauty depends on the poet's emotions and personality. Hence the concept of *zhi* is linked with the poet's style, his temperament and personal emotions, as well as his *qi*, which not only gives birth to his talent, but also shapes his *zhi*. Thus the statement "poetry expresses the *zhi*" has acquired new dimensions which make it possible to deviate from the overpowering *Dao*. In this new light, "poetry expresses the *zhi*" can be paraphrased as "poetry expresses the poet's personality and subjective emotions, as well as his other intentions." Since *qi* in Chinese cosmology is also the primordial force the universe is made of (*qi* is the "vapor," so to speak), the significance of personal talent and feelings

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32 James Liu, 71.
33 Liu Xie 劉勰, *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons* translated and annotated by Vincent Yu-chung Shih (Hong Kong: the Chinese University Press, 1983) 309. I have made minor changes in the English translation. 才力居中, 敗自血氣; 氣以實志, 志以定言, 吐納英華, 莫非情性。
(which originate from \textit{xie-qi}) in poetic production is thus endowed with a cosmic nature and hence the concept of \textit{qing-xing} (emotions and personality) is entitled to an important position in the concept of \textit{zhi}.

Despite Liu Xie's effort to legitimize the expressive concept of literature, it could hardly withstand the power of the mighty Way with its cosmological and ethical claims. After all, in the eye of the Confucian, a poet's \textit{qing-xing}, or his emotions and personal nature, could be of relevance only when it was subsumed with the overarching \textit{Dao}.

For the next millennium or so, the concepts of \textit{qi} and \textit{qing-xing} in literary creation were overshadowed by the orthodox Confucian tradition in which the moral and pragmatic considerations always outweighed personal emotions and feelings. Except for a few isolated attempts to voice the concern about the importance of \textit{qi} and \textit{qing-xing} in literary production, the dominant trend was in the vein of Confucian didacticism. However, in the late Ming dynasty (1368-1644), the expressive theory of literature came back with a vengeance, and found its most vehement expression in Li Zhi's writing. Li Zhi (1527-1602), both condemned and acclaimed as the most heretic and iconoclast thinker in pre-modern China, belonged to the "Left Wing" of Wang Yangming's idealist school of Neo-Confucianism. In the celebrated essay "On the childlike heart" included in his book \textit{Fen shu} [A book to burn], he proposed the notion of "the childlike heart" in open opposition to the concept of the Confucian \textit{Dao}. Li Zhi declares that "the childlike heart is the true
heart” and those who have “the childlike heart” are “true men” who can create “true literature.” He says:

None of the great literary works under Heaven are not produced by those with the childlike heart. If one always keeps the childlike heart, then the Way and its principles will not work, and what has been heard and seen about the Way will not hold true. If this is so, then one can write literary works at any time, and everyone can be a writer.34

In another essay titled “Za shuo” 雜説 [Miscellaneous remarks], Li Zhi gives the old concept that “poetry can express grievances” a more graphic description:

In this world those who can really write did not intend to do so in the first place. In their bosom, there are so many strange things that can hardly be described; in their throat, there are so many things they want to pour out but dare not; in their mouth, there are often so many words they want to say but cannot find the place to say them. When these things have accumulated for a long time, they will no longer be contained. One day when one sees a scene that stirs up his emotions, he will heave a sigh over what he has seen. Then he will grab someone else's winecup to pour over his grievances, give vent to his feelings of injustice, and lament the ill fate of a thousand years.35

Under the direct influence of Li Zhi, the Yuan brothers of the Gongan School of the late Ming put forward the theory of xing-ling (nature and sensibility, or natural sensibility).

Derived from Li Zhi's "childlike heart" concept, the *xing-ling* theory of the Yuan brothers emphasizes the spontaneous expression of sincere and genuine feelings, as is evident from the following passage:

Ignore style and conventions and only follow your own natural sentiments. Do not write unless words flow from your bosom. Sometimes when emotions are fused with a scene, then thousands of words will be written in an instant, surging forth like the river flowing eastward. This will hold one in rapture. There are wonderful and blemished compositions. Wonderful pieces need no comment; even the blemished ones are created out of one's nature.  

Of the three Yuan brothers of the Gongan School, Yuan Hongdao 袁宏道 was the leader. Besides the concepts of *xing-ling*, he also stressed the importance of *zhi* 質 [substance]. According to Yuan Hongdao, *zhi* means true emotion and insight of an individual. In his literary theory, *zhi* is the essence of the *Dao*, and determines the outcome of literary creation. He said: "Zhi is the main part of the *Dao*, and conveyed in words, it becomes literature." As we can see, what he attempted to do was to change the meaning of the *Dao* as it was conventionally understood, and make it synonymous with *qing*. The *xing-ling* theory was further developed by Yuan Mei 袁枚 (1716-1797), a famous poet-critic of the Qing dynasty. Yuan asserts: "Poetry is born out of emotion. Immortal

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36 Yuan Zhonglang quanji 袁中郎全集 [Collected works of Yuan Zhonglang], quoted in Min Ze 敏澤, Zhongguo wenxue lilun piping shi [A history of Chinese literary theories and criticism], Vol. 2 (Changchun: Jilin jiaoyu chubanshe, 1993) 871.

poetry comes into being only after intense emotions.” However, Yuan's concept of xing-ling is different from that of the Yuan brothers in that it also refers to a special kind of poetic sensibility and creativity inherent in one’s nature, as can been seen from the following remarks:

Many of our contemporaries compel themselves to write poetry just for the sake of superficial fame. If poetry departs from their personal nature, and they lack talent and sensibility, they had better show their flair by striking the shaft of a carriage with a club, as the country folk do.

One last Qing critic we would like to mention is Ye Xie 葉燮 (1627-1703), a well-known scholar and literary critic in the early Qing period. Actually he lived at a time when Yuan Mei was not yet born. The reason why he deserves our attention is two-fold: firstly, he came up with a theory that embraced not only qing (Ye used the word to mean both “emotions” and “manner”), but also shi (meaning “matter,” “object,” “occurrence,” “event,” etc.), and li (order, principle); secondly, he was probably the first Chinese literary critic who proposed a poetics which contained some notions similar to the Western concept of mimesis.

He was surely a proponent of the expressive view of literature, since he agreed with the notion that “the purpose of writing poetry is to express one's personality.” He said further: “Since poetry is the voice of the heart, it is certainly not cast in the

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38 See Min Ze, 1187. 詩者由情生者也，有必不可解之情，而後有必不可朽之詩.
39 Ibid., 1190. 令人浮慕詩名而強為之，既離性情，又乏靈機，轉不若野眠之擊韎相杵，猶應風雅也.
same mold. If we are to summarize its basic principles, we may use three words to
describe them: \textit{qing} [emotion], \textit{shi} [event], and \textit{li} [principle]." \textsuperscript{41} In saying these
words, Ye might still stick to the original meaning of \textit{qing} in literary criticism:
\textit{"emotions," \textit{feelings}." However, from the elaboration on the three-word
principle of poetry in his work \textquotedblleft Yuan Shi [On the origin of poetry],\textquotedblright\ Ye made
it quite clear that \textit{qing} was used by him to mean \textit{"fact"} or \textit{"appearance."} Here I
would like to translate it as \textit{"essential conditions,"} as is suggested by A. C.
Graham\textsuperscript{42}:

Thus we have these three terms: \textit{"principle"} (\textit{li}), \textit{"event"} (\textit{shi}), and
\textit{"essential condition"} (\textit{qing}). If any one of them is missing, then the \textit{"thing"}
(\textit{wu}) is not complete. This is true for everything: from matters of great
importance, such as the determination of the positions of Qian and Kun, and the
movement of the sun and the moon, down to every grass, tree, bird, and beast. ... 
Literary works are what we use to describe the essential conditions and the way
of Heaven and Earth, and all the other things in the world as well. Take a tree or
a grass as an example. What enables it to come into existence is the
\textit{"principle"}; once it has life, it becomes an \textit{"event"}; once it has come to life,
it grows and flourishes, presenting a myriad of appearances and manners, and it
takes delight in being itself: these are its \textit{"essential conditions."} \textsuperscript{43}

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[40]{See James J. Y. Liu, 84.}
\footnotetext[41]{Quoted in Min Ze, 1131. 蓋詩為心聲, 不膠一輶, 謂其旨趣, 約以三語蔽之: 日情,日事, 日理.}
\footnotetext[42]{\textit{Qing} here is used in what A. C. Graham calls its "technical" sense. As A. C.
Graham points out, "In the technical sense as it first emerges in Sung Hsing, Chuang-
tzu, Mencius and the Later Mohists, the ch'\textit{ing} [\textit{qing}] of \textit{x} is that without which the
name \textit{x} would not fit it; the concept is close to the Aristotelian concept of \textit{essence}\nexcept in being tied to naming, not to being. ... I therefore prefer to use constructions
with 'essential' rather than translate ch'\textit{ing} directly by 'essence'." See A. C. Graham,
\textit{Disputers of the Tao} (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1989) 99.}
\footnotetext[43]{Ye Xie 葉燮 , \textit{Yuan shi} 原詩 [On the origin of poetry] (Beijing: Renmin wenxue
chubanshe, 1979) 21. 日理, 日事, 日情三語. 大而乾坤之定位, 日月之運行, ... 文章者,
所以表天地萬物之情狀也, ... 臂之一草一木, 其能發生意, 理也; 其既發, 則事也,
既發之後, 天貸滋植, 情狀萬千, 成有自得之趣, 則情也.}
\end{footnotes}
This passage seems to indicate that the three-word principle of poetry is grounded in a realist, materialist ontology. As Ye stated quite clearly, the aim of literature is to reflect the processes and appearances of all things in the universe, as well as their principles, and this, of course, presupposes a realist epistemology. So Ye Xie advises those who are good at learning to write poetry that they must "first of all engage in the investigation of things so as to complement their talent with knowledge; only then will they be qualified to write poetry and create a style of their own." 44 This is further attested by Ye's remark that "those works which bear a true resemblance to Nature set the best examples for perfect literature." 45 Ye Xie's On the Origin of Poetry is indeed an anomaly in the history of Chinese literary thought. Since his views were rare and definitely out of tune with the dominant trend of literary criticism, his works were often held in low regard by some conservative Confucian scholars and critics.

The advocates of the expressive theory of literature were always under pressure from orthodox Confucian theorists, who either dismissed their works as heretical or subjected them to moral interpretations. However, the majority of Chinese literati writers found themselves constantly wavering between these two literary orientations. For instance, Lu Ji, who invented the aphorism "lyric poetry springs from the feelings and is exquisitely ornate," claimed that both "feelings" and "mind" should be "nourished with ancient canons and scriptures" 46 and the function of literature is

44 Quoted in Min Ze, 1131. 故吾告善學詩者，必先從事於“格物”，而以識充其才，則質具而骨立.
46 Wen Xuan, 213.顧情志於典墳.
"indeed that on which a multitude of principles rest." Although Cao Pi was the first person who emphasized individual personality in poetic production by introducing a new concept of qi, he also asserted that literary works had a great bearing on the administration of the state. Even Li Zhi, the greatest heretic and arch-individualist, claimed that he himself was a "true Confucian" and a "true scholar of the Way." On the other hand, writers who subscribed to the orthodox Confucian doctrine sometimes betrayed their proclivity for the emotional aspects of literature. For example, Han Yu, a famous late Tang poet and a firm champion of Confucianism, defined the Dao in unequivocal moralist terms in his seminal essay "Yuan dao" [The origin of the Way]. However, in another essay titled "Song Meng Dongye xu" [Preface presented to Meng Dongye], Han Yu elaborated on the idea that literature expresses intense emotions such as grievances and sorrows. He created what was to become a very popular saying -- the phrase "bu ping ze ming" (meaning, "when stirred, an object will sound") -- as a metaphor to show that literature is the outpouring of stirred-up feelings within. Of course, the expression of such feelings in literary form should accord with the Confucian teaching. It should contain a social critique, and be kept within the confines of the rites and morality.

There are volume upon volume of writings in Chinese literary theory across the ages, and it is outside the scope of the present work to carry out an exhaustive study of them. However, from what we have discussed so far, we can see that in the

47 Ibid., 231.
48 See Owen, 68.
49 Min Ze, 837. “真儒”, “真道學”
whole history of classical Chinese literary thought, there were basically two major tendencies: the pragmatic and the expressive. Despite the fact that the pragmatic theory was the dominant trend, the two views of literature were always locked in a dialectic relationship in which ancient Chinese writers moved freely across their blurred boundaries. Representing the pragmatic view is the saying “poetry conveys the Dao,” which underscores a major concern with the Way of Life as well as the Way of Nature in literary creation. It demonstrates an intense interest in ontological, cosmological, and ethical aspects of literature. The expressive view is represented by the statement that “poetry springs from the feelings,” which, though primivistic in its origin, was further developed into a literary orientation emphasizing the spontaneous expression of private emotions and personal temperament. The remark that “poetry expresses the zhi” actually represents a compromise between the two - different poetics, depending on how the word is interpreted. The concept of qi furnishes zhi (the emotional half) and qing-xing a materialist as well as a cosmic significance. Conspicuously lacking in Chinese literary thought was the idea of mimesis. Although it was slightly touched upon by a very few critics, its influence, however, was minimal.

Literary Tradition: Chinese vs. Western

Comparing Chinese literary tradition with its Western counterpart, we find that the differences between them are indeed very great. They are manifest not only in the

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50 Guo Shaoyu, 443.
critical concepts, but also in other aspects, such as literary genres, form, style, methods, techniques, etc. The Western concept of mimesis is chiefly realistic in epistemology. It resulted from an outward-going sensibility to find a way of delving into the deep reaches of the physical world and human nature. Therefore, there is a strong cognitive element in mimesis. On the contrary, Chinese literary thought shows little interest in finding a way to know the external reality, since the way to apprehend the Way lies in human beings themselves: through self-oblivious pondering and intuitive enlightenment, one can identify with the Way. Another way to apprehend the Way is also clearly pointed out, i.e., through self-cultivation and self-realization. In other words, man can attain perfection and generate the highest form of good without the need to look beyond and transcend his own world. Confucius even said that “it is man that can make the Way great, and not the Way that can make man great.”

Since man can even make the Way great, of course there is no need to know the Way by means of mimesis. In the quest for reality, the Chinese way of understanding is more holistic-oriented and cares less about the dualities such as subject and object, mind and body, and man and God, than its Western counterpart. It is not that these divisions are not made, but that in the Chinese mind they are seen as forming a unity or harmony. However, to the Western mind nurtured in the transcendental philosophical tradition, the bifurcation between these opposites seems to have always prevailed over an integrative, holistic sense of understanding.

Another major difference between the Western and Chinese literary traditions

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51 Chan, 44. 人能弘道, 非道弘人
concerns the emotional aspect of poetry. Although subdued by the orthodox school of Confucianism, the expressive theory in Chinese literary criticism nevertheless has a long tradition and many followers. The intense interest in expressing private emotions and sentiments has given Chinese literature a strong inclination toward subjectivity. This subjectivity, however, should be in conformity with the Way as Confucius expounds it. According to the idealized Confucian scheme, the natural and moral Dao and the personal qing should be integrated and harmonized in an organic way. Deeply ingrained in Chinese philosophical thought in which there is no absolute division between the subjective and the objective, mind and body, man and nature, the expression of emotion is never just for the sake of expressing it. As Pauline Yu has remarked:

[what] is internal (emotion) will naturally find some externally correlative form or action, and that poetry can spontaneously reflect, affect, and effect political and cosmic order. In other words, the seamless connection between the individual and the world enables the poem simultaneously to reveal feelings, provide and index of governmental stability, and serve as a didactic tool.”

The intense interest in self-expression and the strong sense of subjectivity that have permeated Chinese literature since classical antiquity persisted into the modern era. In the May Fourth period, they worked in alliance with the imported romanticism as a powerful weapon to counter the stifling precepts of the literary tradition. Even in the 1980s when subjectivity as a “liberal humanist” concept was under attack in the West,

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it was experiencing an unprecedented revival in China and was hailed by critics such as Liu Zaifu as an idea with great emancipatory force.

In the West, the shift in the concept of the arts from one based on mimesis to one based on subjectivity and self-expression did not come until the romantic movement appeared on the scene to challenge the legitimacy of classicism at the end of the eighteenth century. What Plato fears most in poetry is the dangerous effects that its emotional elements may produce on the audience, since "poetry feeds and waters the passions instead of drying them up." This is also the main reason why Plato banishes poets from his ideal state. Aristotle is not opposed to the emotional side of poetry; as a matter of fact, he defends it in a very clever way by inventing the term catharsis—a device that can make harmful feelings beneficent. As Gerald F. Else points out, "In any case—and perhaps this is the most important thing in the long run—it is clear that Aristotle accepts, nay insists on an emotional as well as intellectual side of poetry."  

However, Aristotle's objective sensibility and his realistic orientation tended to make him view poetry as a form of knowledge and a means to express the universal, which often resulted in a lack of richness and variety in expressing personal insights and feelings. This is one of the reasons which led to the revolt of romanticism. So the expressive theory in the West actually emerged as a result of the strong disbelief in the tenets of neo-classicism. Romanticism, which embodies the premises of the expressive theory, is a literary movement with both a starting and ending date in the process of literary modernity in the West.

53 Boyd, 10.
One thing that the Western mimetic theory and Chinese poetics have in common is their emphasis on the communicativeness of literature. Because of its "given" quality, serious humanistic concern, and stress on verbal expressions, mimesis naturally demonstrates a strong desire to communicate. In other words, the poet is eager to interact with an audience through well-structured drama. The traditional Chinese poetics crystallized in the two statements "poetry expresses the zhi" and "literature conveys the Dao" also displays this tendency toward communication, as is evident from the verbs "express" (yari) and "convey" (zai). As a matter of fact, in Chinese literary thought, literature is seen essentially as an act of communication through which ideas are exchanged and moods are shared. For example, Yuan Congdao 袁崇道 (1560-1600) wrote in his famous essay titled "On Literature" (Lun wen 論文):

Therefore, when discussing literature, Confucius said: "Words are meant for communication. That is all." The difference between what is and what is not literature lies in whether it communicates or not.\(^{55}\)

In Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons, there is a chapter specially titled "Zhiyin" or "An understanding friend," expressing an earnest desire to find someone who really understands the poet's personal thought and feelings. Even in the modern era, aesthetic critics such as Zhu Guangqian still hold the view that literature is essentially the locus of community, which plays a vital role in joining individuals together spiritually. As Kirk Denton has observed, "These critics [aesthetic critics] saw

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\(^{54}\) Else, 7.

literature as fundamentally a communicative art, a process through which minds connect. This longing to communicate one's intention lies at the heart of traditional Chinese views of literature....” 56

Thus we can see that before the advent of the modern era, Chinese men of letter were wavering and vacillating between the pragmatic and the expressive views of literature for over two millennia, whereas in the West, the mimetic theory alone held the prestigious position in literature for about twenty-three centuries until the romantic movement. And this, I think, is the major difference between the Chinese and Western literary tradition and the principal reason why the route of literary modernity followed in the West is one characterized by shifting literary trends from romanticism to realism to modernism and postmodernism, and Chinese literature, despite the impact of Western literature, has taken an entirely different path to attain its literary modernity.

The May Fourth movement which took place in 1919 is often regarded as China's Enlightenment and the beginning of modern Chinese literature. However, efforts to launch China on the path of modernity date back to the mid-nineteenth century when the reform-minded Qing officials and scholars began to look for the secret of Western wealth and power. The way that they put forward to make China into a strong and wealthy nation without losing its basic Confucian values was the formula first proposed by Zhang Zhidong, the Governor-General of Hubei and Hunan: “Zhongxue wei ti, xixue wei yong” 中學為體, 西學為用 [Chinese learning as the goal, and Western learning as the
The Chinese defeat of 1895 in the Sino-Japanese War came as a shock to many of China's literati and awakened them to a sudden sense of crisis and urgency. They were beginning to realize that the question at issue was not simply one involving military might, or advanced industrial technology and commerce, but one involving the whole political, legal, and social structure of Western society, along with the Western ideas and values behind it.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, intellectuals who had been influenced by "Western learning" — particularly those who had studied overseas in Japan, Europe, and America — began to raise serious doubts about the validity of this formula, and openly challenged the supremacy of "Chinese learning." The weapon that they used to attack tradition was critical reason. As Vera Schwarcz points out, "In twentieth-century China, as in Europe a hundred and fifty years earlier, the discovery of critical reason has been heralded as a sign of transition from tradition to modernity." 57 However, from the very start, China's Enlightenment was intertwined with historical exigencies: Chinese intellectuals' enthusiasm to turn China into a modern nation was inevitably tied up with their passions for China's first nationalist revolution to overthrow the Qing dynasty. The corrupt and vulnerable Manchu rule was seen as an obstacle to national salvation and the root cause for all the stagnation and humiliation that China had suffered in her recent past. So from the very beginning, "qimeng" (enlightenment), was inseparably connected with "jiuwang" (national salvation), and the

56 Denton, 58.
success of “jiuwang” hinged to a great extent upon “jiuren,” i.e., the “salvation of the people.” The 1911 revolution which toppled the Qing dynasty was not a thorough revolution, and the republic established in its wake was only a republic in name. The political system was chaotic, and the old mentality still reigned supreme among the broad masses.

It was in this climate that a group of radical intellectuals rallied around the magazine *Youth* (later changed to *New Youth*) and started the New Culture movement in 1915. Disillusioned with the outcome of the 1911 revolution, they decided to embark on a quest for a new worldview. Taking “Democracy” and “Science” as their mottoes, these pioneers of enlightenment enthusiastically advocated liberalism, scientific thinking, and the critical spirit, and fiercely attacked Confucian values such as filial piety, and subservience. They turned to the West eagerly for new ideas and models in their iconoclastic rejection of the past. However, the mission of national salvation compelled them to search for an autonomous national identity with which to arouse and rally the masses and combat the threat of the West, and this could best be sought in tradition. Therefore, May Fourth intellectuals were constantly caught up in the tension between totalistic anti-traditionalism and nationalism. As we shall see, this fundamental contradiction runs through the entire course of China’s modernity project.

On May 4, 1919, this New Culture movement came to a climax in the form of a student demonstration in Beijing against the warlord government for its compliance with the decision of the Versailles Peace Conference to cede Shandong Province to Japan. Later this event turned into a nationwide movement for cultural and political awakening.
One of the greatest achievements of the May Fourth movement is a “new literature,” i.e., May Fourth literature, which signaled the beginning of a new era in the history of Chinese literature: modern Chinese literature. This is quite understandable, since in a country like China, a benign national culture is generally considered to have an important bearing on the effort to modernize China, and literature in particular is always assigned the key role in the building of a new national culture.

The new literature in the May Fourth era actually had its roots in the New Culture movement in the years of intellectual ferment and agitation immediately preceding May Fourth. By general consensus, the starting point for modern Chinese literature is set at the year 1917, when Hu Shi and Chen Duxiu published their two famous articles on literary reform, titled respectively “Wenxue gailiang chuyi” 文學改良芻議 [Some modest proposals for the reform of literature] and “Wenxue geming lun” 文學革命論 [On literary revolution]. It has a prehistory which dates from an even earlier time: the year 1898 when Liang Qichao 梁啓超 wrote his well-known essay “Yi yin zhengzhi xiaoshuo xu” 譯印政治小說序 [Foreword to the publication of political novels in translation].

If the romantic movement in the West took the first step in the direction of literary modernity, May Fourth literature in China represents the initial effort in China's

modernity project in literature. However, unlike its Western counterpart, which was well-defined and characterized by clearly-stated principles, the literary movement at the beginning of Chinese literary modernity appeared somewhat amorphous and complicated. There are at least three important factors which contributed to its formation and development: tradition, China's historical exigencies, and the influence of foreign literature. What played a decisive role in its formative process is first and foremost China's age-old literary tradition. The influence of foreign literature and China's historical imperatives also contributed significantly to its growth.

Confronted with the historical contingencies, the pragmatic and expressive views in the Chinese literary tradition developed into two widely divergent attitudes in the May Fourth period. The early exponents of a new literature were torn between these two impulses, with some in favor of the one, and some subscribing to the other, and still some wandering between these two positions. For instance, Liang Qichao elevated the utilitarian role of literature to a disproportionate height, claiming that “fiction has four powers to influence the way of man,” whereas Wang Guowei upheld an aesthetic view of literature, asserting that “'bread and butter literature’ can never be literature.” In one of his early essays titled “On the Power of Mara Poetry,” Lu Xun displayed an ambivalent attitude, attempting to negotiate between these two opposing views. On the one hand Lu Xun said that “From the vantage point of pure

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literature, the essence of all art is to rouse and delight its audience, and so it should be
with literature, as one of the arts. It has nothing to do with the existence of individuals or
nations. It is completely divorced from material gain, and no philosophy is to be dug out
of it." 62 On the other hand, he also spoke approvingly of the “demonic” voices of
Mara poets who would “bellow an audience to its feet,” and claimed that “Poetry, in
its integration with morality, in its soundness of concept, has life and immortality.” 63
Later writers such as Zhou Zuoren 周作人 and Mao Dun 茅盾 appeared more resolute in
their onslaught against the two time-honored axioms “poetry expresses the zhi” and
“literature conveys the Dao,” since to their mind, these two sayings represented the
totality of traditional literary values. However, they either betrayed their tacit approval of
“literature conveying the Dao” by censuring the works of the Mandarin Ducks and
Butterfly school, or showed their allegiance with the slogan by replacing the old Dao
with a new Dao. For some May Fourth writers and critics, this new Dao was the Real, or
the Zeitgeist, or History, as Kirk A. Denton has observed. 64 For some others, such as
Zhou Zuoren, the moral content of their new Dao does not differ very much from the
Dao explicated by the late Tang poet Han Yu. 65

With the extensive translation of Western literature and literary theories, Western
literary genres and values were introduced into China. For the first time, the Western

62 Lu Xun 魯迅, "On the Power of Mara Poetry," Modern Chinese Literary
Thought, 105.
63 Ibid., 107.
64 See Denton, 36-7.
65 Ibid., 37.
concept of mimesis and a host of different literary modes, such as romanticism, realism, symbolism, were brought into China almost simultaneously. While emphasizing that Chinese literary tradition plays a determining role in shaping the contours of Chinese literary modernity, we should not overlook the massive impact of the Western literary tradition, but this is to be understood in the context of Chinese literary tradition and China's historical contingency. In China where the Aristotelian sense of mimesis is lacking in its literary tradition, the introduction of an alien concept in the form of realism could especially fulfill a need and provide a useful literary mode for a twentieth-century Chinese writer caught up in the tensions between aesthetic impulses and social-historical imperatives, and between tradition and modernity. The precepts of realism, particularly its hidden agenda of social criticism, cater to the function of spiritual transformation assigned to literature by many of the May Fourth intellectuals. Western romanticism, along with its strong note of personal emancipation and emphasis on the release of individual energies, was also welcomed with open arms, since it could be easily identified with the tradition stressing the expression of personal feelings and appropriated favorably in the assault on tradition. As we shall see later, however, as Western literary trends and techniques were introduced into China, they underwent metamorphoses and were modified to harmonize with traditional literary thought and the tenor of the time. Romanticism, realism, and modernism which were antithetical with each other in the West could be adapted and incorporated into China's modern literary discourse all at once irrespective of their original intentionality and overtones.
Especially in the 1920s, Chinese writers embraced Western realism and romanticism with great enthusiasm, oblivious to the fact that romanticism was long gone in the West, and realism, as a literary mode diametrically opposed to romanticism, had already passed its heyday. Very few Chinese writers were aware that a new literary trend was already on the rise in the West -- the modernist trend. The works of such towering modernist figures as James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Thomas Mann, Franz Kafka, and Ernest Hemingway were barely known to their Chinese contemporaries, and it was not until the 1930s and 1940s that surrealism and the stream-of-consciousness technique were introduced into China and a small circle of Chinese writers were beginning to experiment with these new methods. The premises of romanticism and realism especially struck a chord with Chinese writers of the twenties and found resonance at the depths of their psyche where traditional views of literature were entrenched. It seemed to them that the tenets of romanticism coincided with the motto “poetry springs from feelings,” and realism could be appropriated as a means to convey the new Dao. However, when they did apply romanticism and realism in practice, Chinese writers betrayed their anxiety and uneasiness with these radically alien modes. They had to be

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66 For instance, Xu Zhimo 徐志摩 and Lin Huiyin 林徽音 are among the first few writers who tried to experiment with the new techniques introduced from the West. Xu Zhimo's story "Lunpan" 轮盘 [The roulette] and Lin Huiyin's "Jiushi jiu du zhong" 九十九度中 [In the heat of 99 degree Fahrenheit] are said to have imitated Virginia Woolf's style. See Zhang Daming et al. eds., Zhongguo xiandai wenxue sichao shi Vol. 2 [A history of modern Chinese literary trends] (Beijing: Shiyue wenyi chubanshe, 1995) 927-8. Shen Congwen 沈从文 is another famous writer of fiction whose enthusiasm in literary innovation and experimentation few of his contemporaries could rival. He experimented with the stream-of-consciousness technique in such a creative way that it virtually merged with his aesthetic acumen rooted in traditional Chinese poetics.
modified to adapt to traditional Chinese literary values and historical contingency. This again reveals the tension inherent in the consciousness of May Fourth intellectuals, i.e. the tension between iconoclasm and nationalism.  

One thing that we should keep in mind is that the old concepts of the Dao and qing, and those of didactic utilitarianism and expressive aestheticism in the Chinese literary tradition were still at work. Whichever literary “school” he or she belonged to, none of the Chinese writers could be exempt from the influence of these traditional concepts of literature. For example, Chinese romantic writers such as Guo Moruo and Yu Dafu were often accused of producing an empty literature divorced from life and promoting art for art’s sake, and the romanticists were eager to disassociate themselves from these accusations by declaring that “art with no connection to life is no art.” This may explain in part why modernism did not fare very well in the May Fourth era. The reasons may be multifarious. However, one major reason is the overriding concern with the new Dao. The “obsession with China,” to quote C. T. Hsia’s well-known phrase, precludes the emergence of any auratic literature that is divorced from China’s social and historical imperatives. This was more so from the late 1920s, through the 1930s, to the Anti-Japanese war period (1937-1945) when literature increasingly succumbed to political demands. Only realism, whose tenets seemed to contain the greatest potential for cultural transformation, was highly thought of and resolutely promoted, but the realism in the Chinese context was no longer what it was in its original Western milieux,

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67 Kirk A. Denton has made a wonderful study of the reception of realism and romanticism in China and how attempts were made to infuse traditional views into these alien literary modes. See Denton, 26-54.
having undergone modification and adaptation in the hands of Chinese writers. The idea that “literature representing life” was changed by Zhou Zuoren and Mao Dun into “literature equaling life.” As Denton points out, “To see literature as ‘equaling life,’ or embodying life, empowers it with an almost cosmological force that may then allow it to exert a transforming influence on life.”

Confronted with socio-political imperatives and deeply immersed in tradition, Chinese writers have been trapped in the tensions between iconoclasm and nationalism, between utilitarianism and expressivism in their quest for reality. They have been trying to find a way out of the dilemma by negotiating among different approaches and orientations, both Chinese and foreign. However, in a tradition where Confucian doctrine has always loomed large, it is difficult, if not entirely impossible, to escape the influence of the overpowering Dao and zhi. The ideas behind the concepts of “poetry expressing the zhi” and “literature conveying the Dao” seem to encourage the encroachment of the cognitive-instrumental and moral-practical rationalities on the aesthetic-expressive rationality. This means that China is still a long way from attaining the ideal situation of an auratic literature with full autonomy and independence. Even though writers and artists have gained freedom from political interference and ideological orthodoxy, it is still impossible to free themselves from the influence of cultural tradition. Possessing a tradition that essentially favors an integrative, holistic way of thinking, perhaps China will never have a truly autonomous art in the same sense as it is

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68 Denton, 40.
understood in the West, i.e., an art in which the emancipated aesthetic subjectivity and individuality can fully assert themselves.

The problem with China's project of modernity is that the splitting of culture into three autonomous spheres of science, morality (including jurisprudence), and art came very late and was incomplete. As a matter of fact, China is still in the middle of this separation, and, given the holistic cultural tradition, whether it will be completed is questionable. We might even say that in China, aesthetic-expressive rationality is still a goal to strive for. While subjectivity is out of fashion, particularly in the eyes of postmodernists, in the West, it is nonetheless a positive, emancipatory force in China.

The heated discussion about zhuti xing [subjectivity] initiated by literary and philosophical theorists such as Liu Zaifu 劉再復 and Li Zehou 李澤厚 in the 1980s clearly indicates that the ideal of a humanist, autonomous literature of subjectivity is something yet to be realized in China. As Liu Zaifu contends, the recognition of the primacy of subjectivity and individuality is of paramount importance in the transformation of cultural conceptions in China's project of cultural modernity.69

As a late-comer in literary modernity, China can certainly profit from Western experience and draw lessons from its Western predecessors. Being an inevitable step in cultural modernization, the assertion of autonomy in the domain of art is irreversible, and its independence should not only be preserved but also work as a force of negation to

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69 See Liu Zaifu 劉再復, "Zhongguo xiandai wenxue shi shang dui ren de sanci faxian" [Three discoveries of humanity in the history of modern Chinese literature], Liu Zaifu ji [Selected works of Liu Zaifu] (Harbin: Heilongjiang jiaoyu chubanshe, 85
counterbalance the infringement of instrumental rationality. However, as the process of rationalization deepens, literature becomes more and more divorced from the lifeworld and turns into a sphere of experts. Furthermore, the reifying dynamics of economic and bureaucratic imperatives have kept encroaching upon the domain of literature by means of the "steering media of power and money" (Habermas's words). All this may result in a "cultural impoverishment" which will threaten the success of modernity. China's belated literary modernity can certainly benefit from the experience of the West, particularly with regard to the idea of autonomy in literature and the arts.

There seems to be a paradox between the autonomy of art and its integration with life, but in actuality they do not necessarily conflict with each other. What is truly paradoxical here is that sometimes rather than simply lengthening the distance between art and life, and thus strengthening the former's autonomous status, the increased focus on form and language which grew out of the idea of autonomy is conducive to the shortening of this distance. Autonomy of literature usually implies both freedom from political intervention and ideological orthodoxy and freedom to experiment with form and language. These two kinds of freedom do not necessarily suggest in any way the separation of literature from empirical reality. "Reality" is never an absolute concept. There can be many versions and interpretations of reality produced by writers through a variety of literary means and devices, be they realist or modernist, or whatever. The autonomy of art is contrasted with science and morality. It is not necessarily opposed to life.
In his book *All That is Solid Melts Into Air*, Marshall Berman gives “modernity” the following definition:

There is a mode of vital experience -- experience of space and time, of the self and others, of life's possibilities and perils -- that is shared by men and women all over the world today. I will call this body of experience “modernity.”  

What is implied in this broad and open definition is that for all of us modernity is something we experience, something very real, something inseparable from our time and environment. This explains why Berman says in another place that “for all of us, modernism is realism.” For many Chinese writers, literary modernity is their “experience of space and time, of the self and others, of life's possibilities and perils,” which they try to describe and portray, by whatever literary means they think fit. Since the start of the modern era, Chinese writers have been searching incessantly for an appropriate literary form or mode that would best integrate literature with their life experience in the modern “maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish.” By negotiating among different kinds of literary modes, both domestic and foreign, be they romantic, realist, symbolist, modernist, or traditional, successive generations of Chinese writers since the May Fourth have been striving painstakingly to build a literature that is both modern and typically Chinese. The modern potentialities inherent in China's rich literary legacy have played a vital part in this process, and they will continue.

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71 Berman, 14.
exercising their immense influence on Chinese writers in their quest for the truth of reality.

Perhaps by now it is clear how and why Chinese literary modernity is different from its Western counterpart, and why it should take its own course, instead of following the route taken in the West: from romanticism to realism to modernism to postmodernism. It is also clear, then, why it is futile to engage in a debate over whether there is postmodernism in China. For Chinese writers, the path to literary modernity may be a long and tortuous journey. The epigraph at the beginning of *Wandering*, one of Lu Xun's short story collections, is a quote from the *Li sao* [Encountering sorrow], a famous poem written by the great Chu poet Qu Yuan 屈原 (ca. 340-278 B.C.) more than two thousand years ago: “Long, long stretches the road, and far, far is my journey./To seek truth, I will search high and low.” The epigraph portrays exactly the pensive mood Lu Xun was in in the twenties when he was wandering and groping for truth. For many contemporary Chinese writers, this quote may still hold true. Believing that they are the legitimate heirs of the May Fourth, they will certainly persist in the quest for reality as China's project of modernity continues.

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72 Ibid., 15.
Chapter Three:

THE IRONIC, THE LYRICAL, AND THE PARODIC:

LU XUN'S MODES OF FICTION

Lu Xun's literary virtuosity and creativity have long established him as the greatest Chinese writer of the twentieth century. His literary interests cover a wide range: from the writing of short stories, prose poetry, classical-style poetry, and the *zawen* [miscellaneous essays], to the compilation of ancient tales and the translation of foreign literature and literary criticism; and he excels in each of the above-mentioned fields. In terms of the quantity of his creative works, the *zawen* essays certainly comprise the bulk of his writing, with a total of sixteen volumes to his credit. By comparison, the output of his short stories is rather meager: he wrote only 34 stories in his lifetime. The first piece, titled “Remembrances of the Past,” [Huai jiu 懷舊, 1911] is a story written in classical Chinese, and the rest 33 stories, written in the vernacular language, are contained in three slim collections: *A Call to Arms*, *Wandering*, and *Old Stories Retold*. To be sure, in terms of sheer quantity, they do not comprise an impressive amount. However, if we examine them in terms of literary excellence and in the context of Chinese writers' quest for reality and literary modernity, their importance in modern Chinese literature cannot be overstressed.

Although written in the classical Chinese idiom, Lu Xun's first story “Remembrances of the Past” already demonstrates certain traits of modernity: a
story told from a subjective point of view and characterized by a strong lyrical mood and ironical vision. His first story written in colloquial Chinese entitled "A Madman's Diary" (1918) is, as William A. Lyell has observed, "the first truly modern short story -- modern in content, structure, and language -- in the Chinese literature of the period." The immense success of this story made Lu Xun famous almost overnight and soon established him as the leader of the New Literature movement. As a writer of short fiction, Lu Xun was certainly not prolific, and the thirty-four stories which he wrote in his whole lifetime only constitute a small portion of his oeuvre. However, because of their enormous significance in the process of Chinese literary modernity, Lu Xun's stories have always been accorded a lofty status and Lu Xun himself has been hailed as the pioneer and founder of modern Chinese literature.

The modernity of Lu Xun's fiction can be approached from different perspectives. We may discuss it in terms of content, structure, and rhetoric, or we may study it by looking at the theme, technique, and characterization of his fiction, or we may characterize it from the point of view of literary trends, i.e., realism, romanticism, symbolism, etc. These are indeed viable schemes through which both Chinese and Western scholars have approached the problem. In China, the tendency to deify Lu Xun ever since his death in 1936 has greatly hampered the study of Lu Xun's works from diversified viewpoints. Since in the May Fourth era realism was assigned the dual function of acting both as a weapon with which to

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1 See Lu Xun, *Diary of a Madman and Other Stories* trans. William A. Lyell
launch an assault on traditional literature and as a new literary vehicle to carry the new Dao, it was elevated to a status of literary orthodoxy dedicated to the lofty mission of transforming the national spirit and national character. As far as Lu Xun's fiction is concerned, the unified opinion in China before 1958 was that Lu Xun was a thoroughgoing realist, and his stories represent a remarkable achievement of realism in China. It was taboo to discuss Lu Xun's fiction in terms of romanticism or symbolism for fear that these "individualist and bourgeois" aesthetic modes might mar the image of Lu Xun as a great thinker and revolutionary fighter. Since 1958, the romantic elements in his fiction have drawn more and more attention from Chinese scholars, but until 1977, symbolism was still a term that people chose to avoid when they studied Lu Xun's works.


2 Some people even went so far as to claim that Lu Xun is the "great pioneer and representative writer of socialist realism in China," and his *Diary of A Madman* "is not devoid of the initial signs of a burgeoning socialist realism." See Xu Zhongyu 徐中玉, *Guanyu Lu Xun de xiaoshuo, zawen he qita* 關於魯迅的小說, 雜文和其它 (About Lu Xun's fiction, miscellaneous essays, and others) (Shanghai: Xin wenyi chubanshe, 1957) 17.

3 The orthodox status of realism in China virtually forbade the study of Lu Xun's fiction from the perspective of romanticism before 1958, the year when Mao Zedong made the remark that "the way out for Chinese poetry is, firstly, the folk song, and secondly, the classical-style poem. ... Its form should be that of the folk song, and its content a unity of antitheses, i. e., the unity of realism and romanticism." This proposition was further amplified by some theoreticians and scholars. It was Guo Moruo 郭沫若 who first spoke of Lu Xun as an example of this marriage of realism and romanticism. In an article titled "Romanticism and Realism" published in *Hong Qi* [Red Flag] in 1958, Guo claimed that "admittedly, Lu Xun was a great writer of realism, but there was no lack of strong romantic elements in his works." See Zhu Zai ed., *Zhongguo dangdai wenxue sichao shi* 中國當代文學思潮史 [A History of contemporary Chinese literary thought] (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1987) 348-351. The discussion of Lu Xun's stories in terms of symbolism was only possible after the downfall of the Gang of Four in 1976 when a more open attitude was encouraged in academic studies. As Yan Jiayan 嚴家炎 has remarked, "For a long time, we rarely mentioned the romantic
have drastically changed since 1977, and romanticism and symbolism in Lu Xun's fiction are no longer forbidden subjects of study. It even seems fashionable nowadays to discuss Lu Xun's works from the perspective of symbolism. For instance, some people argue that "symbolism in Lu Xun's works should be accorded more importance than romanticism." Of course there are no such taboos in the West in the study of Lu Xun's works. C. T. Hsia, Patrick Hanan, Douwe Fokkema, Lin Yü-sheng, Leo Ou-fan Lee, and other scholars have approached Lu Xun's fiction from many different perspectives. Their fruitful studies have deepened our understanding of Lu Xun elements in Lu Xun's fiction (especially before 1958), either because of limitations in our understanding, or because of the orthodox status of realism. As for symbolism, we have virtually turned our back on it, oblivious to its existence." See Yan Jiayan, "Lu Xun xiaoshuo de lishi diwei" [The historical significance of Lu Xun's fiction], Jinnian Lu Xun dansheng yibai zhounian yueshu taolun hui lunwen xuan [Selected papers of the Symposium in Commemoration of the Centenary of Lu Xun's Birth] (Changsha: Hunan renmin chubanshe, 1981) 269. Actually, as early as 1923, Mao Dun 茅盾 already drew attention to the symbolic elements in Lu Xun's "Diary of a Madman." In an article entitled "On Reading A Call to Arms," Mao Dun wrote the following words when commenting on "Diary of a Madman": "The dispassionately elegant sentences and the lofty manner, contrasted with ambiguity in meaning, and a pale shade of symbolism, constitute its extraordinary style. No sooner has one read it than he feels a kind of sad happiness hard to describe in words." Quoted in Wang Runhua 王潤華, Lu Xun shiaoshuo xin lun 魯迅小説新論 [New explications of Lu Xun's short stories] (Shanghai: Xuelin chubanshe, 1993) 37. However, ever since realism was raised to a disproportionate height to the neglect of other literary modes, Mao Dun himself refrained from mentioning symbolism in Lu Xun's works.

A quick browsing through the articles published since 1977 on Lu Xun's works reveals that "symbolism" is one of the most frequently used critical terms. This is particularly true of Lu Xun's Yecao 野草 [Wild grass], a collection of prose poems, on which many critics are lavish with the use of the word "symbolism."

See Wang Runhua, Lu Xun xiaoshuo xin lun, 37.

For example, C. T. Hsia presents a general study of Lu Xun's fiction in the chapter on Lu Xun in his pathbreaking book History of Modern Chinese Fiction. Basing himself on the principle of "the discovery and appraisal of excellence" typical of New Criticism in the West, Hsia discusses Lu Xun's stories mainly in
as an intellectual of complex thought and emotions, as well as a writer of great
talents caught up in the historical turbulence at the dawning of the modern age --
the May Fourth period.

To be sure, like many May Fourth intellectuals, Lu Xun took an
iconoclastic attitude toward Chinese cultural tradition, but to say that Lu Xun is an
antitraditional iconoclast is an oversimplification which ignores the complexity of
his consciousness characterized by constant intellectual contradictions and spiritual
tensions. As Leo Ou-fan Lee has well observed, "It may be possible to find two
sides of Lu Xun's identity as a writer. As a leading intellectual of the May Fourth
era, he was 'future-oriented and totalistic.' As a literary man and a man of
sentiment he still clung to memories of the past and to past forms. But Lu Xun's
long journey to the role of a writer demonstrated that the two persons were closely
intertwined and interactive." Lu Xun's complex consciousness and contradictory
terms of theme, structure, and technique against the background of modern
Chinese literature and the challenge of the Western tradition. Hsia speaks briefly
of "the realist exposé of the traditional way of life" and "the symbolic parable" in
some of Lu Xun's stories. As its title indicates, Patrick Hanan's essay "The
Technique of Lu Hsun's Fiction" is concerned with the technique that Lu Xun
employs in the writing of fiction, and Hanan approaches it basically from the
perspective of irony and how this Western concept has exercised its influence on
Lu Xun's works. In his study on the impact of Russian literature on Lu Xun's
fiction, Douwe W. Fokkema points out that Lu Xun was particularly drawn to the
romanticist and symbolist values in Russian literature and was less interested in its
realist values. Lin Yu-sheng attempts to reveal Lu Xun's complex consciousness
through an analysis of some of his representative stories, such as "Diary of a
Madman" and "The True Story of Ah Q." Leo Ou-fan Lee chooses to discuss Lu
Xun's fiction and its modernity by looking at its relationship with both the Chinese
literary tradition and Western literature. His approach is, as he claims, "to see how
he [Lu Xun] manages to evolve something new in both form and content by
transforming and thereby transcending traditional Chinese influences, while
consciously borrowing from Western literary models."
frame of mind inevitably found their way into his short stories. To put it otherwise, we may as well say that the stories which he wrote were in tune with his ambivalent stance toward tradition and his general conception of literature. So before we proceed to discuss the modernity of his short fiction, it seems appropriate to take a look at Lu Xun's conceptions of literature and how they are related to the Chinese literary tradition.

All his life Lu Xun showed an unusual fascination with premodern Chinese literature. Apart from his distinguished achievements in the scholarly pursuit of classical Chinese literature which started long before he gained a reputation as a short story writer, he was also interested in rubbings from ancient stone tablets, rare editions of ancient books, and classical poetry, etc., all these being favorite pastimes typical of urbane Chinese literati in the past. He continued writing classical poems almost to the very end of his life. His *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction* is the first comprehensive and systematic history of classical Chinese fiction, and its solid scholarship still marks it off as a standard reference for students of traditional fiction. Another remarkable work which testifies to his erudition in as well as his preoccupation with classical literature is *Ji Kang ji 稡康集 [The works of Ji Kang]*. This meticulously collated edition of the works of Ji Kang 稡康 (223-263), which represents one of the major achievements of Lu Xun's life as a classic scholar, was considered the most authoritative edition of that
author from its publication in 1938 until 1962 when a new edition of Ji Kang was published by a scholar who is said to have drawn heavily on Lu Xun's book.8

All this suggests that Lu Xun as a renowned scholar of classical literature was certainly more attached to the Chinese literary tradition than the average man of letters in his time. However, as one of the celebrated leaders of the New Culture and New Literature movement in the May Fourth era, Lu Xun is also known to be a radical antitraditionalist who displayed an unyielding combative spirit in his resolute assault on tradition. In analyzing the complex consciousness of Lu Xun, Lin Yû-sheng says: “Lu Hsûn [Xun]'s consciousness is characterized by a profound and unresolved tension between an iconoclastic totalism and an intellectual and moral commitment to some traditional Chinese values.” 9 Living at a critical historical period rife with tension and crisis, Lu Xun's consciousness was not exempt from the general tenor of the times marked by a radical antitraditional iconoclasm for emancipation from a feudal worldview and an ardent quest for the way of national salvation from foreign threat.

However, as Lin points out further, “whereas his complex consciousness testifies to the profundity of twentieth-century China's crisis of culture, it was least representative of the May Fourth intelligentsia.” 10 To my understanding, this means not only that Lu Xun was possessed with a consciousness whose complexity

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10 Lin Yû-sheng, "The Morality of Mind and Immorality of Politics: Reflections
and sophisticatedness few of the May Fourth intellectuals could rival, but also that his literary achievements, which could only have been born out of his complex frame of mind and conflicting aesthetic impulses, were second to none among his contemporaries; and this complex consciousness is best demonstrated in his attitude toward Chinese tradition and his conception of literature.

Unlike many of his contemporaries such as Hu Shi 胡适 and Chen Duxiu 陳獨秀, Lu Xun's attitude toward tradition was not one of total rejection; and with regard to literature, Lu Xun harbored an extremely ambivalent attitude that could be traced to the two traditional literary orientations that we have discussed in the second chapter: the didactic and the expressive; and unlike many of his contemporary writers, Lu Xun was not committed entirely to the idea that literature could be utilized as a means for the transformation of social mores and the remolding of the national spirit. Whereas he believed in the priority of intellectual and spiritual revolution, he was torn between the idea that literature can be used to enlighten the people, and the idea that literature was essentially an art form which "has nothing to do with the fortunes of an individual or a nation." 11

In the preface to A Call to Arms, Lu Xun gave us the reason why he decided to pursue a literary career instead a medical one, after recounting the by now famous incident at the Sendai Medical College in Japan:

The people of a weak and backward country, however strong and healthy they might be, could only serve to be made examples of or as witnesses of such futile spectacles; and it was not necessarily deplorable if

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many of them died of illness. The most important thing, therefore, was to change their spirit; and since at that time I felt that literature was the best means to this end, I decided to promote a literary movement.  

This is actually the public stance that Lu Xun took toward the functional role of literature. He essentially remained true to this idea ever since, even though his conception of literature betrayed a serious tension between antithetical impulses when he was engaged in the actual writing of his literary works.

The belief that literature could be appropriated as a means to achieve spiritual and cultural transformation of the nation is one of the basic presuppositions of what Lin Yu-sheng refers to as the "cultural-intellectualistic" mode of thinking characteristic of May Fourth intellectuals, which "stressed the necessary priority of intellectual and cultural change over political, social, and economic changes." And, as Lin explicates further, "the cultural-intellectualistic approach was influenced by a deep-seated traditional Chinese predisposition, in the form of a monistic and intellectualistic mode of thinking." This is exactly where the radical anti-traditionalist iconoclasm of May Fourth was rooted. Literature, because of its didactic function crystallized in the aphorism of "literature conveying the Dao," could certainly be utilized to achieve the goal of changing the morality and spirit of the Chinese nation, and this goal can be construed as the major ethicopolitical content of the new Dao of the May Fourth

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13 Lin, 26.
14 Ibid., 28.
era. Lu Xun still clung to this conception of literature late in his life, as he made it clear in an essay published in 1933:

For instance, as to why I wrote, I still felt, as I had a dozen years earlier, that I should write in the hope of enlightening my people, for humanity, and of the need to better it.\(^\text{15}\)

It is an undeniable fact that Lu Xun's conversion from medicine to literature was caused by the conviction that literature could salvage the ailing soul of the Chinese people, which was the prevailing belief of the May Fourth era. However, at the depths of Lu Xun's psyche, he was emotionally and intellectually drawn to literary works, both traditional and foreign, which excelled mainly because of their intrinsic literary quality. From early on in his childhood, Lu Xun was deeply immersed in traditional literary works. The first set of books that Lu Xun bought for himself was *Tang dai cunshu* 唐代叢書 [Collected works of the Tang dynasty], which included many Tang tales and anecdotes.\(^\text{16}\) In his early childhood, Lu Xun had a great affection for popular tales, fables, folk religious practices, mythology, and village opera. Leo Ou-fan Lee calls these aspects of Chinese tradition the "little tradition."\(^\text{17}\) As he points out further, "These early intellectual pursuits

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\(^\text{17}\) Leo Ou-fan Lee, "Genesis of a Writer: Notes on Lu Xun's Educational
led to his later interests in what may be called ‘countertradition’ in Chinese culture.” By “countertradition,” Lee refers to unorthodox literary genres, such as Tang tales and Ming and Qing vernacular novels, and works by such “unorthodox” writers as Zhuang Zi and Ji Kang, etc. They are also important component parts of the Chinese literary tradition. However, they are strains which run counter to the orthodox Confucian tradition.

When explicating the implicit level of Lu Xun’s consciousness, Lin Yu-sheng wrote of the traditional Chinese moral value of nien-chiu (literally, “cherishing the past”), which “Lu Hsüñ [Xun] was himself never intellectually and morally alienated from in his life.” It is a traditional value that Lu Xun implicitly clung to in his private life but was reluctant to bring onto the explicit level. Actually, in the realm of literature, which is linked more to the explicit level of consciousness, Lu Xun also showed this sentiment of adherence to the past and displayed an apparent inconsistency between what he said and what he did in his literary and scholarly practice, and interestingly, he seemed little bothered by this discrepancy. This naturally leads us to speculate that Lu Xun might have achieved a kind of transcendence which was unconstrained by his totalistic antitraditional attitude, because there seemed to exist a harmony between Lu Xun’s iconoclastic stance and his conception of literature.

According to Lin Yu-sheng, the cultural-intellectualistic mode of thinking prevalent among May Fourth intelligentsia emphasizes the priority of intellectual

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Ibid., 163.
and cultural change over social and political change, and cultural change, i. e., a change in the system of symbols, values, and beliefs, can best be achieved through changing man's ideas and his conception of, and relationship to, both cosmic and human reality. Paradoxically, the cultural-intellectualistic approach adopted by May Fourth anti-traditionalists was itself deeply-rooted in Chinese tradition. In order to effect any change in social institutions and political structure, one must first of all make changes in man's mind and culture. This is where literature comes in and can help make the change, for Lu Xun, like many of his predecessors and contemporaries, believed in the functional values of literature in changing the morality and spirit of the Chinese nation. So these two predispositions, i. e., Lu Xun's totalistic iconoclasm and his positive concept of literature, were in full accord with each other inasmuch as they were based on the same mode of thinking, which was itself deeply embedded in Chinese tradition. This perhaps explains why Lu Xun was not disturbed by the inconsistency and contradiction in his career as a scholar and writer, for he had committed himself to the cause of transforming the psyche of the Chinese people by means of literature instead of practicing medicine ever since he strode out of the lecture hall in the medical school in Sendai, and this attitude was in harmony with the iconoclastic stance which he adopted later. Intellectually and psychologically, he felt it justified to engage in literary activities, whether they were the scholarly pursuit of evaluating traditional fiction, or creative writing based on myths, legends, history, or events from his bygone days.

19 Lin Yü-sheng, 149.
As far as fiction is concerned, Lu Xun also exhibited an ambivalent attitude toward the alien literary mode of "realism" which had already gained overwhelming support from the majority of May Fourth writers because of its supposedly positive role in spiritual transformation. On the one hand, Lu Xun was drawn to the basic tenets of realism, since the implied function of social criticism inherent in Western realism coincided with his didactic view of literature, which, as we know, was deeply embedded in the Chinese literary tradition. On the other hand, as a man of letters who was more interested in the counter strains of classical Chinese literature, Lu Xun certainly subscribed more to the expressive concept of literature, and was more inclined toward the expression of the private ego and self-conscious introspection through literary works.

It is true that many of his stories are realist since they comply with the basic precepts of realism in terms of theme and objectivity, and are more often than not informed with a serious moral purpose, but the strong subjective ruminations and self-conscious introspection which Lu Xun invested in his fiction endow it with qualities that can hardly be described from the perspective of conventional realism alone. As a matter of fact, Lu Xun never committed himself solely to the doctrine of realism. Personally, as far as foreign literature is concerned, he was more drawn to the symbolic works by Leonid Andreyev and Garshin than the realist works by the Russian masters of realism such as Lev Tolstoy and Maxim Gorky.\(^{21}\)

\(^{20}\) See Lin, 26-55.

\(^{21}\) After he finished the draft of the preface to the Czech translation of Lu Xun's selected stories, Feng Xuefeng 馮雪峰 gave it to Lu Xun to solicit his opinion. In
Lu Xun's search for the most appropriate mode of literary expression resulted in a wide spectrum of innovations in form and style. The imposition of imported literary labels such as "realism," romanticism," and "symbolism" on Lu Xun's works may help us gain a good understanding of the various aspects of his stories, but any dogmatic indulgence in the study of Lu Xun's works only within the confines of these "-isms" will perhaps result in our incompetence to comprehend certain techniques appropriated in his fiction. For example, the extensive use of "irony" that we find in Lu Xun's stories is also a major feature typical of many of the modernist works in the West; and the strong lyrical strain permeating Lu Xun's stories make them resemble the "lyrical novel," which represented one of the newest trends in European fiction at the beginning of the twentieth century. Incidentally, Lu Xun did not have much knowledge of the works written by the great modernist masters in the West. Furthermore, in Gushi xinbian [Old stories retold], his last collection of fiction, which is also the most controversial and most neglected of all his stories, Lu Xun experimented with the innovative use of parody and created a brilliant work that can be placed on a par with the great postmodernist works of the present time, although the idea of the draft, Feng mentioned the impact of the works of Lev Tolstoy and Maxim Gorky (the two great realist masters that May Fourth writers adored) on Lu Xun's fiction. After reading it, Lu Xun crossed out the two names and put the name of Andreyev instead, and said: "Their impact on me is very small, but Andreyev has some influence on me." Andreyev's works are known for their strong symbolic inclination, for which Lu Xun had a special preference. See Wang Runhua, Lu Xun xiaoshuo xin lun, 11-12.

22 As Leo Ou-fan Lee has observed, "Of modern Chinese writers, only Lu Xun and Yu Dafu come close to this modernistic tradition of Herman Hesse, André Gide, Virginia Woolf, and, to some extent, James Joyce, though neither had any extensive knowledge of their European counterparts." See Lee, 65.
“postmodernism” was totally inconceivable in 1935, the year when the collection was published. While it may not be out of place to describe some of Lu Xun's works as “modernist,” it would be preposterous if we brand Old Stories Retold as “postmodernist.” To find explanations for these phenomena in Lu Xun's fiction, we cannot but turn to the Chinese literary tradition, which was always an unfailing source for Lu Xun's literary activities. Therefore, to discuss the modernity of Lu Xun's fiction, we should not restrict ourselves within the bounds of Western literary techniques or trends, still less within the predetermined framework of “realism,” “romanticism,” or “symbolism.” China's rich, time-honored literary tradition not only nourished Lu Xun's mind, but also proved to be the fountain-head of inspiration and creativity for many of his modern stories.

In what follows, I wish to examine the modernity of Lu Xun's fiction from the perspective of literary modes. By literary mode, I mean a kind (or mode) of discourse that distinguishes itself by distinct signals, which may be of a wide variety: a characteristic motif, a consistent mood, a recurrent formula, or a certain literary quality, etc. These signals have been incorporated into a genre as modifiers to indicate some specific attributes. It seems to me that “mode” is a

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23 The idea of mode that I adopt is mainly based on what Alastair Fowler has expounded in his book titled Kinds of Literature. He wrote: "Normally, a modal term will imply that some of the nonstructural features of a kind are extended to modify another kind. Modal extension can be either local or comprehensive. Locally, modes may amount to no more than fugitive admixture, tinges of generic color. All the same, they are more than vague intimations of ‘mood.’ As we have seen, a mode announces itself by distinct signals, even if these are abbreviated, unobtrusive, or below the threshold of modern attention." See Alastair Fowler, Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes 103
far broader term than “technique,” or “literary schools” (such as “realism,” “romanticism,” “symbolism”) that Chinese critics are so fond of using. As a term unconstrained by the literary trend of a period or the literary tradition of a culture, “literary mode” can thus provide us a broader prospective from which to look at the modernity of Lu Xun’s fiction.

As a person obsessed with the transformation of national spirit and a literary man concerned with aesthetic values, Lu Xun was always in search of literary modes that could give best expression to his ideals. In the provenance of short stories, the predominant modes that Lu Xun resorted to were the ironic, the lyrical, and the parodic. These three modes constitute the framework of his fiction and define its modernity. In A Call to Arms and Wandering, the ironic and the lyrical constitute the major modes, whereas in Old Stories Retold, Lu Xun mainly resorted to the parodic as the principal mode of his creative works. What I wish to investigate is how Lu Xun evolved these fictional modes which bear his own distinct characteristics by drawing upon not only foreign literature, but also traditional resources, and how the latter played a more important role.

The Ironic Mode

As Patrick Hanan has pointed out, “Irony is the first, perhaps the most pronounced feature of Lu Hsün’s [Xun’s] fiction.” 24 In his essay on the technique

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of Lu Xun's fiction, Hanan made a rather comprehensive study of Lu Xun's stories, the greater part of which is devoted to the discussion of how the various aspects of irony are appropriated in Lu Xun's fiction, with emphasis on the influence of foreign writers. Hanan's point of departure is a short article in the newspaper Chen bao [Morning newspaper] on March 19, 1922 written by Zhou Zuoren, Lu Xun's brother, who claimed that the technique of "The True Story of Ah Q" was primarily modeled on that of Gogol, Sienkiewicz, and to a lesser degree, on that of the Japanese writer Soseki, and the technique was that of irony. According to Zhou, this was a feature rarely found in Chinese fiction, the only two significant earlier exceptions being Rulin waishi 儒林外史 [The scholars] and Jing hua yuan 鏡花緣 [Flowers in the mirror]. Then after giving a definition to the term "irony" in the Western critical tradition, Hanan starts to investigate the different forms and functions of irony in Lu Xun's stories. He distinguishes situational irony (including character irony), presentational irony, and juxtapositional irony, and their "lowering" and "raising" effects. On the basis of this categorization, Hanan proceeds to discuss in considerable detail Lu Xun's first story "Looking Back to the Past" [Huaijiu] written in classical Chinese and 18 out of the 25 stories in A Call to Arms and Wandering, relating them mainly to the impact of the Polish writer Sienkiewicz and the Russian writer Gogol, particularly in the case of "The True Story of Ah Q."

Was Lu Xun's techniques of irony also influenced or even shaped to some extent by that used in traditional Chinese fiction such as The Scholars and other works? Except for mentioning in passing that "one source of the technique was
the *Ju-lin wai-shi* [*Rulin waishi*], the masterpiece of this kind of irony, which Hsü Ch'ın-wen heard discussed in Lu Hsün's lectures," Hanan did not investigate the influence that classical Chinese fiction might have also exercised on Lu Xun's fiction with regard to the use of irony. After citing Zhou Zuoren's article and some analysis of the relationship between some of Sienkiewicz' and Gogol's stories on the one hand and Lu Xun's on the other, Hanan said: "This brief investigation has shown that Lu Hsün [Xun], in choosing an artistic tradition within which to work, was drawn primarily to Gogol, Sienkiewicz, and Soseki, with their range of ironic techniques, and only secondarily to Andreev and literary Modernism." 25

In studying the possible influence of a literary work on another, certainly there should be some principles or criteria to go by. The term "influence" is quite a broad and elusive word which seems to defy accurate definition. As one definition has it, "The term 'influence' is often used in a general sense to denote the ideational and formal consequences that certain external and internal relations have had on a work of literature or of criticism or on an entire period." However, "the concept of influence obtains more real meaning for the study of literature -- and for comparative literature in particular -- when the relations between one literary text and another are investigated. ... When the two texts are placed side by

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25 Hanan did not make any study of the possible influence of *The Scholars* on Lu Xun's fiction in terms of the use of irony in his essay "The Technique of Lu Hsün's Fiction." This is perhaps due to an article written by Xu Qinwen 许钦文 in 1947, in which he reported Lu Xun's statement that *The Scholars* had little effect on his fiction. Hanan mentioned this in his essay. Xu audited Lu Xun's course in Chinese fiction at Beijing University in the early 1920s, but in his article, he did not say clearly on which occasion or in which essay Lu Xun made the above remark. See Xu Qinwen, *Xuexi Lu Xun xiansheng* 学习鲁迅先生 [Learn from Mr. Lu Xun] (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1959) 71.
side, the formal and ideational data they present make it possible to speak about influence and to know exactly what the term implies.” 26 It is in this sense of the word “influence” that I wish to explore the impact that traditional Chinese literature may have had on Lu Xun's fiction.

In 1920, while working as a section chief at the Ministry of Education and engaged in literary research in his spare time, Lu Xun also accepted an invitation to teach a course on the history of classical Chinese fiction first at Beijing University, and later at several other institutions of higher learning in Beijing. The time when he was doing research and teaching the course on Chinese fiction coincided with the time in which he wrote all the stories in the two collections: A Call to Arms and Wandering. 27 Since the course on classical Chinese fiction and the writing of his stories progressed almost simultaneously, we have grounds to speculate that traditional tales and novels that he had studied carefully and extensively must have played a role in the development of his fictional modes. Although Lu Xun did not declare explicitly that he was indebted to The Scholars and other traditional novels in his fiction writing, he did say that he wanted to write a novel similar to The Scholars in order to expose the seamy side of life in

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27 Lu Xun started compiling Ancient Tales Uncovered in 1910 when he was teaching at the Zhejiang Normal School in Hangzhou. He collected more than five hundred pages of tales and anecdotes from the Han to the Sui times. From December 1920 to August 1926, he taught a course on the history of Chinese fiction at Beijing University and some other universities in Beijing. The lecture notes led to the publication of A Brief History of Chinese Fiction in 1925. All his stories in A Call to Arms and Wandering were completed between 1918 and 1925. See Bao Chang and Qiu Wenzhi 鲍昌, 邱文治, Lu Xun nianpu 鲁迅年谱 [A biography of Lu Xun in chronological order] (Tianjin: Renmin wenxue chubanshe,
Shaoxing, his hometown. His own words in *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction* give us the best testimony to the high regard that he held for this Qing novel. In *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction*, Lu Xun discussed *The Scholars* in considerable detail and spoke highly of its achievements. The following are some of the comments that Lu Xun made on the novel: “Wu Ching-tzu's *The Scholars* is the first novel in which a writer criticizes social abuses without any personal malice, directing his attack mainly on the literati. The style is warm and humorous, gentle and ironical. This must rank as China's first novel of social satire.” “So this long novel is like a group of short stories or a patchwork quilt of silk; though it lacks one great design, the rich and rare episodes which run through it make it entertaining and worthy of serious attention.” “No other Chinese novel of social satire has since come up to the level of *The Scholars*.”

In actuality, satire and irony are not uncommon features in traditional Chinese fiction. Satire is a literary art of lowering a subject by making it ridiculous. It consists of two parts: the technique (wit, humor, etc.) and the object of attack (ridicule, or butt). Irony, particularly the lowering kind, is often

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28 See Bao Chang and Qiu Wenzhi, 105.
30 As Sun Xuyu 孫述宇 has pointed out, the novel *Jin Ping Mei* written in the late Ming dynasty (1368-1644) is an excellent example which demonstrates that both satire and irony as literary devices are used extensively in classical Chinese literature. Although there is no specific word that matches exactly the Western term “irony” in classical Chinese literary criticism, a literary trope similar to that of “irony” is widely appropriated in the various genres of classical Chinese literature. “Irony” can already be seen as one of the salient features of classical Chinese poetry, prose, and fiction. See Sun Xuyu, *Jin Ping Mei de yishu* [The art of the *Jing Ping Mei*] (Taipei: Shibao wenhua chuban shiye youxian gongsi, 1979)
employed in satire to deride, to ridicule, and to criticize. As Wayne Booth has remarked, "Irony, like the sublime, can be 'used' or achieved in every conceivable kind of literature: tragedy, comedy, satire, epic, lyric poetry, allegory, congressional speeches -- to say nothing of everyday speech." 31

Lu Xun's critical acumen naturally led him to focus his attention on this prominent characteristic of traditional fiction. He observed: "Satirical stories were written even before the Tang dynasty, and many of the Ming novels about human affairs were satires. In the Ching [Qing] dynasty, however, we find very few satirical novels. The most famous and practically the only one is The Scholars by Wu Ching-tzu of Chuanchiao, Anhwei." 32 In his short essay on satire, Lu Xun gave us some idea about what he meant by this term. He wrote, "Thus many writers who describe nothing but the truth have been officially dubbed 'satirists' .... We see this in China in Jin Ping Mei when Censor Cai flatters Ximen Qing by saying, 'I am not up to Wang Anshi; but you sir, have all the fine qualities of Wang Xizhi!' And in The Scholars we find Fan Jin refusing to use ivory chopsticks because he is in mourning, yet 'he extracted a large shrimp ball from the dish of bird's nests, and popped it into his mouth.' Similar happenings are still to be met with today. .... They are obviously real people and common types, yet we all call this satire." 33 As we can see, the examples that Lu Xun gave mainly fall within the range of the lowering kind of irony, which, as Hanan has

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32 Lu Xun, A Brief History of Chinese Fiction, p. 434.
pointed out, is often included in the term *fengci* 諷刺 in Chinese. The Chinese terms for irony are usually *fanhua* 反話, *fanyu* 反語, or *fanfeng* 反諷.

Not only did Lu Xun think very highly of *The Scholars*, he also spoke approvingly of other Ming and Qing masterworks such as *Jin Ping Mei* 金瓶梅 [Plum in the golden vase], *Xiyou ji* 西遊記 [Pilgrimage to the west], *Shuihu zhuang* 水滸傳 [Heroes of the marshes], and *Hong lou meng* 紅樓夢 [Dream of the red mansions]. He held a high opinion for the *Jin Ping Mei*, and said that “The writer shows the most profound understanding of the life of his time, his descriptions are clear yet subtle, penetrating yet highly suggestive, and for the sake of contrast he sometimes portrays two quite different aspects of life.” 34 By using the words like “highly suggestive,” and “portrays two quite different aspects of life,” Lu Xun actually referred to the way irony works in the novel, since “subtlety,” “suggestiveness,” and “conflicts of facts” are some of the clues that often guide us to the understanding of irony.

Andrew H. Plaks has discussed this feature in traditional Chinese fiction at great length. One of the important claims that he makes in his book *The Four Masterworks of the Ming Novel* is that the ironic element in each of these four novels is essential to the understanding of their literary design. Plaks writes, “These features add up to the impression of a strong dose of self-consciousness in relating to the past artistic tradition. This seems to be what Cahill has in mind when he uses the term ‘irony’ to describe certain paintings by Ch'en Hung-shou (1589-1652) and others. This aesthetic attitude forms the key to my argument

regarding the comparable ironic revision of traditional narrative conventions in the four masterworks of the literati novel." 35 He devotes large portions of the book to the investigation of the nature and functions of irony in its different forms in each of the four works. In concluding, Plaks claims that "the reading of each of these works in terms of ironic disjunctions of surface and underlying meanings has been the guiding principle of my interpretation of their literary design." 36 Contrary to what Zhou Zuoren claimed in his article in 1922, Plaks and many other contemporary scholars tend to regard "irony" as a core concept in the Chinese vernacular novel.37 As an eminent scholar of classical Chinese fiction, Lu Xun already noticed this feature and gave credit to the classical novels where irony was employed.

Now let us return to the question we asked just now: Did The Scholars and other traditional Chinese novels have any effect on Lu Xun's stories? The answer is affirmative. Not only do Lu Xun's own words and his comments on the traditional novels lead us to this answer, but his own stories themselves provide us with many examples to attest to this judgment.

34 Lu Xun, A Brief History of Chinese Fiction, 234.
36 Ibid., 498.
37 For example, in the case of the Jin Ping Mei, scholars have recently paid attention to the presence of "a thick overlay of irony," as pointed out by Plaks in his book. Wei Ziyun 魏子雲 speaks of "ironic allusion" in the novel, and Sun Shuyu discusses at length the use of irony in his book Jin Ping Mei de yishu. Sun is not quite sure how to render "irony" into Chinese. At one point he translates it as fanfeng 反諷, at other times he prefers a Chinese phonetic transcription of the English word: 艾朗尼. See Plaks, 123, and Sun Shuyu, 55, 118.
Hanan distinguishes situational irony, in which both object and factor (irony-producing element) lie in the “dramatized” part of a fiction, from presentational irony, in which the factor is the tone adopted by a narrator who is detached from the action he is recounting. *The Scholars* is a masterpiece infatuated with both presentational irony and situational irony, to produce “raising” as well as “lowering” effects. The whole novel is like a series of short stories strung together by one thematic design, i.e., “Riches, rank, success and fame are external things. Men will risk their lives in the search for them; yet once they have them within their grasp, the taste is no better than chewed tallow. But from ancient times till now, how many have accepted this?” 38 To this end, the author adopted the satirical form, the general tone throughout the novel being that of presentational irony. Its internal coherence is based on the Chinese cosmological view in which heaven, earth, and man form a triad, interacting with one another in the creative process in a harmonious whole. Thus the major concern of the novel is not a centralized plot built on the concept of cause-effect, but the arrangement of characters and events in a vast network through the complex interrelationship among men. 39 There are about three hundred and eighty characters in *The Scholars*, over a hundred of whom are different kinds of scholars. Therefore, the author relies heavily on character portrayal, or in terms of irony, character irony, which is part of situational irony, according to Hanan.

Although Lu Xun never wrote a full-fledged novel, his short stories display some kind of thematic and inherent coherence which links them together in a colorful patchwork. These stories are much like those in The Scholars, and we may even say that put together, they make up a novel quite similar to The Scholars. Fourteen of his twenty-five stories in A Call to Arms and Wandering are set in the rural world centered around the towns of S and Luzhen, clearly his hometown Shaoxing and his mother's place of origin, and the locus of another seven or eight stories is Beijing, the capital city. There are more than seventy characters altogether in Lu Xun's stories, and about twenty of them are various types of scholars. So Lu Xun, too, resorts to character portrayal and character irony in terms of technique. Of course presentational irony is also employed, the most explicit example being "The True Story of Ah Q," but much of his fiction contains both situational and presentational irony.

The most salient technique peculiar to traditional fiction is the so-called baimiao 白描 (literally, plain portrayal), a term borrowed from traditional Chinese painting, i.e., to bring out the outline and unique features of an object or a happening by drawing in clear and simple strokes. This is a method that Lu Xun highly recommends, and a technique particularly suited for irony, because its deceptively simple and matter-of-fact way of description is more effective in getting across the ironic meaning to the reader.
In the section dealing with *The Scholars* in *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction*, Lu Xun quotes some passages from the novel, and the following is one of them:

First Mr. Chang paid his respects, then Fan Chin saluted his patron. The magistrate, having politely declined their homage, invited them to sit down and drink tea. After exchanging some remarks with Mr. Chang he praised Fan Chin's essay and asked, “Why did you not sit for the higher examination?” “My mother has died,” Fan Chin explained. “I am in mourning.”

Magistrate Tang gave a start and hastily called for a plain gown to change into, after which he bowed them into an inner room. Wine was brought and the table spread. ... They took their places. ... The cups and chopsticks were inlaid with silver and Fan Chin hesitated to use them. The magistrate was puzzled until Mr. Chang told him with a laugh: “On account of his mourning, Mr. Fan is reluctant to use these cups and chopsticks.” The magistrate instantly ordered them to be changed for a porcelain cup and ivory chopsticks. Still Fan Chin would not eat.

“He does not use these either,” said Mr. Chang.

Finally plain bamboo chopsticks were produced, and all was well. Seeing Fan Chin's strict observance of the rules of mourning, Magistrate Tang was afraid he would not eat meat -- and there were no vegetable dishes prepared. But to his relief, he saw Fan Chin pop a large shrimp ball from the dish of bird's nests into his mouth.  

Commenting on this passage, Lu Xun wrote: “When Wu Ching-tzu describes the poverty of Fan Chin's family, its sudden affluence after his success in the provincial examination, and his observance of the proper mourning for his mother, without a single word of censure Fan's hypocrisy is made clearly evident. This is an excellent example of innuendo and a thoroughly biting attack.”

The same method of irony is used by Lu Xun in his story “Soap” to lay bare the hypocrisy of Siming, a Confucian scholar who still ostensibly clung to the

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41 Ibid., 294.
old morality and etiquette, but actually behaved like an ill-mannered person and
even harbored evil thoughts toward a beggar girl. Without a word of censure,
Siming's character is delineated in a subtly ironic way. The following is a passage
from the story:

Lamplight appeared in the living room now, a beacon fire
beckoning everyone to supper. The whole family crowded close together
around the table in the center of the room. The lamp stood at the foot of the
table while Siming occupied the head in solitary majesty. And then
Zhao'er knocked over her rice bowl, spilling liquid over a good part of the
table. Siming opened wide the thin slits of his eyes and fixed her with a
stare that he took back only when she was on the verge of tears. Now he
thrust his chopsticks out over the table to fetch that cabbage-heart that had
earlier caught his eye — but it was nowhere to be seen.

Glancing around, he discovered that Xuecheng was in the process
of stuffing it into his wide-open mouth and had to content himself with a bit
of leaf instead.

"Xuecheng," he asked, looking his son directly in the eye,
"have you found that phrase yet?"
"What phrase? Oh, not yet." "Hummph! Look at him! No
learning, no understanding — the only thing he knows how to do is eat!
Why can’t you be like that filial girl? There she was reduced to begging
and she still managed to be completely filial to her grandmother. Rather do
without, herself, than let that granny of hers go hungry. ...." 42

What strikes us as similar is not only the detached tone of narration, the technique
baimiao, the subtle use of irony, but also the occasion when the two episodes
happened: both occurred at the dinner table, and the central object that brings out
irony is food— "a large shrimp ball" in The Scholars, and "a cabbage-heart"
in "Soap." As has been said earlier, Lu Xun himself quoted the episode from
The Scholars and mentioned it again in his essay on satire. Therefore, it does not

42 Lu Xun, Diary of a Madman and Other Stories trans. William A. Lyell
seem far-fetched if we say that *The Scholars* had some effect on Lu Xun's "Soap" particularly with respect to the use of character irony.

As a matter of fact, there is no lack of examples like this in Lu Xun's stories. In "The Venerable Schoolmaster Gao," "Kong Yiji," and "The True Story of Ah Q," we can find the same method of character irony at work featuring the traditional technique of *baimiao*. The above two passages have given us sufficiently clear evidence to demonstrate the striking similarity between *The Scholars* and Lu Xun's "Soap" in terms of fictional mode.

Another clue which can help us tell the workings of irony is what Wayne Booth calls "clashes of style." Sometimes in a fictional work we find a juxtaposition of two entirely different styles. As Wayne Booth says, "If a speaker's style departs notably from whatever the reader considers the normal way of saying a thing, or the way normal for this speaker, the reader may suspect irony." 43 Thus the shift in style is a device often employed in a novel or a short story to suggest irony. This is a feature that both traditional fiction and Lu Xun's stories have in common. The *Jin Ping Mei*, for example, is a work in which this technique is frequently applied to achieve ironic effects. Its author was particularly good at moving between different kinds of styles and genres to impose an ironic perspective on the story. In chapter 80 of the novel, after Ximen Qing's death, a group of his sycophantic friends come to express their condolences. They present a eulogy in the form of *fu* or rhapsody, which turns out to be a thinly disguised

description of the male genitalia. The change from a realistic style to a mock-heroic *fu* style produces an especially jarring effect, which was precisely what the author intended: to show in an ironic way the author's contempt for the person who indulged in wanton, excessive sex and provoke a self-reflection on the part of readers so that they would maintain a distance from the mimetic description of the sexual events in the novel.

The same change of style is also found in some of Lu Xun's stories. "The Diary of a Madman" offers us one of the most explicit examples. The introduction to the story was written in classical Chinese, starting with the sentence "There was once a pair of male siblings whose actual names I beg your indulgence to withhold," 44 which reminds us of the kind of beginning that is usually found in traditional Tang tales and tales from *Strange Tales from a Scholar's Studio* [Liao Zai zhi yi 聊齋志異] written by the Qing writer Pu Songlin in classical Chinese. This is in stark contrast to the diary entries, which were all written in colloquial language, the prevalent form of language adopted by the reform-minded intellectuals to start a literary revolution in the May Fourth era.

The classical style is thus used deliberately to create a discrepancy with the overall vernacular style in which the story narrated by the "madman" unfolds. The purpose of this controlled inconsistency is to establish a detached, impersonal, and apparently sober tone, which is quite appropriate for the presentation of a conventional view, and set it against a psychologically tense and seemingly insane tone in which the "madman" told his story. The contrast is designed to alert the

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44 Lu Xun, *Diary of a Madman and Other Stories*, 29.
reader to the radical content of an extraordinary story and deepen its ironic indictment of the evils of tradition.

The change in style may also occur in a paragraph or even in a sentence to produce an ironic effect. This kind of stylistic shift is more commonly employed in some of Lu Xun's other stories, such as "Kong Yiji,” “The True Story of Ah Q,” and “A Passing Storm,” etc. For example, in Chapter 2 of “The True Story of Ah Q,” Lu Xun wrote, “He didn't realize, of course, that up there in the rarefied world of scholar-officialdom those whom one doth Young Literati name can darn well get to be those whom one must Budding Talents proclaim -- if you don't keep an eye on them. That's why Old Master Qian and Old Master Zhao were so all-fired respected in the village: they were daddies to those two Young Literati -- and rich in the boot.”

The ironic twists created by the contrast in style in these sentences are quite poignant and easy to discern, even in the English translation of the story, thanks to Lyell's faithful and wonderful rendering.

The Lyrical Mode

If irony is the most salient feature of Lu Xun's stories, then the next most pronounced feature is lyricism. In his article discussing Lu Xun's first story “Huai jiu,” Jaroslav Prusek wrote, “The predominantly reminiscent and lyrical character of his writing brings Lu Hsünn, not into the tradition of the realists of the nineteenth century, but into that of the markedly lyrical prose writers of Europe.

45 Lu Xun, Diary of a Madman and Other Stories, p. 108. William A. Lyell translates "Ah Q zhengzhuan" as "Ah Q -- The Real Story," but I still follow the earlier translation of the title in my thesis, because "The True Story of Ah Q" has
between the two wars.” 46 Commenting on Prusek’s evaluation, Leo Ou-fan Lee says, “Prusek’s underlying assumption in this rather extravagant claim is that Lu Xun had certainly inherited the dominant lyrical strain of classical Chinese poetry which led him to concentrate on mood, imagery, lyrical tableaux, and metaphorical landscape at the expense of plot, detailed background, and the sequential narrative characteristic of realist fiction.” 47

There is a certain affinity between Lu Xun’s stories and the newest trends in European fiction at the beginning of the twentieth century, as has been pointed out by Prusek. Since Lu Xun did not have any extensive knowledge of such western masters as Herman Hesse, André Gide, Virginia Woolf, and James Joyce, as Leo Ou-fan Lee has observed, Lu Xun must have cultivated the lyrical strain of his stories by drawing on classical Chinese literature: classical poetry, prose, and fiction. Prusek remarks further: “All we shall say is that even in his early work this Chinese writer was making use of devices that European prose did not discover until much later.” 48

What is this inadvertent affinity between Lu Xun’s fiction and the western “lyrical novel”? How did Lu Xun inherit the lyrical elements from Chinese tradition in his fiction writing? These are the questions that we are interested in. The lyrical novel in the western tradition, as defined by Ralph Freedman, is “a

hybrid genre that uses the novel to approach the function of a poem." 49 Combining features of both novels and lyrical poetry, the lyrical novel "shifts the reader's attention from men and events to a formal design. The usual scenery of fiction becomes a texture of imagery, and characters appear as personae for the self." 50 The western novel in the conventional sense is one that seeks to "abstract an objective quality from the encounter between self and other, man and the universe beyond him," whereas "the lyrical novel, by contrast, seeks to combine man and world in a strangely inward, yet aesthetically objective, form." 51 Although many conventional novels and stories may claim to the refinement of language and the evocation of imagery, the lyrical novel or story is different, because it "assumes a unique form which transcends the causal and temporal movement of narrative within the framework of fiction." 52 In other words, the temporal cause-effect unfolding of events so typical of the western novel was violated by the "lyrical novel" at the turn of the century, and the concern for the plot gradually faded out.

Therefore, it is interesting to observe that in Lu Xun's fiction, too, the plot is not his central concern, and in many cases, it is suppressed to its simplest components. At the most extreme, the plot in "Beijing Street Scene" [Shizhong 示众] has completely disappeared, and what remains is a picture of the Beijing street scene which Lu Xun wants to draw attention to. What seems to interest him is not so much the development of exciting plots, as "sketches, reminiscences,"

50 Freedman, 1.
51 Ibid., 2.
52 Ibid., 1.
lyrical descriptions," as Prusek has rightly remarked. The reduction of the plot gives more latitude for the expression of the lyrical impulse of the writer who sees fiction more as an artistic form to express his self than tell a riveting story. This particular feature of Lu Xun's fiction, though quite similar to the western "lyrical novel", was actually in perfect alignment with Chinese tradition, or we may as well say that lyricism in Lu Xun's stories is a natural outgrowth of the time-honored lyrical tradition in Chinese literature.

One of the characteristics of traditional Chinese fiction that has been censured by some scholars in the past is its "heterogeneous and episodic quality of plot." 53 This view was challenged by quite a few scholars later, who argued that the episodic quality of Chinese fiction is actually rooted in Chinese tradition, which has its own concepts of structural unity and coherence. 54 The western idea of a centralized plot in which events are subsumed in one another in a causally linked chain is absent in classical Chinese fiction, because this concept is at odds with the traditional Chinese world view, which sees events as one vast relationship or process. As Shuen-fu Lin points out further, in classical Chinese fiction, "events are no longer described as causally linked: they are simply connected or juxtaposed side by side as if by coincidence. Thus the temporal sequence of the cause-and-effect relationship is instead spatialized into a dynamic pattern of

juxtaposed concrete ‘incidents.’” This deemphasis of plot peculiar to the Chinese narrative structure paves the way for the infiltration of traditional lyricism into fiction, for it makes room for the incorporation of the internal self in the external world that fiction represents. The lyrical tradition in Chinese culture is of course a poetic one by definition, and it has all along enjoyed a privileged status among generations of literati. Fiction, or *xiaoshuo,* literally “small talk,” was eyed suspiciously or even despised by many ancient Confucian scholars, until some literary men elevated it to an alternative genre of sketch-like tales in the Tang dynasty. However, it was only by the Ming dynasty that vernacular fiction, due to the efforts of such famous scholar-writers as Feng Menglong and Ling Mengchu, developed into a mature, full-fledged form, which ultimately culminated in the production of *si da qi shu,* the four great masterpieces. They are stamped with so many traits typical of the Ming literati that Andrew H. Plaks prefers to call them “literati novels.”

Poetry comprised one of the most essential parts in the education of the elite literati, for it was viewed as a vehicle of the *Dao* as well as a means for the expression of one’s *zhi* and *qing,* largely due to the authoritative power that Confucius’ teachings concerning poetry brought with them. As a result, the aesthetics of the lyric were regarded as the highest literary value in the Chinese tradition. When these literati turned to fiction for the realization of their creative desires, they inevitably brought the lyrical strain to their fictional writing. As Yu-kung Kao has remarked, “In the Chinese tradition, there are two parallel

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55 Shuen-fu Lin, “Ritual and Narrative Structure in *Ju-lin Wai-shih,*” *Chinese*
developments in narrative genres, the classical and the vernacular. While the latter may be more varied and have broader appeal to the masses, the former is by all means the elevated mode, which was considered to be a part of the lyric tradition. However, in vernacular fiction, lyrical ingredients are not at all absent. So Kao goes on to discuss two vernacular novels: The Scholars and The Dream of Red Mansions, and investigate "the centrality of 'lyric vision'" in these two masterpieces.

As we know, many critics tend to view The Scholars as a satirical or ironic novel, and this has become a general consensus, while Kao in his essay has convincingly shown us that lyrical elements are also prevalent in The Scholars, and manifest themselves in episodes describing sensual pleasure and the juxtaposition of the real and the ideal. Du Shaoqing, one of the characters in the novel, was supposedly modeled on the author himself to give expression to his own vision of self-fulfillment. The whole novel is framed between a prologue story and an epilogue story, which describe two sets of "model characters," in contrast to different kinds of characters in the episodes. Thus The Scholars, the "most famous satirical novel in the Qing dynasty," is also permeated with a strong lyrical strain, and this gives us sufficient proof to attest to the fact that a novel can be both ironic and lyrical at the same time.

Narrative, 250.

Interestingly, the new wave in European fiction at the beginning of this century, represented by the “lyrical novel,” displays some of the same features as traditional Chinese fiction. Modern western lyrical novels are creatures of romanticism. According to Freedman, “'Romantic irony,’ achieved by author intrusions and frame-story devices, suggests in such writers as Ludwig Tieck and E. T. A. Hoffman the attempt to break the aesthetic illusion and to produce the portrait of a hero simultaneously in life and art.”

Herman Hesse, André Gide, and Virginia Woolf all have applied irony to their lyrical works in a masterful way, as pointed out by Freedman.

This leads us to believe that there is a fictional form which can successfully combine both the ironic and the lyrical modes. As a matter of fact, this form is true of the lyrical novel in the western tradition, as well as Chinese vernacular fiction and Lu Xun's stories, which can be viewed as a direct outgrowth of the Chinese literary tradition, particularly in terms of their lyrical character.

Lu Xun's first wenyan story, “Remembrances of the Past,” furnishes us with a very good example in this respect. It is interesting to note that Hanan prefers to look at this story from the perspective of irony, whereas Prusek chooses to examine it in terms of lyricism. As Hanan has observed, “A certain ironic conception is found in Lu Hsü'n's first piece of fiction, ‘Looking Back to the Past’ [Huaijiu], a story written in 1911 on the basis of the current revolution and the Boxer rebellion.” He remarks further, “It is significant that in this rather shapeless story, which does not contain some of the other characteristic features of

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Freedman, 21.
Lu Hsüan's writing, irony is already present. Prusek would rather posit this story in the vein of lyricism when he says: "The whole atmosphere of the story we are considering here shows the affinity of Lu Hsüan's work to the newest trends in European literature. As we have already said, it is presented in the form of reminiscences and the mood is at moments very lyrical." In discussing the ironic nature of this story, Hanan misses the lyrical strain that pervades the whole story as narrated in the tone of a nine-year-old boy. Chinese lyricism is often linked with reminiscences of the past, and is profuse in nostalgic feelings about old home, old friends, and old landscape, etc. People who study classical Chinese poetry are often awed by the great abundance of poems written in various dynasties on nostalgia. As a matter of fact, huaijü, or nostalgic sentiment, which is also the title of Lu Xun's story, has become a constant and even conventional theme of Chinese poetry. One of the best examples that readily comes to mind is the two lines from Li Bai's famous poem "In the Quiet Night": "Raising my head, I look at the bright moon; / Bending my head, I think of my old home." A strong dose of nostalgic feeling often accentuates the lyrical character of a poem and gives it additional force.

What interested Prusek in "Huai jiu" [Remembrances of the past] most of all was its plotless structure characterized by reminiscences. As Prusek has noted, "Thus, instead of a plot we have reminiscences of childhood and evocation.

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of a mood." But he failed to notice the ironic touches that are also evident in the story. The ironic effect of the story is brought out by the juxtaposition of the naivety of the narrator and the pedantry of Master Baldy, the tutor. The conventional view that the tutor, as an educated man, must be superior to his kindly, ignorant servants is ironically reversed in the story, as Hanan has pointed out. So the fact is: "The Remembrances of the Past" is both ironic and lyrical at the same time. This blending of the ironic and the lyrical is also prevalent in some of Lu Xun's other stories, such as "The New Year's Sacrifice," "Regret for the Past," and "In the Tavern," etc. Even in his lesser pieces, such as "A Comedy of Ducks" and "The Rabbits and the Cat," this feature is also quite prominent.

This brings us to the question why the two modes, i.e., the ironic and the lyrical, which seem so divergent from each other, can coexist quite harmoniously in one genre: fiction? We have mentioned briefly the concept of "romantic irony," which may help us solve this problem to some extent. The term "romantic irony" was launched in the mid-nineteenth century by a German literary historian, Herman Hettner. Irony, as pointed out by Lilian R. Furst, only assumed a prominent position at the turn of the century, because "the dominant literary trends of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century also encouraged

1962) 55-57.
61 Prusek, The Lyrical and the Epic, 104.
the extension of irony and the change in its character.” 63 The rise of the Romantic Movement and the flowering of the novel are two reasons accounting for the fruition of irony. To associate Romanticism with irony seems quite strange at first sight, both conceptually and verbally, since Romanticism is usually taken to mean a primary commitment to the expression of feeling and emotion, whereas irony requires a controlled detachment on the part of the author. “Yet the Romantic poets were too accomplished as poets not to realize that feeling, even at its most intense, required a certain control if it was to be turned into good poetry.” 64 So irony can offer a method with which an author can regulate the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings. Byron, for example, used irony in his poetry to that end.

Furst elaborates on the metamorphosis the concept of romantic irony has undergone. She chooses to make a distinction between traditional, classical irony and romantic, modern irony. While the former focuses more on the disparity between appearance and reality, the latter is more bent on uncertainty, and the perplexities of searching. To roughly oversimplify, we may say that the traditional ironist uses irony, while the romantic ironist is ironic. As Furst points out,

“Almost equally important is the fact that the specification of twentieth century irony is apposite to romantic irony without need of modification and qualification.” 65 Then, to give examples of modern works which fall within the category of romantic irony, she enumerates such great titles as James Joyce’s

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63 Furst, 42.
64 Ibid., 43.
65 Ibid., 232.
Ulysses (1922), André Gide's Les Fauxmonnayeurs (1926), Samuel Beckett's Molly (1951), and Saul Bellow's Herzog (1964), and a few others. One thing that the concept of romantic irony can contribute to our understanding of Lu Xun's fiction is that it convinces us of the justification of amalgamating two divergent modes: the ironic and the lyrical, in one story. This was what Lu Xun did, and he did it quite successfully, perhaps for some additional reasons.

To find out possible answers to the question why Lu Xun used these two modes in his two story collections, Wandering and A Call to Arms, we had better turn to his complex consciousness and conception of literature, which, as we know, are characterized by conflicts and tensions. His radical antitradi tional stance based on the cultural-intellectualistic approach (which, ironically, was ingrained in tradition) made him believe in the power of literature to transform national spirit and character, and hence committed him to the didactic function of literature, whereas his deep immersion in traditional culture and classical literature, his knowledge of western science and literature, and his penchant for aestheticism all led him to incline toward the role of literature as a vehicle of expressing one's ideals and emotions. All his life he had endeavored to compromise and harmonize the two sides of his literary conception: the didactic and the expressive. Therefore, Lu Xun was constantly in search of the most suitable literary modes that can realize his ideal.

Irony, because of its natural affinity with reality and moral didacticism, offers a great deal of latitude for indirect social comment and criticism without much loss of the enchanting quality of "literariness" so essential to the life of a
literary work. Lyricism, the emotional outpouring of one's feeling, nostalgic or otherwise, in aesthetically pleasant and beautiful form, bestows on a self-conscious writer a good means to express his self. Therefore, the ironic and the lyrical modes of fiction fit in very well with Lu Xun's didactic and expressive views of literature. In combining the two, he found the most appropriate form for his first two collections of stories. However, Lu Xun was not content with what he had achieved. He went on searching for new ways of literary expression and new forms of fiction. His unrelenting effort led him to create a new mode -- the parodic mode, for his last collection of stories: Old Stories Retold.

The Parodic Mode

Old Stories Retold consists of eight tales written over a span of 13 years from 1922 to 1935, one year before his death. Based on myths, legends, and historical events and figures recorded in ancient historical and mythological writings, these stories occupy a unique place in the history of modern Chinese literature. Aside from the disputes over their generic nature, scholars hold widely divergent views as regards their literary merit. For instance, while C. T. Hsia deplores that "the resulting levity and chaos in Old Legends Retold [Old stories retold] mark the sad degeneration of a distinguished if narrow talent for

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For instance, "Mending Heaven" is based on a mythical tale recorded in Huai Nan Zi 淮南子, a Han (206 B.C. - A.D. 220) anthology of miscellaneous writings by the proteges of Prince Liu An; "Curbing the Flood" is derived from an account of Da Yu recorded in 史記 [Records of the Grand Historian] by Sima Qian 司馬遷 (145 B.C.-ca. 90 B.C.); and the main source for "Forging the Sword" is "Lie yi zhuan" 列異傳 [Tales of the bizarre] from the Song (960-1234) compendium Taiping yulan 太平御覽 [Taiping imperial encyclopaedia].
fiction,” 67 Jaroslav Prusek acclaims that it is an “outstanding example which
demonstrates how modern aesthetics has enriched native literary tradition and
resulted in a new integrated whole.” 68 Leo Ou-fan Lee maintains a more
balanced view of these stories, praising them on the one hand as works that
“broke new ground by evolving new ways of looking at the traditional heri-
tage,” and on the other pointing out that they are “uneven in quality” and Lu
Xun was “only partially successful in his endeavor.” 69

From the generic point of view, these works are indeed different from the
conventional short story as we understand it. As Lu Xun speaks about them
himself in the preface of the book, most of them are “not worthy of the name
‘story’ according to the manual of literature.” 70 Chinese critics have for a
long time debated over the problem of whether Old Stories Retold belongs to
historical fiction or realist fiction. Those who argue that it is historical fiction are
perplexed by the presence of modern things and figures, such as “kindergarten,”
“university,” “officials from the Bureau of Water Conservancy,” “vitamin
W,” and even foreign personages and English phrases, such as “Shakespeare,”
“O. K.,” “How do you do!”, etc.; those who maintain that it is written in the
realist mode are equally puzzled by the appearance of these things and characters,

67 C. T. Hsia, 46.
68 Quoted in Wang Yao 王瑶, “LuXun gushi xin bian san lun” 魯迅故事新編散論
[Random Thoughts on Lu Xun's Old Stories Retold], Jinian Lu Xun dansheng yibai
zhounian xueshu taolunhui lunwen xuan [Selected papers presented at the
Symposium in Commemoration of the Centenary of Lu Xun's Birth] (Changsha:
Hunan renmin chubanshe, 1983) 47.
69 Lee, Voices from the Iron House, 32.
70 Lu Xun, Old Tales Retold trans. Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang (Beijing:
Foreign Languages Press, 1971) 4.
since they are certainly not historical facts. Confined within the range of their self-imposed and self-defeating arguments, many Chinese Lu Xun scholars are unable to see the true literary merit of *Old Stories Retold*.

There was nothing like these writings in Chinese literature in Lu Xun's own time, nor had there been any historical precedents. Obviously, what Lu Xun attempted to do was to find a new, modern narrative mode which could give free rein to his creativity, a mode both informed by his interest in the cultural dimensions of the past and invested with immediate relevancy for contemporary social realities. These stories represent the culmination of Lu Xun's life-long endeavor to search for the most appropriate mode of fiction commensurate with the changing tenor of the times and his ever-penetrating insights. They are truly avant-garde works which shine brilliantly in their splendor of modernity and mark the further achievement and sophistication of his fictional art. Since *Old Stories Retold* is written in an entirely new mode, any attempt to interpret it from the doctrines of realism or romanticism, or to categorize it as historical or realist fiction would only lead to an impasse. Therefore, to understand the originality and creativeness of these stories, we have to shake off the straightjacket of realism and so on, and examine them from fresh perspectives.

Lu Xun's own comments on these stories have provided us the best clue that might lead us to a more meaningful discussion of them. One key word that deserves our special attention is the word *youhua* (meaning "facetiousness," or "playfulness") that Lu Xun used to describe these stories.
Lu Xun wrote in the preface to *Old Stories Retold*: “That was how I lapsed from seriousness to facetiousness. Facetiousness is the worst enemy of writing; I was most displeased with myself.”  

Many scholars take these remarks as Lu Xun’s confession and self-criticism, and consider *youhua* one of the major weaknesses of *Old Stories Retold*. However, when we read what Lu Xun has to say further on this point toward the end of the preface, we shall find that Lu Xun actually harbors a special fondness for this “facetiousness.” Lu Xun said: “And having less respect for the ancients than for my contemporaries, I have always been unable to avoid facetiousness. Thirteen years have passed, still I have made no progress ...” In a letter addressed to Li Liewen in 1933, Lu Xun even claimed that he “will adhere to this facetious style in the future.” There are two questions which we may raise here. Firstly, what does *youhua* refer to? Secondly, why did Lu Xun still hang on to *youhua* after thirteen years? The answer to the second question seems somewhat easier: because Lu Xun was fond of *youhua* as an effective means of his fictional art, and his previous remark about it was just an ironic statement. The first question is more complicated, since it involves the complex use of parody.

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72 For instance, Leo Ou-fan Lee considers *youhua* one of the major reasons that account for the partial success of *Old Stories Retold*. Lee says: “He [Lu Xun] was only partially successful in this endeavor, because his original artistic intention was led astray by extraneous references to contemporary events and personalities. In his preface he confessed that he could not forgive himself for having slipped into vacuous parody — ‘the arch-enemy of creative writing.’” See Lee, *Voices from the Iron House*, 33.
73 Ibid., 4.
74 See Wang Yao, 46.
While I can hardly bring myself to accept the word "vacuous" in "vacuous parody," Leo Ou-fan Lee's translation of *youthua*, the word "parody" nevertheless hits the nail on the head. What Lu Xun resorted to in *Old Stories Retold* is indeed a very complicated appropriation of parody, which is radically different from the conventional conception of this old literary device. To be sure, we can certainly find the presence of the two important features that are often associated with conventional parody, i.e., wit and ridicule, in these stories. However, the complexity of Lu Xun's parody steps far beyond the traditional notion of parody and points to a conscious and ingenious endeavor to create a fictional mode with aesthetic depths and critical power which aims to undermine the conventions and pretensions of the realist mode so much in vogue in Lu Xun's time.

"Parody" is one of the oldest literary terms in the Western tradition. While there is no exact equivalent to the word "parody" in Chinese, there was a widespread use of literary devices in classical Chinese fiction that can be described roughly in terms of the Western concept of parody. Parody, according to one of

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75 See Lee, *Voices from the Iron House*, 33.
76 As Margaret A. Rose writes, "Of all the terms used to describe comic quotation or imitation (such as burlesque, pastiche, persiflage) parody alone has its roots in the classical literature and poetics of the Greek, and has gained some importance in the Western tradition from this fact." See Margaret A. Rose, "Defining Parody," *Southern Review* 1 (1980): 5.
77 The incorporation of past literary works in traditional fiction for the purposes of displaying the author's wit and erudition or producing comic effects is one of the salient features of the Chinese literary tradition, which may have its roots in the time-honored "scissors and paste" method in Chinese historiography. The parodic appropriation of earlier works as a literary device found its extensive application in
the conventional definitions of the term in the West, "imitates the serious manner and characteristic features of a particular literary work, or the distinctive style of a particular author, or the typical stylistic and other features of a serious literary genre, and applies the imitation to a lowly or comically inappropriate subject." 78

Actually, there have always been debates over the value of parody either as a literary genre or as a technique. Those who are opposed to it consider it as a secondary art, and dismiss it as lacking in originality; and those who advocate it hail it as a most effective literary means for the inventing artist to both lay bare the limitations of the pre-existing text and create new forms. 79 In spite of the various pros and cons concerning parody, there has been a profusion of literary works in the West in which parody features prominently. They include such masterpieces as Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, James Joyce's *Ulysses*, and John Barth's *The Sot-Weed Factor*. In China, the *Jin Ping Mei* [The plum in the golden vase], one of the four greatest novels in many famous Ming novels. For example, *Xi you ji* [The pilgrimage to the west] can be considered a parody of an earlier Song work *Da Tang Sanzang qu jing shihua* [Tripitaka's search for Buddhist sutras], and in the *Jin Ping Mei* [The Plum in the golden vase], parody is used even more profusely and freely. Since there is no Chinese word corresponding exactly to the Western term "parody" in Chinese literary criticism, some people have tentatively rendered it as *ximi* 趣味. For discussions of the use of parody in traditional Chinese novels, see Sun Xuyu, *Jin Ping Mei de yishu*, and Martin Weizong Huang, "Dehistoricalization and Intertextualization: The Anxiety of Precedents in the Evolution of the Traditional Chinese Novels," CLEAR 12 (1990), 64.


79 For example, the Romantics disapproved of parody, since they believed in the idea that works of art were the original achievement of an individual, whereas in the eye of the Russian Formalists, parody represented a significant agent in literary evolution. See Beate Muller ed. *Parody: Dimensions and Perspectives* (Amster-
the Ming dynasty, can be viewed as an outstanding example of parody. With the publication of *Old Stories Retold*, Lu Xun successfully infused parody into his fictional art and created a parodic mode more subtle and intricate than conventional parody.

The complex use of parody that we find in *Old Stories Retold* ranges from parody in its most restricted sense (i.e., no more than a mere repetition of the pre-text, i.e., the parodied text, in a new context) to the employment of the parodied material as a platform for the creation of new form and mode; from the parody of motifs and themes of previous literary works to the parody of style and rhetoric. Besides producing comic and satirical effects typical of parody, Lu Xun's parody also demonstrates an ambivalent attitude towards the material parodied; it contains much more than just elements of ridicule and criticism. As Margaret A. Rose points out, “Although accompanied by a comic effect, the parody need not necessarily ridicule the work of its target.” There is an ambiguity inherent in the Greek word “parodia,” since the prefix “para” can be translated to mean both nearness and opposition, although what has been emphasized is usually its “opposition” part, i.e., its critical dimension, and the “nearness” element in parody has often been neglected. As Margaret A. Rose observes further, “The ambivalence of great parody, from Aristophanes to today -- of apparent empathy with and distance from the text imitated -- can thus be said to be implied in the

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80 For instance, Sun Xuyu is of the opinion that the *Jin Ping Mei* is perhaps the only novel in classical Chinese fiction that can be described as a "parody," but he does not elaborate further on his argument. See Sun Xuyu, *Jin Ping Mei de yishu*, 116.

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classical term itself." Lu Xun's parody in *Old Stories Retold* also demonstrates an ambivalent attitude, because the re-enactment of ancient tales and legends and the incongruity entailed between the pre-texts and Lu Xun's stories reveal a complex frame of mind toward the material and characters parodied and wide-ranging parodic intentions. Lu Xun's stance toward the historical events and figures that he parodied is not simply one characterized by pure ridicule or rejection, but one that reflects his unrelenting aesthetic pursuit and intense epistemological concern. As he makes it clear in the preface, he does not intend to "make the ancients out as even more dead than they are." For Lu Xun, parody was in actuality a means for literary experiment and liberation in his quest for reality, a means that could give free rein to his creative ingenuity and free himself from the bondage of literary dogmatism.

Broadly speaking, Lu Xun's parodic mode operates on two levels: the specific parody, and the general parody, to borrow Margaret A. Rose's terms, characterized by a subtle combination of such features as satiric criticism, ironic detachment, playful exaggeration or understatement, and self-conscious reflexivity. The specific parody refers to the quotation or repetition of certain pre-existing texts within the story for the purposes of ridicule, criticism, or meta-fictional comment; and by the general parody, what is meant is the parodic mode in which the whole story is cast, usually accompanied by discrepancies between the pre-existing text

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82 Ibid., 8.
and the parody which may or may not involve explicit critical comment, but are often endowed with traits such as humor, playfulness, ironic incongruity and self-conscious reflection. The parodic mode of fiction that Lu Xun created was indeed a ground-breaking literary invention that few of his contemporaries were able to truly appreciate. Perhaps he did not realize himself that his literary sensitivity and courage in challenging his own previous works had led him to create the stories in *Old Stories Retold*, which, viewed from our present vantage point, should have been placed on a par with the avant-garde writings of Europe and America in his times and embody one important aspect of literary modernity of his works. Through reading *Old Stories Retold*, we can discern an epistemological doubt about the omnipotence of the much-lauded realist mode and a desire to create a new form by attempting to push parody from the margins of the literary scene to its center.

What is more surprising is that Lu Xun's intricate manipulation of parody that we have mentioned above bears a striking resemblance to some of the features that we only find in postmodernist fiction. With the rise of what has been referred to as "postmodernist" art and literature, parody has witnessed a brisk revival and become one of the hallmarks of postmodernism. As Linda Hutcheon remarks,

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84 The terms "specific parody" and "general parody" are based on Margaret A. Rose's explications, but I have expanded on them.

85 Perhaps Mao Dun was one of the few Lu Xun's contemporaries who understood the significance of *Old Stories Retold*. Mao Dun wrote of it in an essay published in 1937 and acclaimed that "with a display of various changes in form, his [Lu Xun's] *Old Stories Retold* set for us a much-valued example." Mao Dun observed further that "instead of portraying the ancients more like ancients," Lu Xun "fused the ancient and the modern and turned them into an integrated whole." See Wang Yao, 43.
“Parody ... is usually considered central to postmodernism, both by its detractors and its defenders.” According to Margaret A. Rose's explicatons on the modern and postmodern concepts of parody, modern theories of parody try to reduce parody to either the comic or the meta-fictional form by emphasizing either its burlesque aspects or its non-comic, intertextual character, whereas postmodern concepts of parody attempt to combine both the comic and the meta-fictional factors in a more complex fashion and favor both of them as positive, creative forms. Lu Xun's complex use of parody coincides in many respects with what Margaret A. Rose has described as “meta-fictional/intertextual” plus “comic/humorous” typical of many postmodern fictional works.

All the eight stories in Old Stories Retold can be regarded as parodic in the sense that the author deliberately employs parody not only as his major device to create the structures and plots of his stories but also as a technique to engage in meta-fictional criticism and reflection. Lu Xun adroitly turns the parodic mode into a platform for his new stories where not only the ancient themes are parodied

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87 See Margaret A. Rose, Parody: Ancient, Modern, and Post-modern (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 271-3. Actually, this is just one of the many views about the nature of postmodern parody. For instance, Linda Hutcheon, another major theorist of postmodern parody, holds a different opinion. She writes: "In other words, parody works to foreground the politics of representation. Needless to say, this is not the accepted view of postmodernist parody. The prevailing interpretation is that postmodernism offers a value-free, decorative, de-historicized quotation of past forms and that this is a most apt mode for a culture like our own that is oversaturated with images. Instead, I would want to argue that postmodernist parody is a value-problemizing, denaturalizing form of acknowledging the history (and through irony, the politics) of representation." See
but the ancients are made to parody the behavior and manners of his contemporaries. What Lu Xun has done is to situate the recreations of the old tales not only in the milieu of tradition but also in the context of contemporary social reality. Thus his parody functions as a double-edged sword: the ironic differences between the original stories and the stories retold embody Lu Xun's critique of reality as well as tradition. By so doing, Lu Xun actually subverts the pretensions of realist fiction and challenges the claim that realism is the only legitimate literary means to reveal the truth.

To each of the stories in the collection, there are usually one or several pre-existing ancient texts. From the point of view of general parody, what Lu Xun parodies are the themes of ancient tales or myths, rather than their stylistic or generic features, although he often parodies the manner and style of classical texts within the stories. For instance, "Mending Heaven" is based on Chinese myths about the creation of the first men by the goddess Nüwa recorded in *Huai Nan Zi* 淮南子, *Shan hai jing* 山海经 [The book of mountains and seas], and *Shi ji* 史记 [Records of the Grand Historian]; the pre-existing texts to "The Flight to the Moon" can be found in *Huai Nan Zi*, *Lie Zi* 列子; and "Leaving the Pass" parodies the legends recorded in *Zhuang Zi* 莊子 and the *Shi ji*.

"Leaving the Pass" is a good example to illustrate how Lu Xun appropriates the parodic mode, both general and specific, to re-create the ancient legends about the two meetings of Confucius and Lao Zi, and why and how Lao Zi


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embarks on his westward journey and leaves the Hangu Pass. The original story about the two visits that Confucius paid to Lao Zi is to be found in Zhuang Zi:

Confucius went to see Lao Tan [Lao Zi]. Lao Tan had just finished washing his hair and had spread it over his shoulders to dry. Utterly motionless, he did not even seem to be human. Confucius, hidden from sight, stood waiting, and then, after some time presented himself and exclaimed, "Did my eyes play tricks on me, or was that really true? A moment ago, Sir, your form and body seemed stiff as an old dead tree, as though you had forgotten things, taken leave of men, and were standing in solitude itself!"

Lao Tan said, "I was letting my mind wander in the Beginning of things." 88

Confucius said to Lao Tan, "I have been studying the Six Classics -- Book of Songs, Book of History, Book of Ritual, Book of Music, Book of Change, and Spring and Autumn Annals, for what I would call a long time, and I know their contents through and through. But I have been around to seventy-two different rulers with them, expounding the ways of the former kings and making clear the path trod by the dukes of Chou and Shao, and yet not a single ruler has found anything to excite his interest. How difficult it is to persuade others, how difficult to make clear the Way!"

Lao Tzu said, "It's lucky you didn't meet with a ruler who would try to govern the world as you say. The Six Classics are the old worn-out path. What you are expounding are simply these paths. Paths are made by shoes that walk them, they are by no means the shoes themselves! "The white heron has only to stare unblinking at its mate for fertilization to occur. With insects, the male cries on the wind above, the female cries on he wind below, and there is fertilization. The creature hermaphrodite is both male and female and so it can fertilize itself. Inborn nature cannot be changed, fate cannot be altered, time cannot be stopped, the Way cannot be obstructed. Get hold of the Way and there's nothing that can't be done; lose it and there's nothing that can be done."

Confucius stayed home for three months and then came to see Lao Tan once again. "I've got it," he said. "The magpie hatches its young, the fish spit out their milt, the slim-waisted wasp has its stages of transformation, and when babybrother is born, big brother howls. For a long time now I have not been taking my place as a man along with the process of change. And if I do not take my own place as a man along with the process of change, how can I hope to change other men?"

Lao Tzu said, "Good, Ch'iu -- now you've got it!" 89

Now let us turn to "Leaving the Pass" and see how Lu Xun portrays Confucius and Lao Zi:

Lao Tzu [Lao Zi] was seated motionless, like a senseless block of wood.

"Master, Kung Chiu [Confucius] is here again!" whispered his disciple Kengsang Chu, entering in some annoyance.

"Ask him in. ..."

"How are you, master?" inquired Confucius, bowing respectfully.

"As always," replied Lao Tzu. "And you? Have you read all the books in our collection?"

"Yes. But, ..." For the first time Confucius appeared a little flustered. "I have studied the Six Classics: Book of Songs, Book of History, Book of Ritual, Book of Music, Book of Change, and Spring and Autumn Annals. To my mind, after all this time, I have mastered them thoroughly. I have been to see seventy-two princes, none of whom would take my advice. It is certainly hard to make oneself understood. Or is it perhaps the Way that is hard to explain?"

"You are lucky not to have met an able ruler," replied Lao Tzu.

"The Six Classics are the beaten track left by the kings of old. How can they blaze a new trail? Your words are like a track which is trodden out by sandals -- but sandals are not the same as a path."

After a pause he proceeded: "White herons have only to gaze fixedly at each other, and the male calls from windward, the female responds from leeward, and she is impregnated. With her maphrodites, one creature has a double sex and decundates itself. Nature cannot be altered, the Way cannot be obstructed. If you have the Way, all things are possible; if you lose it, nothing is possible."

Like one clubbed over the head, Confucius sat there as if his spirit had departed, to all intents a senseless block of wood.

... ... ... ... ...

Three months went by. Lao Tzu was seated motionless, as before, like a senseless block of wood.

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89 The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu, 165-6. I have made minor changes in Watson's translation so as to ensure that the English renderings of some Chinese words are consistent in both Zhuang Zi and Lu Xun's story. 141
“Master! Kung Chiu is back again!” whispered his disciple Kengsang Chu, entering in some surprise. “He hasn’t been here for so long, I wonder what this visit means....”

“Ask him in....” As usual, Lao Tzu said no more than this.

“How are you, master?” inquired Confucius, bowing respectfully.

“As always,” replied Lao Tzu. “I have not seen you for a long time. No doubt you have been studying hard in your lodgings?”

“Not at all,” disclaimed Confucius modestly. “I stayed indoors thinking. I begin to gain a glimmer of understanding. Crows and magpies peck each other; fish moisten one another with saliva; the sphex changes into a different insect; when a younger brother is conceived, the elder cries. How can I, long removed from the cycle of transformations, succeed in transforming others?....”

“Quite so,” said Lao Tzu. “You have attained understanding.”

No further word was said. They might have been two senseless blocks of wood.

Eight minutes or so passed. Confucius exhaled deeply and stood up to take his leave, having thanked the master as usual most courteously for his instructions.

Confucius mounted his carriage. Leaning against the horizontal bar, he raised his clasped hands respectfully in farewell. Jan Yu cracked the whip in the air and cried:

“Gee-up!” The carriage rolled off. When it had gone more than ten yards, Lao Tzu went back to his room.

“You seem in low spirits today, master.” Kengsang Chu stood beside him, arms at his side, when Lao Tzu regained his seat. “You said very little....”

“Just so,” rejoined Lao Tzu wearily with a faint sigh.

“But you don’t understand. I believe I ought to leave.”

“Why?” If a thunderbolt had struck from the blue Kengsang Chu could not have been more staggered.

“Kung Chiu understands my ideas. He knows I’m the only one able to see through him, and this must make him uneasy. If I don’t go, it may be awkward....”

“But doesn’t he belong to the same Way? Why should you go?”

“No.” Lao Tzu waved a dissenting hand. “Ours is not the same Way. We may wear the same sandals, but mine are for traveling the deserts, his for going to the court.”
Zhuang Zi (ca. 369-286 B. C.) is the second great figure of the early Daoist philosophy in China, the first being Lao Zi, who lived, according to one theory, around the fifth century B. C., and was about 20 years senior to Confucius. Thus Daoism is often referred to as "the teachings of Lao-Zhuang." Though a very popular school of philosophy contending for supremacy in the late years of the Zhou dynasty and the beginning of the Han dynasty, Daoism gradually lost to Confucianism, which won official recognition from the Han emperor and obtained the status of the orthodox doctrine of the state. Perhaps partly due to the apolitical nature of Daoism and its principle of inaction, the rivalry between Confucianism and Daoism was not as severe as that between Confucianism and Legalism. Confucian scholars often employed Daoist concepts in their debates with the Legalist-minded officials who favored regimentation through the enforcement of stern laws. As Burton Watson has well observed, "One should therefore think of Confucianism and Taoism [Daoism] in the Han times not as rival systems demanding a choice for one side or the other, but rather as two complementary doctrines, an ethical and political system for the conduct of public and family life, and a mystical philosophy for the spiritual nourishment of the individual, with the metaphysical teachings of the Book of Changes acting as a bridge between the

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90 *Old Tales Retold*, 96-9.
91 Little is known about the life of Zhuang Zi. According to *Shi ji* by Sima Qian, his personal name was Zhou, and he was once a small official. In order to retain his freedom, he declined an offer to become a prime minister. The life of Lao Zi is also a mystery. Although the scant information about Lao Zi still comes from Sima Qian's book, it contains contradicting dates about his life which have raised doubt among scholars. While many people accept that Lao Zi lived around the fifth century B. C., some date Lao Zi at the fourth or even third century B. C. See Wing-tsit Chan, *The Way of Lao Tzu*, Introduction.
From the passages above taken from the *Zhuang Zi*, we can discern some traces of the Daoist smugness about its superiority over Confucianism, but there is little evidence to suggest the animosity between Confucius and Lao Zi. Confucius is portrayed as an obedient student who listens with all due respect to the teachings of Master Lao Zi, and seems to have benefited from them. Comparing the original story in the *Zhuang Zi* and Lu Xun's parody of it, we cannot fail to discover a strong critical impulse concealed in the seemingly burlesque depiction of Lao Zi and Confucius in Lu Xun's story. The comic effect is produced from the recognition of the incongruity between the original text and the parody text, and Lu Xun's critical comment is implicit in the contrast that his story presents.

Lu Xun was critical of both Confucianism and Daoism all along, which was in conformity with his general iconoclast attitude toward tradition. However, behind this overall critical attitude is a complex frame of mind which often betrays Lu Xun's ambivalent stance. In "Leaving the Pass," although both Lao Zi and Confucius are held to ridicule and criticism, Confucius is described as an aggressive, calculating person, whereas Lao Zi appears to be a timid, overcautious sage who chooses to retreat after he sees through Confucius's scheme. True to Lao Zi's tenet of inaction, the best he could think of was to leave. Although Confucius appeared "most courteous and respectful" in front of Lao Zi in his first meeting with Lao Zi, when asked how well he had studied and applied the Classics, Confucius looked "a little flustered," an understatement which reveals Confucius's eagerness about and interest in wooing favor and fame from the

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princes. Lao Zi's lecturing on the Way unwittingly dealt a hard blow to Confucius, who, "like one clubbed over the head," sat there "as if his spirit had departed, to all intents a senseless block of wood." Eight minutes later, Confucius "inhaled deeply and stood up to take his leave...." 93

Lu Xun's description of Confucius' second meeting with Lao Zi can also be seen as a parody of the first one with some variations. During the second meeting, Kengsang Chu entered in some surprise in his whisper instead of "some annoyance" after he saw Confucius, and Confucius, without waiting for Lao Zi to lecture, spoke eagerly about how he had gained "a glimmer of understanding" after staying indoors for three months "thinking" instead of "studying." In Lao Zi's eyes, Confucius' "thinking" and "understanding" were indicative of his aggressive ambition. As Lao Zi remarked later, "Kung Chiu [Confucius] understands my ideas. He knows I'm the only one able to see through him, and this must make him uneasy. If I don't go, it may be awkward...." 94 So at the end of the second meeting, Confucius and Lao Zi looked like "two senseless blocks of wood," and Confucius, unlike the first time, "exhaled deeply and stood up to take his leave." 95 Despite Confucius' apparent modesty and obedience, his words actually sent a chilling note to Lao Zi, and became the major reason for Lao Zi's departure for the west. Of course this is Lu Xun's version of why Lao Zi decided to leave, which was based on Zhang Taiyan's view. Lu Xun wrote of the story specifically in an essay entitled "The 'Pass' in 'Leaving the Pass'." Lu

93 Lu Xun, Old Tales Retold, 97.
94 Ibid., 99.
95 Ibid., 99.
Xun said: “It was because of Confucius’ words that Lao Zi decided to embark on the westward journey and left the Hangu Pass. This is a theory that I learned from Mr. Zhang Taiyan in Tokyo thirty years ago. It is not my own discovery or creation. Later he included this opinion in his essay ‘A Brief Account of the Theories of the Ancient Philosophers.’ I myself do not necessarily believe that it is the truth.” 96 Nevertheless Lu Xun adopted Zhang Taiyan’s radical view in his story, probably because he could appropriate it to his advantage in the critique of Confucianism. 

“Leaving the Pass” was first published on January 20, 1936. This was a time of increasing national crisis for China when Japanese invaders were stepping up their encroachments on Chinese territory. In the face of Japanese aggression, some people, instead of agitating for active resistance, advocated Lao Zi’s principle of inaction and the idea that “the soft can outdo the tough.” Some scholars highly recommended the Zhuang Zi and put it on the top of the reading list for young readers, claiming that the philosophy of Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi was superior to other ideas. Lu Xun had no intention to conceal his motive in writing the story, and said openly that “‘Leaving the Pass’ is in actuality my criticism of Lao Zi’s thought.” 97

In addition to evoking ancient events and figures through the use of general parody, Lu Xun also employs the technique of specific parody characterized by a playfully enforced integration of the incongruous texts as a means of his critique of

96 See Lu Xun, Old Tales Retold, footnote (10), 109.
97 See Lu Xun, “Zhi Xu Maoyong” 致徐摩庸 [A letter to Xu Maoyong] (February 21, 1936), Lu Xun shuxin ji 魯迅書信集 [A collection of Lu Xun’s letters], 146
tradition and comment on social reality. In the story "Leaving the Pass," we find quite a few instances where ancient classics are parodied. In illustration, let me quote the following passage:

Lao Tzu sat in the middle like a senseless block of wood. After a deep silence, he coughed a few times and his lips moved behind his white beard. At once all the others held their breath to listen intently while he slowly declaimed:

The Way that can be told of is not an Unvarying Way;
The names that can be named are not unvarying names.
It was from the Nameless that Heaven and Earth sprang;
The named is but the mother that rears the ten thousand creatures, each after its kind....
The listeners looked at each other. No one took notes.

Lao Tzu continued:

Truly, "Only he that rids himself forever of desire can see the Secret Essence" ;
He that has never rid himself of desire can see only the Outcomes.
These two things issued from the same mold, but nevertheless are different in name.
The "same mold" we can but call the Mystery,
Or rather the "Darker than any Mystery,"
The Doorway whence issued all Secret Essence.

Signs of distress were apparent on every face. Some seemed not to know where to put their hands and feet. One of the customs officers gave a huge yawn; the copyist fell asleep, letting slip his knives, brushes and wooden tablets with a crash on to the mat.\textsuperscript{98}

Lao Zi's lecture which starts with the verbatim quote of the first few lines from the \textit{Dao de jing} in classical Chinese appears particularly funny amongst an

\textsuperscript{98} Lu Xun, \textit{Old Tales Retold}, 103.
audience made up of constables, scouts, custom officers, one copyist, one accountant, and one cook. Small wonder signs of distress soon appear on every face. The insertion of Lao Zi's *Dao de jing* in a comic setting actually mocks and trivializes this greatly revered classic. In its own illuminating way, Lu Xun's parody is purgative of the hypnotic power of Lao Zi's mystic doctrine so much adored by its followers past and present.

If we browse quickly through *Old Stories Retold*, we shall find that Lu Xun's parodization consists of not only bric-a-brac from ancient classics, but also debris from contemporary sources. There are ample examples from *Old Stories Retold* to show how Lu Xun has dexterously made use of specific parody as a technique for the purposes of ridicule or ironic comment, and as a means to underscore the meta-fictionality of his works. Besides producing humorous as well as comic effects, the inconsistencies and incongruities that we have observed between the parodied text and the parody often betray a kind of self-conscious playfulness and reflection which embody the originality and creativity of Lu Xun's new fictional mode.

*Old Stories Retold* is littered with parodic snippets from contemporary personages. In the story “The Flight to the Moon,” when Yi replied to the old woman that he was “forty-five last year” on one occasion and said to Feng Meng, his enemy in the duet, that Feng had “learned nothing in a hundred visits or more” to him, Lu Xun is said to be parodying Gao Changhong's words in the
essays that Gao wrote to attack Lu Xun.\textsuperscript{99} This is certainly true. In addition to the quotes above, we can find more from the story that can be seen as Lu Xun's parodization of Gao's words. For example, Yi said to the maids: "Did she find me too old? But only last month she said: 'You are not old. It's a sign of mental weakness to think of yourself as old....' " One of maids said to Yi: "Folk still describe you as a warrior, sir." While Lu Xun's use of parody may have been attributed to his personal rancor with Gao, it should nevertheless be viewed in the larger context of both the olden times and the contemporary age when the same motifs keep repeating themselves, viz., the motifs of betrayal and ungratefulness.

The story brims with Lu Xun's scathing satire, but it is not aimed at just one Gao Changhong. It is expressive of Lu Xun's repugnance and loathe toward a whole bunch people like Gao, both in the ancient age and present time. As Lu Xun pointed out himself in a letter to his wife Xu Guangping, one of the objectives in writing the story was to "deal a blow to Gao Changhong and his ilk." \textsuperscript{100}

"In the story "Mending Heaven" -- the story of the Creation -- the goddess NUwa inadvertently made some creatures when she was flicking a wistaria with her hand, and "the wistaria rolled over in the muddy water, sending up a spray of mud which falling on the ground turned into little creatures like those she

\textsuperscript{99} Gao Changhong 高長虹 was one of the young writers whom Lu Xun had helped. His first collage book of poetry and prose entitled \textit{The Adventures of the Heart} was edited by Lu Xun and included in the \textit{Wuhe congshu} [A library series of diverse authors]. Later Gao broke with Lu Xun and attacked him fiercely especially after Lu Xun publicly protested against the misuse of his name by Gao for the Society of Sturm and Drang that Gao and others had founded. See \textit{Gushi xinbian} [Old stories retold] (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1979), note 8, 25-26.

\textsuperscript{100} See \textit{Liang di shu}, No. 85, 73, 112.
had made.” But “most of these looked stupid and repulsive, with heads like
deer, eyes like rats.” 101 One of these ugly-looking creatures said, in classical
Chinese, to the naked Nüwa: “Your lewd nakedness is immoral, an offence
against etiquette, a breach of the rules and conduct fit for beasts! This is forbidden
by the laws of the land!” 102 Apparently Lu Xun was parodying the words of those
hypocritical apologists of old Confucian morality who were trying to smear the
radical anti-traditionalists of May Fourth in the name of the rites and the laws.

In “Curbing the Flood,” there is an episode depicting the scholars on the
Mount of Culture and their dialogues:

Conversations like this were carried on vertically:
“Good morning!”
“How do you do?”
“O. K.”
“Glu.... Gli. ... “

... ... ...

“You will never succeed in curbing the flood, not if he's the son of
Kun,” declared a scholar who walked with a cane.
“I have collected the genealogies of many kings, dukes, ministers
and rich families. Long and careful study has led me to this
conclusion: all the descendants of the rich are rich, all those of the
wicked are wicked—this is known as heredity.’ It follows that, if
Kun was unsuccessful, Yu will inevitably be unsuccessful too; for
fools cannot give birth to wise men!”
“O. K.,” agreed a scholar without a cane.
“But think of His Majesty's father!” put in another scholar
without a cane. 103

101 Lu Xun, Old Tales Retold, 7.
102 Ibid., 13.
103 Ibid., 32. The first dialogue is rendered in the Chinese transliteration of the
English speech in the original.
This episode happened not long after the story "Curbing the Flood" started. "Curbing the Flood" is based on the ancient tales about the meriteous deeds of Emperor Yu, the well-known semi-legendary and semi-historical figure who is accredited with the achievement of subjugating the floods — the natural disaster that had caused immense trouble to the Chinese people living in the Yellow River valley. However, in Lu Xun's version of the story, the historical events fade into the background, and what is thrust to the foreground is a group of contemporary scholars and officials from the Bureau of Water Conservancy who survived the catastrophe. Also thrust to the foreground is Lu Xun's own parodic mode and style, which provide him with an artistic means to engage in self-conscious reflection as well as humorous purgation.

Malcom Bradbury writes that "Parody is, I take it, an ironic renegotiation of the relationship between style and substance, so that the stylistic presentation passes into the foreground and the content is minimalized to the background, this often having comic effects." 104 These scholars of modern times gathered on the Mount of Culture which was not inundated. So they had no fear of the flood; nor did they have to worry about food, since it was imported from Qi Hong Guo — the Kingdom of Marvellous Artisans. Therefore, they could converse with one another in English and pursue their studies in a peaceful state of mind, enjoying "the poetic sight" of the flood from the cliffs. The name "Mount of Culture" itself is a parody of "city of culture," with reference to an event in October 1932 when more than thirty cultural personages in Beijing petitioned the government to

104 Malcolm Bradbury, No, Not Bloomsbury (London: Andre Deutsch Limited,
declare Beijing as a "city of culture." At that time the Japanese invaders had already occupied the northeastern part of China, and north China was in a precarious situation. These scholars thought that declaring Beijing as a "cultural zone" and removing all military institutions to some other place could prevent the ancient city rich with cultural relics from being devastated in the war, since they claimed that Beijing was of neither political nor military importance. Of course this proposal not only was naive but also coincided with the plot of the invading Japanese troops. By parodying the tones and manners of these cultural figures, Lu Xun combines both the meta-ficitonal and comic elements in an attempt to create a mode that is not only critical but also creative.

As has been mentioned previously, literary devices similar to parody have been appropriated quite extensively in Chinese literary tradition. Parody (used as either a structural or rhetoric device) is a feature that can be frequently observed in many of Ming and Qing novels. In the Jin Ping Mei, the self-reflexive and playful potential of parody has been brought into full play. The parodic character of the Jin Ping Mei has been noted and discussed by quite a few scholars. Here I would like to give only two examples in illustration. The first chapter of the Jin Ping Mei is a novel that can be described as a parodic work. When discussing the first chapter of the Chongzhen edition of the novel, Andrew H Plaks also speaks of its "obvious parody on the opening scene of San-kuo yen-yi [Romance of the three kingdoms]." See Andrew H. Plaks, Four Masterworks of the Ming Novel, 77. Martin Weizong Huang points out that "Jin ping mei is a novel full of intertextual subversions and various plays of parodistic strategy. Its intertextual relation to Shuihu zhuan is a well-known fact though few critics have examined it in terms of an intricate parody." See Martin Weizong Huang, "Dehistoricization and Intertextualization: The Anxiety of Precedents in the Evolution of the Traditional Chinese Novel,"
Ping Mei incorporates some parts from a huaben [vernacular story] entitled “Wen jing yuanyang hui” [The lovers’ rendezvous where murder was committed]. What has been parodied is only the prefatory ci poem and some of the narrator's comments at the beginning and end of the original text. Almost toward the end of the whole novel, in chapters 98 and 99, another vernacular story with the title of “Xinqiaoshi Han Wu mai chunqing” [Han Wu sells love at Xingqiaoshi] has also been parodied, again not in its entirety: only about one third of the original has been embedded in the new context, with names of the characters changed to fit the story and the roles of figures totally reversed.

Thus these chapters in the Jin Ping Mei can be viewed as hybrid texts in which the parodied text and the parody text are thrown into an active dialogue with each other. Their interaction and the discrepancy revealed serve to accentuate the theme of the whole novel: “Sex does not mislead men; men mislead themselves.”

As the author of A Brief History of Chinese Fiction, Lu Xun could not have been unfamiliar with this special feature of the traditional novel. As has been mentioned previously, Lu Xun thought very highly of the Jin Ping Mei and admired its literary excellence. It is quite natural if some of the techniques employed in this Ming novel found their way into Lu Xun's stories.

Tapping the critical and creative potential inherent in parody, Lu Xun successfully remolded it into a new literary form. In his hands, parody became an entirely innovative mode of fiction, more subtle and sophisticated than conventional parody, and more avant-garde than the modes adopted in his previous

CLEAR 12 [1990]: 64.
stories. The parodic mode of fiction thus turned into a literary device that could give Lu Xun unbridled freedom in his literary endeavor and creation. He employed it adroitly not only as a tool in his critique of tradition, contemporary reality, and the established literary conventions, but also as a means to project his identity as a creative, inventing artist whom no doctrine of any sort could bind in his quest for truth.
Chapter Four:  

SHEN CONGWEN: A RELENTLESS EXPERIMENTALIST

If we are to rank modern Chinese writers, Shen Congwen is perhaps second only to Lu Xun. When Lu Xun died in 1936, Shen Congwen was already an established writer and editor in the prime of his career, with thirty-odd collections of fiction and prose to his credit. Some believed that Shen Congwen was the person who would fill the void left by the grand master in the Chinese wentan [the literary arena], but this does not suggest in any way that Shen Congwen was one of Lu Xun's disciples who shared with him similar beliefs about literature and wrote in his tradition. As a

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1 See Hua-ling Nieh, Shen Ts'ung-wen (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1972), Preface. Of course, this was not the unified opinion of all the writers and reading public at that time. In China, Shen Congwen was always a controversial figure. Before 1949, despite his literary achievements, he was censured by Left-wing writers for his middle-of-the-road political position and liberal attitude toward literature. Some of his works were criticized for prettifying reality and lacking political seriousness. After 1949, Shen Congwen virtually disappeared from the Chinese literary scene. He stopped writing stories completely, and worked in a new post at a museum. Several influential books on the history of modern Chinese literature published in the 1950s and 1960s made no mention of his name and his works. They chose to turn a blind eye to Shen Congwen's literary achievements and influence as if he had not existed at all. Later events proved that Shen was wise to quit writing and take on the job of a researcher on cultural relics from the past. By working on ancient porcelain and costumes instead of writing fiction, he was able to avoid becoming a victim of the successive political campaigns from which few writers could escape. It was only in the early 1980s that Shen was reinstated and his literary merit re-
matter of fact, only two years back in 1934, Lu Xun was engaged in a minor polemic with Shen Congwen about the so-called "Beijing type" and "Shanghai type" of writers.\(^2\) Shen Congwen was not Lu Xun's friend, not even his acquaintance, although Shen held Lu Xun in due esteem and called him the founder of xiangtu [native soil] literature who "has freed the pen of the new writers from the constraints of dogmatism and brought it closer to earth from which they can obtain nourishment." \(^3\)

In this respect, Shen Congwen can be regarded as one of Lu Xun's followers, since Shen is sometimes known as an eminent writer in the xiangtu tradition. However,

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\(^2\) The polemic between the Jingpai ["Beijing school or type"] and the Hapai ["Shanghai school or type"] of writers in 1934 was actually started with an article written by Shen Congwen in the Dagong Bao [L'Impartial]. The article, titled "Attitude of Men of Letters," taunted Shanghai writers for taking literature as a pastime in their leisure instead of an honest undertaking. Later in another article, Shen called them, not without a hint of contempt (due to the traditional scorn for Shanghai merchants and the Shanghai-based writers of the "Mandarin Ducks and Butterfly school" in the early decades of the 20th century), the "Shanghai types." Su Wen, one of the so-called "third kind of people" residing in Shanghai, rebutted the charge by quoting Lu Xun's remark to the effect that a person was always ridiculed for things over which he has no control, such as his birthplace. Later Lu Xun joined in the polemic, and wrote that "the sole difference between them is that the 'Beijing types' are the protégés of officials, and the 'Shanghai types' are the protégés of businessmen." See Lu Xun, "'Beijing Types' and 'Shanghai Types,'" Selected Works of Lu Xun, Vol. III, trans. Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1985) 20.

\(^3\) Shen Congwen, "Xue Lu Xun" [Learn from Lu Xun], Shen Congwen sanwen [Prose of Shen Congwen], Vol.2, eds. Fan Qiao et al. (Beijing: Zhongguo guangbo dianshi chubanshe, 1994) 426. 使新作家群的筆,從教條觀念拘束中脫出, 貼近土地,挹取滋養,...
despite the few similarities that we may find in their works (another example is that the fiction of both is permeated with a strong lyrical mood), Lu Xun and Shen Congwen are as different as, to quote Hua-ling Nieh's words, "rice and corn." The difference is manifest not only in theme, form, and style, but also in their life experience and attitude toward literature. The words that are used to describe Shen Congwen's works are often such adjectives as "idyllic," "pastoral," "lyrical," "romantic," "realist," "naturalist," "modernist," and "philosophical."

Shen Congwen is often loosely referred to by some Chinese critics as a writer of the so-called "Beijing school" (Jing pai) consisting mainly of liberal-minded intellectuals who were striving to achieve artistic independence and excellence, whereas Lu Xun, taking Shanghai as the base for his writing activities from 1930 on, was the father of modern Chinese fiction and the spiritual leader of the Left-wing writers.

In terms of the quantity of fiction, Shen is also different from Lu Xun. While Lu Xun's output of fiction is small, Shen Congwen is a prolific writer of stories, novellas and novels, which amount to more than thirty volumes. Furthermore, these works are written in a variety of modes and styles that defy any easy summary.

Shen Congwen is a passionate experimentalist in fiction writing. For him, alien modes of literary expression, be they romanticism, realism, symbolism, or modernism, are
all worth trying. The narrative methods and techniques used in traditional Chinese fiction are also objects for his literary experimentation. He is, so to speak, an “avant-gardist” writer by temperament. However, many Chinese critics tend to overlook this important aspect of his writing. For example, Ling Yu, a Chinese scholar of Shen Congwen, sums up Shen Congwen's writing in the following words:

With regard to the basic tendency of writing, Shen Congwen can be said to have inherited the romantic tradition indigenous to the culture of the South, but as a result of his multifarious explorations of the modes of life, his works, when viewed from the perspective of form, have evolved into four basic categories, i.e., the realistic recollections of the past; the satirical portrayal of realities; the symbolic and lyrical; and the romantic and legendary, thus presenting a unity of various creative methods.4

Since whether or not the literary tradition in the south of China can be portrayed as romantic is a question that falls outside the scope of the present study, we are not going to discuss it here. Despite his effort to catch all the salient features of Shen Congwen's works, Ling Yu's comment neglects one of the most important features of his oeuvre, i.e., his experiments with modernist techniques. Some other Chinese critics maintain an even narrower view of Shen Congwen, claiming that Shen

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is but a "genuine xiangtu 鄉士 [native soil] writer," and his chief contribution lies in "establishing a modern Chinese xiangtu literature." 5 In fact, only about half of Shen's works are concerned with his homeland in West Hunan, and the other half are about the various aspects of urban life. Judgements made from different perspectives can certainly add to our understanding of Shen Congwen and his works. However, what seems more important to me is how to look at Shen Congwen as an actively thinking and exploring experimentalist instead of a static, suave observer, and examine his works as something changing and dynamic, constantly undergoing metamorphoses, instead of something stagnant and torpid, or some kind of amalgam made up of isolated writings in different styles and modes.

An examination of the works that Shen Congwen wrote in the different stages of his writing career reveals that Shen Congwen is a self-conscious and conscientious writer who is never content with himself, and never satisfied with his experiments in fiction. In his incessant quest for the truth of reality, Shen Congwen keeps on trying and experimenting, breaking new ground and creating new modes of expression. The image of a relentless, dedicated experimentalist in literary creation is perhaps what defines Shen Congwen as a modern Chinese writer, and his fruitful achievements in literary experiments are what define the modernity of his works. What I would like
to do is to trace the path that Shen Congwen traveled in his exploration of modern
form, theme, and style in Chinese fiction in an attempt to reveal how he endeavored to
arrive at a literary modernity as he saw and interpreted it. His journey in literature and
his search for the meaning of modernity are closely linked with his journey through
life and his ruminations about the self, life, the nature of man, and literature, and the
relationships among them. As we shall see, at a time when literature was burdened
with a lofty mission of spiritual transformation and national salvation, Shen Congwen
was one of the few writers who displayed an unflagging passion and sincerity toward
an auratic literature and an artistic independence little affected by both Right and Left
ideas. This does not mean that Shen ignored the ethical and moral dimensions of
literary works. On the contrary, as a self-taught intellectual well read in the Chinese
classics and traditional literature and immersed in his youth in the atmosphere of the
May Fourth enlightenment, he believed, like many of his contemporaries, in the
Literary Revolution. The reason is not far to seek: the traditional motto that
“literature is the vehicle of the Dao” finds its echo in the basic proposition of the
Literary Revolution. But unlike many May Fourth intellectuals, Shen was against
employing literature for political and commercial purposes.

5 Qin Kangzong and Jiang Chenyu, Xiandai zuojia he wenxue liupai [Modern
In what follows, I would like to start with a discussion of how he perceives of literature and what his conception of literature is, and then I shall try to investigate how this is related to Chinese tradition and how it is different from the views held by the majority of the May Fourth intellectuals. After that, I shall proceed to study a selection of Shen Congwen's fictional works in the different phases of his writing career, and through their analysis, try to sort out clues that will lead us to see more clearly the tracks that he has left behind on his journey toward literary modernity.

We shall find that in his twenty-year career as a writer of fiction, the path which Shen Congwen traversed is one of constant literary creation and experimentation: from his early works about the legendary West Hunan permeated with a strong romantic mood, through the mature stories of his mid-career featuring a combination of different trends and methods (realism, symbolism, lyricism, satire, etc.), to the fiction of his late years in which he experimented with modernist techniques (such as stream-of-consciousness, and psychological probing), he seems to have traveled the entire journey that took Western literature about two hundred years to complete. Yet he has substantially modified these foreign literary modes and combined them with a great wealth of devices and techniques from the Chinese literary tradition. He is indeed one of the few writers who is always willing to try new forms and new ways of expression and therefore can be regarded as a truly "avant-garde" writer among his contemporaries.
Besides being a writer of stories, prose and poetry, Shen Congwen also worked as an editor and university professor. Naturally, he did a great deal of thinking about literature and its relationship with the self, the world, and the nature of man. He wrote critical essays on other writers and their works, and expressed his views about literature in his biography, as well as in the prefaces and afterwords of his works and other prose writings. As we can well imagine, his ideas about literature, though sketchy and random, are often insightful and penetrating, since they have combined the wisdom and experience of an inquisitive and prolific writer, as well as a seasoned editor and professor.

To understand Shen Congwen's conception of literature, we should of course examine what he has to say about literature. Let us first take a look at the epigraph at the beginning of his posthumous essay entitled “Chouxiang de shuqing” 抽象的抒情 [Abstract lyricism]: “Think as I think, you will be able to understand

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6 As early as 1928-29, Shen Congwen and his two friends, HuYeping and Ding Ling, edited one literary supplement to the Shanghai Central Daily, one monthly (the Human World), and another monthly of their own (called the Red and Black) in Shanghai -- all at once -- albeit for a short period of time. From 1933-38, he took on the job of editing the literary supplement to the Dagongbao in Tianjin. His teaching career started at the same time when he was editing the literary monthlies in Shanghai. He accepted the offer to teach at Shanghai College. In 1930-31, he taught briefly at Wuhan University, and then in 1933-35, he worked as a professor of literature at Qingdao University. From 1938 to 1948, he first taught at the Southwest Associated University in Kunming, and then moved to Beijing and continued his teaching career until he resigned the job.
‘I’. Think as I think, you will be able to understand ‘Man’.” 7 These words may provide us the key to unlock what lies at the core of his random ruminations about literature. Of course this epigraph allows for different interpretations. Reading it, we shall probably ask ourselves such questions as: How can we think as he thinks? What do “I” and “Man” in the quotation marks refer to? In my opinion, “I” refers to not only subjectivity, but individuality. With “I” in quotations marks, Shen Congwen wants to stress and assert the identity of the “sovereign rational subject.” This emphasis on subjectivity and individuality is a bold statement which declares Shen's allegiance to the ideals of the European Enlightenment which were left unfinished in China's own enlightenment. In Chinese thought, “subjectivity” is approved of, but it should accord with the principle of Nature. “Individuality” is more often than not submerged in the intricate Confucian network of bonds and bondage. Shen Congwen is one of the few writers in China who manage to maintain a relatively autonomous stance in literature by identifying with individuality as well as subjectivity. If we want to think as he thinks, probably the best we can do is to try to grasp the subjectivity and individuality of his works by bringing our own subjectivity and individuality into play, and read his stories as he writes them, i. e., try to perceive and contemplate Nature, Man, and reality the way he does, i. e., employ all our

7 See Shen Congwen, Chouxiang de xujing [Abstract lyricism] (Changsha: Yuelu chubanshe, 1995) 1. 照我思我 理解 "我", 照我思我 認識 "人". These words
senses, as well as our faculties of imagination and association.

As for the interpretation of "Man," I think it does not differ very much from "man" (without articles) in English, that is, it refers to mankind, the human being, and human nature. All his life, in addition to pursuing his beloved arts, Shen Congwen always pondered over questions of eternal interest: the enigma of consciousness, the nature of man, the wonders of Nature and the mystery of cosmos. Given a chance to receive a better formal education, he would have become a philosopher or a scholar in religious studies. Literature for him is a sacred undertaking, one that he approaches with an almost religious devotion and moral commitment. In his mind, literature ranks nearly as high as the venerable ancient classics in establishing ethical values and moral principles. With his writing, he can explore the depths of human consciousness and reveal its nature. He can also appropriate it as a means to maintain close ties with life, and delve into his own private ego and dreams.

Shen Congwen is one of the modern Chinese writers who values literature more as an autonomous form of art than an expedient tool succumbing to historical exigencies. However, as has been said previously, like many other writers of the May Fourth era, Shen Congwen believed in the role of literature in moral enhancement and hung above Shen Congwen's picture in the funeral hall at his memorial service after
social comment. In this sense, he is not very much different from many of his contemporaries. One of the reasons that started him on a literary career is the old Confucian teaching that “poetry articulates the zhi.” As Shen wrote with reference to why he began to write classical-style poems, “Since I remembered the old teaching of ‘poetry articulating the zhi’ during my awakening in the adolescent years, writing poetry was the only thing I could resort to to express a vague sense of stubborn resistance against the old society and the environment.” The two masters of classical poetry that he admired most and found affinity with were the great Tang poets Du Fu and Bai Juyi, both of whom were known for their poems of social critique and sympathy with the poor and the lowly. They are often considered the embodiment of the traditional poetics which integrates the elements of both Dao and qing.

As a self-made writer who climbed from the bottom of the social ladder to the elite intellectual class by means of literature, Shen knew better than either to take literature lightly as mere entertainment or to subject it to the sole use as a tool for political purposes. This explains why on the one hand he despised and attacked the popular fiction of the Mandarin Ducks and Butterfly school, and on the other hand, he


was also against the Left-wing writers for placing literature entirely at the service of politics. In a historical period rife with tensions and conflicts, Shen seemed to be a person less affected by either radical iconoclasm or a complex consciousness beset with contradictions. He was more like a member of the traditional literati class, who always attempted to find harmony between literature and the *Dao*, and between the expressive and the didactic theories of literature. Therefore, he was not very much perturbed by the tensions and conflicts that have tormented a great many intellectuals of his times.

Of course, Shen was biased more toward the expressive than toward the didactic concept of literature. He was essentially of the view that literature should be a seamless combination of ethical and aesthetic values. This is very close to the Aristotelian idea of mimetic poetry offering an organic union of aesthetic enjoyment and cognitive pleasure. From the following words, we can see how Shen Congwen tries to harmonize the *Dao* and *zhi* with literature's own aesthetic and communicative requirements:

> The history of literature and the arts shows that "articulating the *zhi*" and "carrying the *Dao*" always have a bearing on them. Everybody says that art should take morality as one of its pre-requisites. If we assume that the existence of this concept is justified, then the minimal effect of the creative arts should be one which can ensure communication between the artist and other people based on an understanding of common human nature. From satisfaction arise the feelings of happiness and a sense of being enlightened,

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166
which in turn will create the courage and confidence to forge ahead. Thus we can say that the procurement of this effect is moral.¹⁰

What Shen Congwen attempted to do was to elevate literature to a level comparable with the Chinese classics, or even to substitute literature for them:

For two thousand years most of the classics have used axioms to convey abstract principles. These classics have lost either their significance or relevance today. The new classics of tomorrow will most likely be elaborated through “human affairs,” because they are prepared for human beings. While this concept of literature may look like a “joke” to some people, for writers, it should be treated like a faith.¹¹

Therefore, he attaches great importance to the kind of literature that takes “human affairs” as its major concern and is close to a “human life of flesh and blood,” and certainly, an aesthetic quality (what Shen calls dexing 德性, i.e., “virtue” or “merit”) is no less significant:

All literary compositions should be rooted in “human affairs.”

¹⁰ Shen Congwen, “Chengmo [Silence],” Qie bu ji [Cautious steps], quoted in He Dong ed. Shen Congwen miaoyu lu [Wonderful quotes from Shen Congwen] (Beijing: Zhong guoguangbo chubanshe, 1992) 89.

great literary works are necessarily close to a human life of flesh and blood. In the execution of a work, importance should be placed on the “best appropriation of its merit.” Obviously, the work of an author capable of making his story harmonize with human nature while adhering to an aesthetic quality of literature will easily possess universality and durability.\footnote{Shen Congwen, “Lun Mu Shiying [On Mu Shiying],” \textit{Shen Congwen sanwen}, Vol. 2, 394.}

Thus we can see that for Shen Congwen literature is a faith, a belief in the power of literature which derives from the harmonization of its own “aesthetic quality” (or in Habermas’s words, “inner logic”) and its life reference.

However, as Shen Congwen explicates further, “human affairs” consist of two important parts: “social phenomena” \textit{shehui xianxiang} 社會現象, and “dream phenomena” \textit{meng de xianxiang} 夢的現象.

Three years ago I spoke of fiction ... and said that fiction can be viewed as “human affairs appropriately recorded in words.” As the term implies, human affairs are composed of two parts: one is the social phenomena, which relate to the various relations among people; the other is the dream phenomena, which refer to the various activities of the individual human mind or consciousness. If fiction is made up of the first part alone, then it will easily become day-to-day accounts of a newspaper; if it consists of only the second part, then it tends to become poetry. We must blend the part about human relations and the part about dreams in our work, well embellish and trim it, and execute it in the most appropriate way. Only by so doing can we hope to turn out a good story.\footnote{Shen Congwen, “Duanpian xiaoshuo [The short story],” \textit{Chouxiang de shuqing}, 250.}

168
As we can see, unlike many of his contemporaries who subscribed only to the doctrine of realism for its dubious role in cultural transformation, Shen Congwen was of a more balanced opinion. Subjective contemplation and imagination are at least as important as the objective portrayal of reality. He knows very well that literature will lose its vitality if separated from life, but he knows equally well that in the creative process, a writer's sensibility and personality play a no less important role. This is a process where the writer should keep himself from the interference of the outside world:

I know that a person should live among people and breathe all human breaths. He must be close to life so as to develop his mind and personality. This I know very well. But on the very moment when I take up my pen and start to write, things become different: except that I try to capture my perceptions and images of events, it seems as though I was insulated from the outside world, and lost all contact with it. I think it should be this way, and it has to be this way. All literary works call for individualism, and they must be soaked with the personality and feelings of a writer.

14 Shen Congwen, “Xizuo xianji daixu” [In lieu of the preface to the collection of my fledgling works], Shen Congwen xuan ji [Selected works of Shen Congwen], Vol. 5, 228.
As if this is not clear enough, Shen says more emphatically that “the writer must make his own independent judgment in writing; he must be thoroughly independent.”

As a matter of fact, Shen frankly acknowledges that he is often engrossed in his own dreams. For him, writing is, in one sense, to put down “the history of the mind and dreams.” Speaking of his novella The Frontier City, he says that he has just put on the paper “a kind of dream that has made me feel depressed,” and the story is “a pure poem, one that should not stick with life.” He attempts to create a fictional world which builds on a life that one lives in his dream land as well as in the real world. To his mind, this is exactly what literature should be. Defending the validity of this fictional world, Shen Congwen says:

Everything depends on whether the representation is right and makes sense. If everything (such as the handling of themes, portrayal of characters) is all right, then this kind of world can naturally exit in my stories, although in reality it has disappeared. Even if this world has never existed, that does not interfere with the truth of a story.
In order to create such a world, a writer has to mobilize all his senses to perceive reality and evoke visionary pictures from one’s reminiscences and imaginations. Shen Congwen writes:

We ought to employ our every sense to capture all kinds of sounds, colors, and smells from Nature, and keep an eye on all kinds of human affairs. We must rid ourselves of all old and stereotyped constraints, and learn to use our pen in a natural way. • • • In this way we can roam about freely in our remembrances and imaginations as well as in our realities, and create a work by using all our senses simultaneously.  

What distinguishes a good writer from a mediocre one is that the former is good at using his senses to perceive and interpret reality and the human world, whereas the latter is relatively lacking in sense perception. To possess a perceptive and sensitive mind is thus required of everyone who wants to be a good writer. Proud of his rural origin, Shen Congwen impugns the poor sensibility of those dwelling in the cities:

The life of city dwellers is too busy and chaotic. Their eyes and ears, being exposed to sounds, lights and colors, are too tired. They suffer from lack of sleep and bad nutrition. Their nerves may appear to be extraordinarily acute and sensitive. However, except for their sensual desire and worries about personal gains and losses, their senses are quite numb. 

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Shen Congwen always takes pride in his country origin. On many occasions he prefers to call himself a "country man."

Shen Congwen was born in West Hunan, a remote rural area in China's hinterland where some of the tributaries of the mighty Yangtze River flow through its wooded mountains. To outsiders, this is a mystic land inhabited by the Han, the Miao, and other ethnic peoples and known for its turbulent rapids and wondrous green mountains. Shen Congwen's paternal grandmother was a Miao, and his mother was a Tujia. In his childhood days, Shen was more interested in the great outdoors than going to school. He often played truant and found a great deal of pleasure playing in the fields: climbing trees, fishing, wading in the brooks, and picking berries and herbs, etc. For him, Nature was a bigger book, which not only taught him knowledge but also sharpened his senses. He was also interested in vernacular novels of the Ming and Qing dynasties, such as *The Dream of Red Mansions*, *A Journey to the West*, and *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. He preferred these fictional works to classical-style prose and read them with great avidity.

At the young age of fourteen, Shen decided to embark on a military career and was enlisted as a student soldier. From the age of fourteen to twenty, he worked variously as a soldier, police clerk, tax collector, and staff secretary. During this period, particularly when he was a staff secretary, he was engrossed in reading...
different kinds of books: classical poetry, prose, history, and even some of Dickens's novels that had been translated into classical Chinese by Lin Shu and his collaborator.

While working as a proof reader, Shen Congwen had a chance to read some of the new magazines, such as Xin chao [New Tide], Gai zao [Reform] and Chaungzao yuekan [Creation monthly], for the first time. He even learned to write classical-style poems and earned a reputation among local squires. However, fed up with the dark and placid side of the provincial life and cherishing vague hopes to join in the cultural renaissance, Shen made the decision to go to Beijing, the cultural center of the country.

He went to Beijing at the age of twenty, with more ambition than money to support his ideal and subsistence. He did various odd jobs (at a printing company and an orphanage, for instance), and at one time he was even driven by his miserable plight to the recruiting station of a warlord army. It was only at the moment of fingerprinting and taking his food allowance that he suddenly remembered what he came to Beijing for and resolutely stole away. Despite the numerous hardships he underwent, Shen was able to pick up a haphazard knowledge by observing classes at Beijing University and reading extensively in Chinese literature and foreign literature in translation. He made many friends among progressive students and started to write articles and stories from his childhood memories and adolescent experience. He got his first work published in 1925, and Yazi [The ducks], the first collection of his
plays, stories, and poems was published in 1926. With more and more of his stories published, Shen Congwen finally succeeded in establishing his fame as a writer, thus realizing his ideal to be a new intellectual and join in the Chinese enlightenment which started in the May Fourth movement. Looking back on the road that he had traveled, Shen had every reason to feel proud of his country origin and the unusually acute senses that he had tempered in the ordeal of his life.

According to Shen Congwen, bringing all one's senses into full play is very important in the creative process; keeping close ties with life and having the ability to engage in subjective imagination also have a crucial bearing on the successful execution of a story. All these are essential qualities required of a good writer, but there is one more thing that one should not ignore, that is, the technical dimension of writing. Shen Congwen is well aware of the formal and stylistic aspects of literature. It seems to him that technique is inseparable from art. As he says, "Since art is inseparable from technique from the very start, we should not despise and overlook technique; nor should we abuse it." He has all along paid a great deal of attention to the style and methods of literary works. According to Shen Congwen, one of the reasons why the great classics of Chinese literature are immortal masterpieces of art is that they excel in technique. And "technique," as defined by Shen Congwen, refers
to “choice, careful arrangement, appropriateness, and propriety.”

Throughout his writing career, Shen Congwen never slackened his effort to experiment with new techniques and methods. His inquisitive and eclectic mind never ceased its quest for the refinement in style and form. As early as 1936, Shen Congwen wrote in the preface to the collection of his works that they were “only the initial experiments” of his lifelong undertaking. In 1980, he said again that writing was for him forever experimenting:

From the very beginning I have regarded myself as a foot soldier of the entire literary movement of the present century and my primary task was to be a pioneer of the whole army. My works represent the attempts that I have made to break records. Therefore, I always set about writing my works as if they were “exercises.” If I failed, I would change to another method; even if I succeeded, I would never rest on the small achievements I had made.

Browsing through his works, we find that Shen Congwen never backed off from his goal to experiment and make innovations in all his writing activities. It is this belief in literary experimentation and breaking new ground that led Shen

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20 Shen Congwen, “Lun jiqiao” [On technique], Chouxiang de shuqing, 283.
22 Shen Congwen, Shen Congwen xuanji, Vol. 5, 227.
Congwen to keep on creating literary works of diverse styles and forms. It is the spirit of “trial-and-error” and the courage to challenge past literary conventions that run through the entire journey of Shen Congwen's quest for literary modernity.

Shen Congwen's writing career can be roughly divided into three periods: (1) 1922-1931, (2) 1931-1938, and (3) 1938-1948. The works written between 1922 and 1931 fall into the early stage of Shen Congwen's writing. This period can be subdivided into two phases with the publication of “Bai Zi” 柏子 (1928) as the dividing line. Before 1928, most of his stories are really “exercises” in the true sense of the word: we can easily find traces of immaturity and roughness that could only have come out of the hand of a novice writer still in his apprenticeship. Mostly based on his childhood memories, nursemaid's tales, and adolescent experience, they reveal signs of naiveté and simplicity. However, the exotic flavor and farfetchedness of plots and characters make up for the lack of sophistication and refinement. The celebration of primitive energies and the exaltation of untainted love among the Miao people are particularly appealing to urban readers. Representative of this phase are the early pieces such as Yazi 鴨子 [The ducks], Migan 蜜柑 [Mandarin oranges], and Alisi Zhongguoyouji 阿麗絲中國游記 [Alice's adventures in China]. In this period, Shen chiefly resorts to an evocation of legends and his past experience to create the picture of a remote country tucked away in a corner of China's hinterland. He immersed his stories in his idealism and covered them
with a veil of myth and romanticism.

The publication of “Bai Zi” in 1928 represents the transition of Shen Congwen from a novice to a mature writer who was beginning to distinguish himself by writing fiction with his own distinct features. From 1928 to 1933, Shen tried to write stories in diverse literary modes and styles, and the thematic scope of his works was also widened. Some stories, “Long Zhu” (1929) and “Shen wu zhi ai” [The love of a shaman] (1929), for instance, were written by combining his imaginative power and the Miao life that he had learned about from tales and legends. They are permeated with a strong lyrical mood and romantic idealism. Some stories are realist portrayals of characters from different walks of life: peasants, boatmen, concubines, prostitutes, an actress, businessmen, shopkeepers, vendors, soldiers, bandits, etc. Shen also attempted to extend his thematic range from rural West Hunan to urban life.

These works can be described as realist in the sense that they are basically objective representations of contemporary social reality, but they are definitely not the kind of realism which takes high morality and prescriptive sociological preaching as its goals. In many of these stories, Shen Congwen evinces a genuine affection for the rural characters he portrays. As he says himself, “For peasants and soldiers, I cherish warm feelings of love that can hardly be described in words. This affection emanates
everywhere in all the works I have written.” The country folk are often depicted as creatures left to the mercies of harsh realities, or as innocent, kind-hearted people with natural goodness. “Bai Zi” (1928), “Niu” (Ox) (1929), “San ge nanren he yi ge nüren” 三個男人和一個女人 [Three men and a woman] (1930), and “Xiao Xiao” 萧萧 (1930) are examples of these works. Shen's nostalgic sentiment for the traditional values is so intense that sometimes he tends to idealize a tradition already besieged with many problems. As Michael S. Duke has well observed when commenting on the story “Xiao Xiao,” “Shen's story ‘Xiao Xiao’ probably represents the outer limit for depictions of rural China as a world where innocence and spontaneity can be rewarded with good humor and natural justice ….” In addition to the above two groups of stories, Shen Congwen also tried his hand at another kind of fiction that blends realist depiction of life with romantic lyricism and symbolism. “Yu” 漁 [Fishing] is a representative piece of this mode.

Shen Congwen reached the peak of his creativity in the years between 1931 and 1938. Many of his masterpieces were completed in this period of time: Bian cheng 邊城 [The frontier city], “Yue xia xiao jing” 月下小景 [Scenes under the

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178
moon], “Ba jun tu” 八駿圖 [Eight steeds], “Xin yu jiu” 新與舊 [The old and the new], “Gui Sheng” 貴生, “Zhangfu” 丈夫 [The husband], etc. Again, like his stories in the first period, those about Miao life are imbued with romantic pastoralism. Shen Congwen chiefly relied on whatever he knew of the folklore of the Miao people and his own resources of imagination for the creation of these stories. They are based more on “dream phenomena” than on “social phenomena.” Underlying the ethnic ethos and folkloric nature of these stories is an interest in Western mythology and anthropology that Shen developed through contact with his professor friends. In either his West Hunan stories or stories about urban life, Shen Congwen never limits himself to conventional realism. Many “dream” elements are incorporated into some of his best known realist stories, such as The Frontier City. Furthermore, Shen Congwen never hesitates to try out new ways of expression and experiment with new literary modes in his quest for meaning. He often imbues his stories with subtle psychological probing and intellectual ruminations. Natural and psychological symbolism is also a literary means that Shen Congwen employs frequently in his works. All this shows that Shen Congwen has never committed himself to the orthodoxy of realism. His fascination with ideas and ideals often lends his fiction an intellectual as well as a sentimental ethos that can hardly fit in with realism.

The outbreak of the War of Resistance Against Japan in 1937 interrupted Shen
Congwen's writing activities when he was just at the height of his productivity. The years from 1938 to 1948 witnessed Shen Congwen's further maturation as a fiction writer and continuing search for his own voice and style. Works of this period demonstrate an inclination toward more introspective contemplation and a further sophistication of a lyrical form blended with an ironic vision. The best representative works are *Chang he* [The long river], “Lú yan” 綠魘 [Green nightmare], “Héi yan” 黑魘 [Black nightmare], and a series of other stories with the word “nightmare” in the titles.

*The Long River*, the only full-length novel that Shen wrote in his whole writing career, and “Green Nightmare” and another five “nightmare” stories represent Shen Congwen's experimentation with a new form in which fiction amalgamates with lyrical prose, and plot gives way to self reflection and free association. From the perspective of literary genres, these fictional works resemble very much the “lyrical novel” in the West, since they cross the boundaries between fiction and lyrical prose or poetry. I have discussed the “lyrical novel” in the chapter on Lu Xun, and I shall elaborate more on it later. In these works, Shen Congwen also employs a method quite similar to the stream-of-consciousness technique in Western modernist fiction. The new generic form that Shen creates in these works can be traced to an earlier period in his writing career. His famous *Xiang xing san ji* 湘行散記 [Discursive notes on a trip through Hunan] written in 1934 actually represents his early attempt at this
mode. Now in *The Long River* and the "nightmare" stories, he developed it into a more mature form.

The "nightmare" stories seek to merge the perceiving author and the external world in a strangely inward yet aesthetically objective form. They demonstrate an even stronger inclination toward subjectivity and individuality. What the author aims at is a higher form of objectivity which is achieved through his contemplation of Nature and exploration of inner experience.

In what follows, I shall discuss a few selected stories of Shen Congwen, taken from different periods in his writing career. By subjecting them to a close perusal and investigation, I hope to demonstrate how as a self-conscious and conscientious writer, Shen Congwen has constantly searched for the most appropriate forms of literary expression and evolved his own distinct style of modernity by drawing upon both foreign techniques as well as China's rich literary legacy.

"Meijin, Baozi yu na yang" 蚂金, 豹子與那羊 (*Meijin, Baozi, and the white kid*), written in 1929, is one of Shen Congwen's Miao stories. It is a story which sings the praise of primitive, untainted love among the ancient Miao people. Love and sensuality are portrayed in their natural, primordial form, and the author makes no attempt to conceal his admiration for the young Miao lovers who commit suicide for the sake of true love. The story exemplifies Shen's romantic predilection to idealize
the ancient mores and virtues of the tribespeople of West Hunan and his nostalgic longing for a world unspoiled by civilization where people live in a "state of nature" and treasure faithfulness in love and devotion to each other more than anything else. The whole story is imbued with a mythic and sentimental atmosphere, and the lyrical vein in which the story is narrated gives an extra dimension to this romantic tragedy.

The plot of the story is simple enough. Meijin (Tender Gold), the beautiful heroine of the story, finds her perfect match, Baozi (Leopard), in a cross-singing contest, a time-honored tradition of the Miao people in which young men and women choose their lovers. According to custom, the young man should bring a newly-born white kid to the girl as a gift in exchange for her virginal blood during their first tryst after the singing match. Both of them treat the occasion very seriously and look forward to it in happiness and eagerness, since it marks the beginning of their lifelong union in marriage. However, what would be a happy lovers' rendezvous turns out to be a tragedy because of Baozi's failure to arrive at the meeting place in time, and the reason is not that some unforeseen events have prevented him from coming, nor that he does not take the first tryst as an important occasion in his life. The reason is just the opposite: Baozi takes their first meeting too seriously. He is so much obsessed with finding a perfect gift for Meijin that he forgets all about the time. Thinking that she is forsaken by her lover, Meijin plunges a knife into her breast to lay bare her
heart. When Baozi arrives at the cave, it is too late. Meijin, with the knife stuck in her bosom, is still able to talk to her lover. Finding out the reason why Baozi is late, Meijin no longer feels any remorse or hate; her heart brims over with love again. Pulling out the knife from Meijin's breast, Baozi thrusts it into his own breast and ends his young life.

This work seems to be one of those common tragic stories about a double love suicide. However, in addition to a strong lyrical mood in which the story unfolds, Shen Congwen's smooth and unruffled style, his dexterous use of the narrative method, and the romantic irony he resorts to have all added a special charm to the love story and made it particularly appealing. Lyricism, one of the salient features of Shen's writings, figures prominently in this story, which opens with a beautiful passage nothing short of a well-written part of a ballad:

Describe to someone who has never known the taste of the pears from Pear Market village the sweetness of songs sung by girls of the White-faced Miao tribe, and you would be wasting your breath. Some people think the sound of sweeping oars beautiful. Others find beauty in the sound of the wind and the rain. Nor is there any dearth of simpletons who find beauty in a baby's cries at night or the sound of reeds as they whisper their dreams into the breeze. All these are poetry. But the songs of the White-faced Miao girls are even more poetic, more apt to lead you to intoxicated rapture and to dream. ***

Someone familiar with Miao legends could tell you fifty stories about famous, handsome men ensnared by ugly girls endowed with beautiful voices and fifty more about handsome men driven to distraction by the songs of girls from the White-faced tribe. And if, after all those, the tale-teller had yet another left to
tell, the one forgotten would surely be the tale of Meijin.26

As we can see from the passage quoted above, there is a profusion of figures of speech (such as metaphor, parallelism, climax, and hyperbole) that we often find in classical Chinese poetry and folk songs. To start a poem with a metaphor (called xing 興 in Chinese) is a very common device in the Chinese poetic tradition, which can be traced as far back as the Spring and Autumn Period over 2600 years ago when The Book of Songs -- the first anthology of Chinese poetry took shape. For example, the first poem in this ancient book of poetry begins with the following lines:

“Fair, fair,” cry the ospreys
On the island in the river.
Lovely is this noble lady,
Fit lady for our lord.27

We can find ample examples of this trope in many “Regulated Verse (Modern Style)” poems, “Ancient Verse (Classical Style)” poems, folk songs, as well as in The Book of Songs. Although what Shen Congwen employs is not exactly the xing, what merits our special attention is his daring appropriation of a series of rhetorical devices (instead of just one or two analogies that we usually find at the

beginning of traditional poetry) as a lead to the introduction of the heroine. This string of rhetorical figures not only produces an immediate hint about the lyric-folkloric features of the story, but also serves to create a suspense among the readers, and titillate their curiosity to read on. In this sense, we may say that Shen Congwen has expanded on the function of *xing* and broadened its scope.

The lyrical vein in which the first passage is written is sustained throughout the whole story. Shen is at his best when he writes the lyrics of the songs that Meijin and Baozi sing during the singing match. When Meijin finally admits her defeat and must give herself to Baozi by rights, she sings:

Red leaves falling over the mountains,
They are at the mercy of autumn wind;
Turning me from a lass to a woman,
You, and only you, are the man.28

“Meijin, Baozi, and the White Kid” also testifies to Shen Congwen's reputation as a stylist. The story flows in an easy, unpretentious manner. It unfolds so smoothly and gracefully that it leaves almost no trace of artificiality and awkwardness. From the story we can see that the author adheres to his belief that a good style is one that aims at “appropriateness and propriety.” In terms of the narrative method, what deserves our special note is the extent of privilege that Shen
consigns to the omniscient narrator, whose heavy intrusion and involvement, though similar to but far surpassing those of the story-teller in traditional Chinese vernacular stories, reveal his proclivity for the didactic as well as the romantic.

However, despite Shen Congwen's interest in telling a romantic story with morals meant for modern urban readers, we can still find ironic twists in the story. Before coming to the story proper, we read the gist of different versions of the story about Meijin, just as the traditional story-teller in classical vernacular stories tells a prefatory story in Ming huaben fiction. However, Shen manifests his difference from the conventional story-teller by choosing to tell his own story of Meijin, one that is different from the other versions. Besides the romantic atmosphere it is couched in, there is something mythic and fatalistic about Shen's version of the story. Apparently, he is not content with the conventional wisdom of folk tales and tries to explore the fatal role of some chance happenings in one's life. Shen's version of the story also reveals his interest in the idea that human beings are often driven by accidental forces over which they have no control. In Shen's story, Baozi first goes to the chieftan's house to search for an ideal gift (a white kid without any spot) for Meijin in exchange for her virginity. None of his kids is good enough to meet Baozi's criteria. Then he searches from house to house in his own village, and still, he does not find any kid to

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his satisfaction. So he decides to go to another village about a mile. On his way there, he finds by accident a kid with a wounded leg, lying in the grass by the roadside. Baozi carries this kid back to the chieftain's house to treat its wound, and finds out that this is the kid with pure white skin. But time elapses without his noticing it, and he does not realize that this will be the whole cause for the tragedy.

The authorial intrusion in the story is not only for the sake of romanticizing the near-perfect hero and heroine, but also to achieve the purpose of authorial control so that Shen Congwen, by giving ironic twists and turns to the story, can explore the various dimensions of life: how chance happenings can cause fatal consequences, and how joys and sorrows, happiness and tragedy are so closely intertwined. This story shows that even in his early romantic pieces based on the legends and folklore of the Miao people, Shen Congwen is not just being romantic. The general romantic demeanor of the story conceals Shen's impulses to experiment with new modes of expression, such as naturalism and irony. Thus we can see that Shen has already displayed a tendency to make his literary creation modernist, and endow it with dimensions and depths that can reveal the enigma and meaning of human existence.

The publication of his short story “Bai Zi” in 1928 marks his move toward a more or less realist representation of social life in West Hunan and his further maturation as a fiction writer. Shen's stay in Shanghai from 1928 to 1931 is a period of prolific literary creation. Quite a few of his famous stories were written during this
Besides "Meijin, Baozi and the White Kid," Shen wrote many other stories, such as "Bai Zi," "The Husband," "Ox," "Sansan," "Xiaoxiao," "Long Zhu," "The Love of a Shaman," and "Fishing." This is a period in which Shen's writing was vacillating between stories idealizing Miao heroes and heroines couched basically in a romantic vein, and pieces about life in West Hunan (characterized by some as xiangtu, or native soil, stories) written in a more or less realist mode. Different from these two kinds of works are a few stories, a very few indeed, with "Fishing" as their representative, which indicate Shen's initial experimentation with innovative modes of writing.

"The Husband" (1930) is a marvelous piece of literary creation that should belong with not only the treasures of Chinese literature but also the immortal masterpieces of world literature. This work is definitely one of Shen Congwen's best and most powerful short stories. Compared with "Meijin, Baozi and the White Kid," "The Husband" presents a striking contrast to the former, and appears as though it was written by a different writer with an entirely different style. In this story, authorial presence is kept to a minimum, and "showing" is obviously privileged over "telling." The implied author maintains an impersonal and detached stance, and the narration and description are carried out with little authorial mediation. If we are to pinpoint the most salient feature that distinguishes "The
Husband" from "Meijin, Baozi and the White Kid" and Shen's other romantically-inclined stories, it is none other than the employment of irony. It is achieved mainly through the inherent disparity which exists between the point of view of the implied author and that of the characters in the story. Of course the effect of irony is further enhanced by the incongruity between the point of view of the implied author and that of the reader. The traditional technique of baimiao [plain portrayal] provides the author with the best means to keep the ironic distance that he desires and achieve a high degree of verisimilitude in presenting a realist picture.

Thus we can say that the single most important feature that marks off "The Husband" as a modernist work is the use of irony. The story represents one giant leap forward on Shen Congwen's journey toward literary modernity.

In terms of plot, "The Husband" is also a very simple story. It is about a husband's two-day experience in a town where his wife works as a prostitute and the delicate changes that take place in his attitude and behavior, which, as we may well presume, could only have occurred as a result of painful mental torments and conflicts. Shen Congwen does not resort to long passages of interior monologues. Nor does he interfere in the story the way an omniscient author usually does. Throughout the story, Shen maintains a detached and seemingly apathetic stance. What he tries to do is to present as an objective picture as he could by keeping his aesthetic, emotional, and moralistic involvement to the minimum.
The story evolves around the husband's stay in a town and the three times when he thinks of leaving his wife and going back to his country home. What Shen relies on is chiefly a detailed, meticulous description of the husband's responses and reactions in a new environment entirely different from his village in the countryside. Step by step, through the depiction of the physical objects, the characters, and their dialogues, the reader is able to feel the inner emotions and turmoil of the husband beneath his seemingly dull, dispassionate, and indifferent appearance.

In a paragraph soon after the story begins, through the ironic tone that the narrator adopts, the reader is alerted to a phenomenon in which the abnormal is made normal, and the uncanny made familiar:

It is all so simple. A young woman in no hurry to bear children goes to the city while her husband still earns his living by honestly and arduously tilling the fields back in the village. Her earnings from two nights in the city, remitted to him once a month, provide him a better life. He keeps the rights to his wife and the profits, too. Therefore, many a young husband sends his wife away after marriage, while he stays at home farming and minding his business. It happens all the time. 29

Maybe it happened all the time in West Hunan when Shen Congwen wrote the story. The majority of readers may still take some time to get adjusted to the fact and accept it as an everyday occurrence. However, the reader cannot but ask a question in his mind: Is it really all so simple? He is certainly doubtful about it. Earlier in a
paragraph preceding this account, when the implied author describes this prostitution as "business" which is "neither offensive to morality nor harmful to health," the reader may already have perceived a disparity between his norms and those of the implied author. Now at this point, the reader's doubt deepens. This is exactly what the author wants to achieve. The story told by an ironic narrator usually makes stronger demands on the reader's ability of inference than a romantic one. However, as soon as the reader realizes the ironic stance the narrator takes, he will certainly come to a better and more enlightened understanding of the story. As the reader comes to the end of "The Husband," the answer that he finds from the story may very well be the opposite: No, it is not that simple for the husband, nor for his wife.

Through Shen Congwen's meticulous and subtle depiction of the three times when the idea of leaving came up in the husband's mind, we shall not fail to notice the emotional torment that he has suffered. When the husband first meets his wife since she went to town to do "business," he is quite surprised: he starts "searching her body with his startled eyes." "For by now the woman has of course entirely changed in the eyes of her husband." His woman, whom he knew so well in the past, has become a different person. The next shock comes when the woman thrusts a delicate Hatamen-brand cigarette into his coarse palm, just as he is reaching for his

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pipe and flint. For him the machine-made cigarette is not only a novelty but a treat.

But right after he has enjoyed it on the first night when he has stayed in the boat which serves as his wife's whorehouse, he thinks of going back:

In the evening, after supper, he is still enjoying the novelty of those machine-made cigarettes. A customer arrives -- a boat owner or a merchant sporting tall cowhide jackboots and a thick, gleaming silver chain that hangs out from his waist pouch. He staggers onto the boat, all liquored up. On board, he yells out that he wants a woman to kiss and to sleep with. ... The husband knows without having to be told to slink away to the back and crawl into the afterhold. Hiding out there with the rudder, out of breath and panting softly, he takes the cigarette from his mouth and gazes listlessly at the life on the river after dusk. The river has changed with the night. The shores, the river boats, all shine with lantern light. At this point the husband tends to think of the chickens and piglets back home, as if they were the only friends really true to him, his only family. Close now to his wife, he feels all the farther from home. A faint sensation of loneliness comes over him, and he wants to go home.  

We can well imagine what humiliation he is subject to when the customer comes on board. The husband must be overcome by immense shame, sorrow, and estrangement. The pathos inherent in the narrator's understated, objective description can only serve to evoke our strong empathy with the husband.

However, on second thought, the husband hesitates, since it is not an easy journey to make at night: besides it being a thirty-/i hike, there are jackals and wildcats along the way, and militiamen on night sentry duty. Of course, there are

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31 Ibid., 31.
32 Ibid., 32-33.
some more temptations which allure him to stay: going to the night performance at the local opera house, and enjoying tea and snacks at a famous teahouse. The second time the husband wants to leave is because of the words of the second customer — the river warden. After the river warden learns that he is the husband of "Seventh Maid," the name by which his wife is known to the customers, the warden still asks him to tell his wife not to receive any customers tonight, since he, the warden, is coming. This time, the honest man is hurt and becomes angry. Neither going to the opera nor enjoying snacks at the teahouse can hold him from going back:

Wild thoughts raged in his heart, aggravated by hunger. The emotions of primitive man welled up inside the simple youth. No more songs came to him. His throat was choked with jealousy, and he couldn't have got them out in any case. Happiness was beyond his grasp. Angry farmer that he was, he decided to go home the next day. Naturally in this rage he was even more useless at lighting a fire. He ended up throwing all the firewood overboard into the river. "Fuck you, firewood! Get lost in the ocean." 33

But the young husband's anger does not last very long. When he sees the huqin (a two-stringed fiddle) that Madam and his wife have got for him and hears their persuasive words, his determination to leave becomes softened. In the evening, he starts to play the huqin while his wife sings. "The lamp shade over her Standard Oil kerosene lamp, made of red paper folk cutouts, bathed the entire cabin in the rosy light seen at weddings. The young man was as elated by the excitement as if it were
New Year's." 34 For a brief moment, he is lost in happiness. But soon this is ruined by two roaring drunk soldiers. The drunkards stagger down to the boat. After they have fooled around in the boat and left, the patrol officer comes to "inspect." Having witnessed all this, the husband cannot bear any more. He decides to leave early the next morning. This time he does not say a word. Silently he packs up his belongings: his straw sandals and the pipe and tobacco pouch. Seeing him so determined to go, his wife stuffs into his palm all the bills she has received from the drunken soldiers and the patrol officer. But the husband "threw them on the floor, shaking his head. Cupping his face in his big, rough hands, unaccountably he started sobbing like a baby." 35 This is indeed a very pathetic scene. The rustic, boorish, and honest young husband finally revolts, however childish and incomprehensible his act may appear to Wuduo, the other maid on the boat. But for the husband, he has shown his courage and rage as a man and husband in his own way. The story ends with husband and wife going back together to the village where they came.

What is remarkable about the story is that Shen Congwen is able to present such a pathetic and rueful picture about a harsh yet lively life in the remote area of West Hunan without making explicit comment or judgment. Each character is portrayed in her/his true colors, vivid, lively, convincing, with a distinct personality of his/her own,

33 Shen Congwen, "The Husband," 43.
34 Ibid., 46.
35 Ibid., 53.
The next story we are going to discuss, entitled “Yu [Fishing],” was written at about the same time (1930) as “The Husband.” Yet it represents a distinct style in its own right. In terms of technique, it is different from either “Meijin, Baozi and the White Kid,” or “The Husband.” The author has adopted some innovative approaches which make “Fishing” stand out from the other stories. It appears to be a realist story, but the celebration of the primitive energy and the goodness of man makes it resemble a romantic work. It also incorporates various elements from legend, prose poetry, and even mystery. The story is rich in symbolic meanings, and a palpable strain of mysticism runs through it from beginning to end. Obviously, Shen Congwen attempts to experiment with an innovative form which could give added breadth and depth to a conventional story. The end result of this experimentation is the hybrid form that we find in the story “Fishing.”

The story centers around the age-old tradition of night fishing among the tribespeople living in the Han-Miao-Tujia borderlands in Western Hunan. It is a very primitive fishing practice. On the occasion, all the folk living in the mountain kraal

and the trivialities of life are described in meticulous detail and with much affection. Unlike his romantic and more emotional stories, “The Husband” displays Shen Congwen's further sophistication and his dexterity in manipulating a form of supreme emotional balance and stylistic control. This is achieved in great part through his detached, ironic artfulness.
ZHAI), men and women, old and young, come down to the river, carrying knives, baskets and torches for a joyous, festival-like fishing event. A boatload of a mixture of lime, knotgrass, and wood resins is used as a kind of poison. It is placed upstream, and when the right time comes, overturned to stun the fish of the entire stream. Then the people waiting on either side of the stream will have a good catch of the fish floating on the surface of the water, stunned or half-stunned, using their baskets, nets, or knives when necessary.

In the story, this fishing event is carried out by two feuding clans living on the opposite sides of the river. They ignore the past animosity between them and choose to cooperate in a spirit of peace and reconciliation. The job of overturning the boatload of poison is assigned to twin brothers of the Wu clan, which is not as large and wealthy as the Gan clan. However, the members of the lesser clan, because of “the competition for survival,” are hardy and strong, like “tigers and leopards,” and so are the twin brothers. Moreover, they can tell time by the stars and from the burning of incense sticks, and that is one of the reasons why they are charged with the task, because timing is very important in night fishing. Each of them bears a finely made sword, a family treasure inherited from their father. On his death bed, their father said that these swords should be used in avenging their grand father's blood shed in a fight with the members of the seventh branch of the Gan clan whose names had the character chao. However, none of the chao generation of the seventh branch

196
of the Gan clan is alive except a girl who is probably swept away by a flood.

Before the moment to sink the boatload of poison comes, the twin brothers have some time at their disposal. They go to an ancient temple by the riverside, and find a cluster of wild flowers which seem to have been left there just a moment ago by a girl. According to the local custom, if a man picks up a flower left by a girl, he has the right to befriend her and engage in a cross singing with her. Then he could win her heart and marry her. These wild flowers send the younger of the twin brothers into a wild flight of imagination. An old, sagacious monk with the air of an immortal appears at this moment. He seems to know their father very well, and he also knows many things about the two clans. The twin brothers learn a great deal from the monk.

After the monk leaves, the twins go on with their job of fishing. However, who left these flowers? Are the members of the chao generation of the seventh branch of the Gan clan still alive? These are the riddles which puzzle not only the twin brothers but the reader as well.

The narrative is intertwined with a meticulous description of the fuzzy, dreamy, and eerie scenery under silvery moonlight: the wilderness, the scattered boulders, the mountain stream, and the ancient temple are all woven into a serene but mysterious landscape. The swords worn by the twin brothers and the wild flowers left on the stone table are rich in symbolic meanings. Love and hatred, friendship and feud, peace and war are entangled in the long history of the two clans, and they are all
resolved for the time being in the more practical job of fishing on a summer night. In
the end, every member of the two clans is happy with the fish he/she has caught,
except the younger of the twins, who loses any interest in catching fish, because the
withered flowers he has picked up make him completely entranced.

At first glance, the story seems to have lapsed into the conventional mode of
the third-person omniscient narrator who is the "center of consciousness" and tells
the story about the night fishing event of the two clans by alternating telling and
showing. On closer scrutiny, we find that the author has skillfully adapted the
conventional story form to one which combines lyrical, symbolic, and allegorical
elements. The protagonists of the story -- the twin brothers -- not only unify the
scenes of the story, but are also allegorical of the history of the race and the nation in
which love and hatred, military prowess and literary propensity, conflicts and
reconciliation are as inseparable as twin brothers. The finely made swords which they
inherit from their father can be used in fishing as well as in battle. The flowers left by
an unknown girl can be construed as insinuating love and the pursuit of higher values
which transcend the cruelties and mundane affairs of life, e. g., the senseless killings
of each other and the struggle for mere subsistence. The sagacious monk seems to be
suggestive of another way to escape from the worldly worries into a state of peace and
salvation. The monk knew the twins' father very well, and very probably he was one
of the warriors of the Wu clan. His swordplay before the twin brothers shows that he
is quite skillful with the weapon. In all likelihood, he must have “laid down his sword and become a Buddha instantly,” as the saying goes.

A strong lyrical mood permeates the whole story. We are mesmerized by the poetic language and the lyrical tone that the story is couched in. Its lyricism is manifest not only in the language of the story, which is highly poetic and lyrical, but also in the jingjie 境界, or the “world” which the author tries to create by clinging to the notion of the fusion of feelings and scenes (qing jing jiao rong 情景交融) of traditional poetics.

As we know, classical Chinese poetry is especially noted for its profusion of imagery. Although the use of imagery is a universal feature that we can find in different sorts of poetry in the world, classical Chinese poetry is particularly rich in all kinds of images, particularly those drawn from nature. Behind the extensive use of natural imagery is a profound belief in the harmony of man with nature rooted in Chinese cosmology: the concepts of yin, yang, and the Five Elements, and the triad of Heaven-Earth-Man. Many of the symbolic meanings that we accord to images used in classical Chinese poetry are based on the conception of resonance brought about by these relations. In “Fishing,” besides skillfully appropriating a poetic language from the perspectives of diction and sound, the author is particularly dexterous in employing images from nature to create a world in which feelings are fused perfectly with scenes. When appropriating imagery, the author does not lose sight of the
symbolic meanings that we traditionally accord to certain natural objects. One of the most prominent examples that we find in the story is the imagery of the moon.

In traditional Chinese poetry, the moon is one of the most frequently used images. The moon is a celestial body which transcends time and space. Its different phases are often associated with joys and sorrows, reunion and separation. A full moon always stands for reunion and supreme happiness. By watching the moon, one can find solace, peace, and tranquillity. The story of "Fishing" takes place exactly on a beautiful moonlit night, but the image of the moon is interwoven with the description of the landscape that is inevitably linked with the past:

At this moment, the vast sky was sapphire blue, with no trace of clouds. The moon and the stars were like jewels inlaid in it. The glowworms fleeting to and fro along the stream were like the lanterns of the immortal to guide travelers. Crickets on the desolate riverside were making clear and sonorous chirruping sounds, reminding one of the hero who used to wander and stroll among the boulders, and shout in a loud voice to relieve himself of the torment of love.\(^{36}\)

As we can see, the imagery of the moon and the stars is mingled with the description of the desolate landscape of the riverside and the remembrance of the hero in the past.

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\(^{36}\) Shen Congwen, "Yu" [Fishing], Shen Congwen xuan ji [Selected works of Shen Congwen], Vol. 2 (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chuban she, 1983) 414-5.
Further down the page, the image of the moon is set against a serene and peaceful landscape resembling that of a fairyland. However, the mention of ghosts and spirits hints slightly at the bloody battles that were once fought between the two clans:

As they walked along, the moonlight flooded the riverside. Since it could not reach the other side of the boulders, it seemed as though ghosts and spirits were hiding behind them. Midges were darting here and there under the moonlight, making light sounds by rubbing their wings. When they were flying overhead, it appeared as if little fairy maidens were riding on their backs. A nondescript scent of some sort was wafted into one's nostrils and no one could tell where it came from. The sounds of the stream from the distance were like a lullaby sung by a mother to help her boy to sleep. The earth was now sleeping, and all this was like a dream for the twin brothers.

About two hundred years earlier, five hundred men from each of the two clans engaged in a bloody battle right by the riverside, and no one came out alive at the end of the battle. Their blood dyed the rocks deep crimson. Their ghosts and spirits are still haunting the place and casting a dark shadow on the serenity of the landscape that night.

Later the twin brothers go into the temple on the hill not far from the riverside. The old monk greets them and lead them into a small moonlit yard:

37 Shen Congwen, “Yu,” 415.
The twin brothers could not refuse the invitation. So they went into the temple from a small side door at the corner. After they entered, they found a small courtyard, where there was a shed overgrown with pumpkin vines, flowers, fish tanks, and an incense burner with long legs. Flooded with moonlight, the courtyard looked very beautiful.\(^3\)

The twins seem to benefit from talking with the wise monk and learn from him many things that they did not know or were not quite clear about before. Apparently they are very happy with the chat, so they even decide on the date of their next meeting. After they take leave from the monk and go downhill:

The moonlight turned everything silvery, and all the objects looked beautiful and peaceful. The quietude of the night made the scenery appear desolate and serene. At the moment, a light dew was forming. The younger of the twins whistled in a low pitch, following his older brother.\(^4\)

However, the fine moonlit night seems to be spoiled by some clouds forming in the east which threaten rain. If it rained, the whole business of fishing would certainly end in failure. But this proves to be just a false alarm: The moon is still hanging in the sky, clear and bright. In the moonlight, a spirit of peace and reconciliation reigns, and there is no place for hatred and animosity. The time for fishing finally comes. All the torches are lit, illuminating the river for several miles.

\(^3\) Shen Congwen, "Yu," 420. 這弟兄無法推辭,就伴同和尚從小角門走進廟里, 一進去是一個小小天井, 有南瓜藤牽滿的藤架, 又有指甲草花, 有魚缸同高脚香爐, 月光灑滿院中, 景致極美.

\(^4\) Shen Congwen, "Yu," 421. 月色如銀, 一切顯得美麗和平, 風景因夜靜而轉清靜, 這時天上正降薄霧, 那弟弟輕輕吹着口哨, 在哥哥身後追隨.
The people from both clans shout in a low voice with joy, heading for the river to fish.

"The older brother, as brave as the fighters in the past, slashed in the moonlight at the fish stunned by the poison, as if taking great revenge. The younger one, lost in thoughts of something else, was still holding an empty basket." 40

As we can see, when Shen Congwen was depicting the moon, one thing that he had in mind was to evoke the symbolic meanings often associated with the moon in Chinese tradition. However, the symbolic evocation of the image of the moon is enmeshed within an allegorical structure in which the twin brothers have been employed to explore the deep recesses of the Chinese psyche. In Jungian terms, the twin brothers can be viewed as representing the persona and the anima of the Chinese ego, which is sometimes harassed by the "shadow," the dark, dangerous aspects of the psyche.

The younger brother has a natural inclination for songs, music, poetry, love and ruminations. "He had the demeanor of a poet. Not as strong as his older brother in physique, he took more to meditation than to getting things done." 41 The older brother was more obsessed with fulfilling his social role as a brave fighter in the clan.

"The older brother was practicing the sword on the terrace in the broad moonlight,

40 Shen Congwen, "Yu," 424.
41 Shen Congwen, "Yu," 417.
displaying various graceful poses. His mind was set only on the movement of the sword. Every step forward and backward was performed with agility and superb skill. He was indeed the purest man in the entire Wu clan.”  

Thus the younger brother, in whom we can hardly fail to perceive certain feminine qualities Shen Congwen has accorded him, stands for the anima part of the Chinese psyche. He represents the “soul-image,” and the spirit of the élan vital which stand in opposition to the persona. The older brother is more of the image of a social personality, which is sometimes quite different from one's true self. In the story, he represents the social being which always burdens himself with the responsibility of a clan warrior. For instance, when the twin brothers see a bunch of flowers left on the stone table, their reactions are quite different:

“Older brother, someone must have visited this place!”
“There is nothing strange about it. Young woodcutters often climb here to burn incense and pray before the gods. They pray for the protection of the gods and love from women.”
“I don't think this is true. I think these flowers were left here by a woman.”
“So what? There is nothing uncommon about them.”
“What if the most beautiful woman in the Gan clan has left these

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42 Shen Congwen, “Yu,” 417.

43 According to Carl Gustav Jung, the anima is a structural component of the male psyche with a feminine designation. This contrasexual element inherent in the man is what he carries in both his personal and his collective unconscious. See Carl Gustav Jung, “The Principal Archetypes,” The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends, 666-76.
flowers here?”
   “This sounds like a joke.”
   “Since we can speculate that some woman has left these flowers here, we may as well think that this woman is a beautiful one. I'll take them home.”

   “Only a child would do such a thing. You are young. Take them as you like; only don't torture yourself over it. A smart person often makes himself unhappy.” 44

Even when the twins are watching the moon, they behave differently:

   “Look! How could it rain? Look at the moon, so clear, so bright!”
   The older brother looked up, and gazed at the moon, entranced. In a little while, he said suddenly: “The monk on the hill is all right. He says he knows our enemy, and knows our father, too.” 45

However, on that moonlit night, the dual sides of the psychic makeup represented by the twin brothers are brought into a harmonious relationship with each other. Far from being a realist or a romantic work, “Fishing” marks a giant step forward in Shen Congwen's endeavor to experiment with a new fictional form which subtly interweaves symbolic and allegorical elements in a densely lyrical texture. The ambiguity and ambivalence inherent in the use of symbol and allegory are further


enhanced by the mythic and folkloric nature of the story. By resorting to an innovative form and drawing upon both traditional poetics and Western techniques, Shen Congwen succeeded in exploring the deep recesses of human nature and revealing some complexities in the human psyche.

The next story we are going to investigate is "Eight Steeds." It was written in 1935 when Shen Congwen was at the height of his writing career. Though not as productive as his early years, the period from 1934 to 1936 marks a significant stage in Shen's writing activities: some of his best, tour de force works, such as The Frontier City and Discursive Notes on a Trip Through Hunan, were finished in this period of time.

In "Eight Steeds," Shen Congwen leads us away from the remote, rural landscape of West Hunan to an entirely new cosmopolitan milieu: Qingdao, a beautiful seaside resort with many Western-style buildings. Instead of green bamboo groves, rafts flowing on the turbulent rapids, and wooden houses built on stilts along the river, what we see is a city with lawns, beaches, and many other modern amenities. Of course, the characters in the story are also different from the country folk, warlord soldiers, boatmen, and prostitutes that we usually find in Shen's West Hunan stories. The "eight steeds" in the story refer to eight university professors. The president of the university uses this jocular expression to show his respect for
these well-bred and well-educated gentlemen, since qianli ma (literally, a horse that can run a thousand li at a stretch) is a compliment used for people with unusual talents. However, all the “eight steeds” in the story except one (a professor of economics) show symptoms of sexual repression. Even the economics professor, as we shall defer from the clues of the story later, is no exception.

Mr. Zhou Dashi, the protagonist of the story, is a professional writer invited to teach literary courses at the summer school of Qingdao University. Despite his claim that he is sound both physically and mentally, it turns out that he, too, is suffering from the same malady as the other six professors. The theme of the story is unmistakably modern: it is about the condition of modern man, modern situational ethics, and Freudian psychology. As Shen Congwen speaks of “Eight Steeds” himself, it is a story which is meant “to illustrate the complexity of the sexual psychological emotions which ‘human beings’ display under various restrictions.”

What deserves our special note here is the apparent Freudian strain in

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46 Shen Congwen gives a rather detailed account of how and why he wrote “Eight Steeds”: “They [Shen’s colleagues at Qingdao University] had no idea about my intention to write this story, which was to create a dream-land. To illustrate the complexity of psychological emotions which human beings display under various restrictions, I selected a few different types of people, and portrayed them by giving a description of their language and behavior, and resorting to associations, metaphors, and other means.”
which the story is couched.

The name of Freud and his theory were probably first introduced to the Chinese reading public in the early 1920s, and in the late 1920s and early 1930s, works dealing with Freudian psychology in a more systematic manner were published in China in a rather big way. Among the scholars who were keen in introducing Freud to China was Zhu Guangqian, a long-time friend of Shen Congwen. Lu Zhiwei, who chaired the psychology department of Yanjing University in the late 1930s and later became the university president, was also a friend of Shen Congwen. Through talks with them and reading their as well as other people's works, Shen got acquainted with Freud's theory and was very much influenced by his psychoanalytic

approach. As Jeffrey C. Kinkley points out, "A pervasively Freudian way of seeing the world, as in 'Eight Steeds,' appears quite frequently, probably under the influence of Zhu Guangqian as well as Lu Zhiwei, in the stories Shen wrote after moving to Qingdao in 1931."  

Since "Eight Steeds" has an obvious Freudian orientation and represents a significant endeavor in Shen's quest for literary modernity, I would like to interpret the story from the perspective of Freudian psychology as it was understood in Shen's time. In my attempt to recapture a Freudian moment in Shen's writing career, I will inevitably use some Freudian terms such as "ego" and "id," but this does not suggest that I have a Freudian critical disposition. Although Freud's psychoanalytic theories still hold some sway in literary criticism, in mainstream psychology, it has been left behind and regarded by many people as a kind of pseudoscience that can hardly be corroborated with clinical experience and empirical data.

48 In an interview with Jeffrey C. Kinkley in June, 1980, Shen Congwen admitted Freud's influence on some of his works, and confirmed Kinkley's argument that there is Freudian symbolism in The Frontier City. In a letter to Shao Huajiang dated July 1, 1982, Shen mentioned the works about Freud and Freud's works that he had read in Chinese. He also remembered the names of the authors and translators, such as Zhang Dongsun, Zhu Guangqian, and Gao Juefu. See Jeffrey C. Kinkley, The Odyssey of Shen Congwen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987) 349-50.


50 For example, Frederick Crews writes: "... entities like the psychic troika of id, ego, and superego deserve to be regarded not as discoveries like radium or DNA, nor even as mistakes like ether or animal magnetism, but as pure inventions like Esperatno, Dungeons & dragons, or, closer yet, Rube Goldberg algorithms for making something happen with maximum complication. In short, Freudian theory is a display
At first glance, the story may appear somewhat simplistic, since it looks like a crude illustration of Freudian psychology. The author seems to have put these professors on a Procrustean bed of psychoanalytic theory and forced them to undergo Freudian treatment. However, to subject the university professors to a psychological analysis in the Chinese context is itself a fresh, innovative approach. Furthermore, the apparent superficiality of the story is compensated by a cleverly knit narrative structure in which first-person narration is alternated with third-person narration, and a skillful blending of satire and irony, which gives the story a delightful modern touch. The use of symbolism and the complexity and ambiguity the symbols evoke in our understanding and interpretation of the story adds further to its avant-garde feel. Another significant feature of the story is that the author adroitly employs a host of literary devices borrowed from traditional Chinese fiction. The seamless merging of Western fictional technique and traditional methods is perhaps what distinguishes “Eight Steeds” from the run-of-the-mill stories of the time and marks it off as one of Shen Congwen's achievements in his incessant quest for meaning and excellence.

In Freudian terms, the “superego” of the intellectuals educated in traditional morality is especially powerful in inhibiting and repressing the sexual drives (their “id”). Their “ego” is unable to keep a wholesome balance between the two opposing forces of the “superego” and the “id.” This is probably the reason why of ingenuity unencumbered by recalcitrant data.” See Frederick Crews, The Memory 210
the professors in the story are all ill: they all show symptoms of Freudian sexual repression. Certainly this is the crudest possible statement about an exquisite story in which psychological implications are delicately described through a variety of literary means and devices. The repressed desires of the seven professors are manifest in different ways, as they are narrated by the third-person narrator and Mr. Dashi in his letters to his fiancée. He describes all the details of their illness in these letters, believing that he himself is immune from their ailment. Or maybe writing letters is his vicarious way of releasing his own repressed desires. All we know for sure is that in the end he proves to be the one who needs a psychotherapy the most. If we could say that in the other seven professors, we find the projection of the superego of the Chinese intellectuals, which always inhibits and represses sexual desires and impulses with moral principles, then in Mr. Zhou Dashi, the protagonist of the story, Shen Congwen is trying to create an embodiment of the ego, who tries to keep himself and other professors healthy human beings by striking a balance between the repressive superego and the unbridled id.

In the story, the "girl in yellow" may be seen as representing the Freudian id -- the primordial energy and desires which disregard social conventions and moral restraints. Apparently, she is in love with the professor of economics. However, she seduces Mr. Zhou Dashi at the same time until the balance Dashi tries hard to
maintain is upset and tips toward her. What is noteworthy in Shen's depiction of the "girl in yellow" is that he employs delicate symbolism to allude to her chastity and purity despite her overall image of sensual passion and desire.

Since Shen Congwen does not attempt to conceal his Freudian conceptions in writing the story, it would not surprise us at all if we should find that symbols are used quite extensively in the story, and quite a few of them warrant a Freudian interpretation.

One of the most prominent images that we can obviously associate with Freudian symbolism is the sea, against the backdrop of which the whole story unfolds. The sea is usually viewed as a female symbol, according to Freudian psychoanalytic theory. In Shen's story, the charming, enchanting sea with its natural beauty might mean life and death, as well as sexual passion and self-destruction. In other words, the sea might be both a \textit{femme fatale} and a chaste, life-giving lover. The story begins and ends with a direct reference to sea. In the first part of the story, the sea is vaguely associated with a suicidal instinct that is often closely conjoined with sexual passion. The porter who tends the house where Mr. Dashi stays mentions a book entitled \textit{A Plunge into the Sea} (tou hai 投海), and jokes with him about the danger of falling into

\textit{Plunge into the Sea} (tou hai 投海), and jokes with him about the danger of falling into

\footnote{In his work on the interpretation of dreams, Freud attempts to explain the images appearing in one's dream in terms of sexuality. Following Freud's example, some psychoanalytic critics tend to see all concave images as female symbols (such as ponds, the sea, cups, vases, caves, groves, and forests). See Sigmund Freud,}
the sea. Then Mr. Dashi sees a girl wearing a yellow dress walk across the meadow, disappear in the aspen grove, and then walk into the sea. The girl leaves an unforgettable image on Mr. Dashi, and "no line of poetry could describe that exquisite, fleeting image in the sunlight." 52 Then when Mr. Dashi is discussing the perennial topic of women in a white boat on the sea with Professor D, Dashi speaks of throwing himself into the sea as an example: "... just like my plan to cast myself into the sea; if I felt like throwing myself into the sea, you wouldn't presume to intervene." 53 In the second half of the story, someone has written an anonymous note to Mr. Dashi with only a few words in it: "School will soon be over. Can you give up the sea?" Then one day when he walks to the beach, he sees two rows of words written in the wet sand with a stick: "In this world some people do not understand the sea and do not know how to love it; other people understand the sea but do not dare to love it." After seeing these words (as every reader can infer, they were written by the girl in yellow), Mr. Dashi decides to stay by the sea for three more days. The one who claims himself to be the healer of humankind's illnesses of the soul is sick himself, and his illness can only be cured with the sea. At the root of his disease is the repressed sensual affection for the girl in yellow, and it can only be

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treated by merging with the sea and accepting the girl's invitation to a tryst.

However, in Shen Congwen's mind, the symbolic implications of the sea do not stay only at the level of Freudian psychology. As Jeffrey C. Kinkley has pointed out, "In fact the sea is part of Shen Congwen's recurring private (though hardly esoteric) symbolic world, its vastness representing, he said in 1980, 'emancipation of thought, and of the feelings.'" 54 During his stay in Qingdao from 1931 to 1933, Shen Congwen would often go to the beach, and stay there for a long time lost in his philosophical ruminations. As he writes of the experience during his stay by the sea in Qingdao,

While I exposed my body to the heat of the warm sunshine, I left myself to the expanse of the sea before me. The sea gave me an education and deepened my life. As I went to the seaside more frequently and stayed there longer, the shapes, colors, and flavors of the sky, trees and the sea silently merged into my absolutely solitary soul. I felt lonely, but not sad, since in my quiet meditations and reveries, I could feel the wisdom and strength of life. The rhythm of my heart beat contains poetry in perfect form and refreshing meters, as well as music in soft notes filled with youthful memories.55

Therefore, for Shen Congwen, the sea means much more than what it implies in Freudian symbolism. Traditional Chinese thinking (be it Confucian, Daoist, or

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54 Jeffrey C. Kinkley, *The Odyssey of Shen Congwen*, 214.
55 Shen Congwen, “Shui yun,” 130. 我一面讓和暖陽光烘炙肩背手足,取得生命所需要的熱和力, 一面却用面前這片大海教育我, 深深我的生命, 時間長, 次數多。天與樹與海的形色氣味, 便靜靜的溶解到了我生氣單獨的靈魂里。我雖寂寞但并不悲傷,因爲從默會遐想中, 感覺到生命智慧和力量, 心臟跳躍節奏中, 即儼然有形式完美韻律清新的詩歌, 和調子柔軟而充滿青春紀念的音樂
Chan Buddhist) always endorses a unity of man and the external world. It is important that man and nature or reality should form a harmonious relationship between them. This harmony can be achieved through contemplation and an intuitive apprehension of Nature. Given the intellectual interest in Freudian psychoanalysis at that time, the therapeutic treatment that Shen Congwen prescribed for Dashi is apparently couched in Freudian terms. However, we should not ignore the fact that Shen Congwen always showed an intense interest in philosophical meditation. Thus the constant references to sea not only suggest a Freudian orientation, but also insinuate that a sound mind is one that has found harmony with Nature through self-contemplation and self-intuition.

The recurring motif of the seashell can also be interpreted symbolically in sexual terms. An interesting episode occurs when Mr. Dashi and Professor B are taking a stroll on the beach:

The girls were just then walking from the southern end of the bathing beach. One of them was wearing a red bathing suit; her body was full and tall. She was exceptionally attractive. Her bare feet had left a row of beautiful footprints in the wet sand. Professor B bent down and picked up a shiny shell from one of the footprints; he lightly and sensually brushed the sand off the shell with his fingers.56

Later in the story there are more references to seashells. For example, "Dashi walked along the beach, his head bowed, searching the white sand for the
The pearly flash of a beautiful shell.” The sexual implications of the shell are readily discernible.

Shen Congwen also appropriates colors as symbols and explores their implications for the unconscious. In the story, the most prominent color image that has repeatedly left its imprint on our mind is “yellow.” Soon after he has arrived at the lodging in Qingdao University, Dashi looks out his window and sees a “yellow dot” on the meadow, which turns out to be the figure of a girl dressed in “pale yellow garment.” Later in the first letter to his fiancée, Dashi writes: “On the mountain road the wildflowers are just opening. Their color is clear yellow, like gold. I like that anonymous little yellow flower.” He asks the boy who tends the house about the name of the anonymous yellow flower. Toward the end of the story, we know that the girl in yellow lives in a “pale yellow house” on the hillside. In Chinese color symbolism, “yellow” is a color favored by the populace. It is often associated with fame, progress, and advancement. One thing that deserves our special note here is that in the Chinese language, huang hua nü [literally, “yellow-flower girl”] refers to a virgin. But in the story, the “girl in the yellow dress” represents not only virginity, but also desire. The girl's eyes “seemed to possess a timid, sensitive light.” “If this light represented chastity, it was at the same time

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56 Shen Congwen, “Eight Steeds,” 359-60.
57 Shen Congwen, “Eight Steeds,” 375.
58 Shen Congwen, “Eight Steeds,” 351.
full of desire.”

It is quite possible that Shen Congwen deliberately combines Freudian sexual symbolism and traditional Chinese color symbolism (the favorable symbolic implications of the color “yellow”) to hint at the positive, life-enhancing effects resulting from a wholesome balance between one’s libidinous energy and rational orientation.

Being a professional writer, Mr. Dashi is certainly very observant: although he has stayed at Qingdao University for only three days, he discovers that the professors that he shares lodgings with are all “sick”. Then the whole story is told by alternating third-person narration and first-person narration, with Mr. Dashi playing the central role weaving together all the other clues of the story. In terms of the narrative technique, the author has demonstrated a remarkable skill in controlling narrative effect by maintaining a delicate balance between telling and showing, and between third-person and first-person narration. Most of the telling in the story is executed in the form of letters which Mr. Dashi writes to his fiancée, whereas most of the showing is left to the third-person narrator who obviously favors the description of “scene” to “summary,” to use Wayne Booth's terms.

To illustrate the dexterity with which the author manipulates narration, let us first take a look at what Dashi writes to his fiancée Yuanyuan in his letter about the

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professors, and then a passage in which the third-person narrator describes the room where Professor A lives:

... in the past three days I've gotten acquainted with six of the seven people living with me. ... In a very short time we’ve developed into rather good friends. ... And because of this friendship I have diagnosed them as sick. This isn't a mistake, and it isn't a joke. At least two of these professors are quite deluded, namely Professors B and C. 

... I believe that my chats with them can help me examine their health and relieve their “mental problems.” Some of these specialists have children in their third year in college who long ago began writing love letters to their classmates and having romances, but these men are completely naive, somnolent in their own hearts. Though rich in learning, they've never enjoyed life at all. If desire even existed in their hearts, it's been mastered, blocked. I've gotten some valuable knowledge out of this: this “freedom to love” that everyone's been calling for these last ten years has stimulated these transitional people, and many hidden tragedies have come along with it. These tragedies occur everywhere!61

Immediately following this letter is a description of what Professor A's room looks like when Dashi comes over for a chat and tea:

On a small table in the middle of the room was a family portrait, of six fat children surrounding husband and wife. The wife appeared very fat. Inside the white linen mosquito netting was a white pillow with a few blue flowers embroidered on it. Beside the pillow was an old-style bag with Chinese buttons in the form of lowers, a volume called It Might Rain, and Five Hundred Writers' Poetry of Seduction. On the mosquito netting hung a cigarette poster of a half-naked girl.

On the window sill were a little bottle of red kidney pills, a vial of cod-liver oil, and a package of headache powders.62


218
From the perspective of point of view, the narrative method that Shen Congwen adopts appears quite conventional at first glance: the story is basically told by an omniscient third-person narrator, who essentially privileges showing over telling. However, the author inserts quite a few letters that Dashi writes (of course in the first person) to his fiancée. In addition to imposing an ironic perspective on the story, these letters also serve another important purpose: to complement the descriptions of a distanced third-person reflector with the intimacy and self-consciousness of the first-person narrator, as can be seen from the passages that we have just quoted above.

Furthermore, the author resorts to a variety of technical means to give a distinct portrayal of each of the professors and his "symptoms." For example, besides attention to detail in objective description, Shen Congwen also opts for such devices as dialogues, and story within a story, and many other structural and rhetoric techniques that are commonly employed in traditional Chinese novels, such as baimiao 白描 [plain portrayal], fubi 伏筆 [foreshadowing], qubi 曲筆 [indirect or circuitous description], xushi xiangjian 虛實相間 [alternate full description with description by implication], and bifan jiujian 避繁就簡 [reducing verbosity to simplicity].

As a story writer, Shen Congwen never ceased to learn from the Chinese

62 Ibid., 358.
cultural and aesthetic tradition. In his adolescent years, he was interested in classical Chinese fiction such as *Liao zai zhi yi* [Strange tales from a scholar's studio] and *Jing gu qi guan* [Remarkable stories new and old], as well as other Ming and Qing novels. During his first sojourn to Beijing, *Shi ji* [Records of the Grand Historian] was one of the books from which he benefited a great deal. Speaking of learning from China's great tradition (literary, artistic, and so on), Shen Congwen wrote: “If he is a short story writer, and is willing to learn from China's traditional artistic works, the knowledge that he learns will surely increase the depths of his works as well as his personal life. ••• If he wants to learn from tradition, and obtain enlightenment and hints from it, it is most natural that this will help him create a beautiful work with a well-rounded structure and insight, and increase the work's communicative effects and durability.”

In some of the dialogues in the story, one thing that we find quite intriguing is that Shen Congwen deliberately omits the responses from one of the two people in the conversation. When Professor B and Dashi go for a walk on the beach, some young girls in new-style bathing suits approach them and pass by. Then a conversation started between them, and the first part of it is like this:

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220
“Very curious, these girls, just as though by nature they needn’t do anything, just go on playing, don’t you think?”

“Shanghai girls don’t seem afraid at all of getting cold.”

“The nurses at the Baolong Hospital make sixteen dollars a month and clerks in the Xinxin Department Store forty a month. Unless they’ve chosen celibacy, the long-range opportunities behind a counter are much greater than in a hospital sickroom, don’t you think?”

In the second half of the dialogue, the author only retains Dashi’s words, and leaves out Professor B’s responses, but it does not seem likely that Dashi did not say anything during the first half of the conversation, and Professor B kept silent in the second half. The reason why the author deliberately omits some parts of the conversation is probably that in so doing he was applying the traditional technique of *bi fan jiu jian* [reducing verbosity to simplicity], or *ji sheng fa* [the method of extreme frugality]. This is a method highly valued by traditional critics such as Jin Shengtan 金聖嘯 and Zhang Zhupo 張竹坡. A similar method was also found in traditional Chinese painting. On one occasion, Shen Congwen referred to this device as *wu yan zhi mei* 無言之美 [the beauty of wordlessness], comparing it to the method used in Chinese traditional paintings since the Song and Yuan dynasties: “With some of the works, the most important thing is that there is nothing drawn in the blank space.

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From the perspective of proportions, this is comparable to the beauty of wordlessness, and thus creates an effect [similar to] the enlightening effect of wordlessness [in a literary work].”

As has been discussed before, baimiao, or “to portray the outline of a person or an object in simple and plain words,” is one of the most frequently used techniques used in traditional Chinese fiction. It is also a literary device favored by many modern Chinese writers such as Lu Xun, Lao She, and many others. Shen Congwen is no exception. The description of Professor A's room that we have mentioned before is a good example.

As for the technique of xu shi xiangjian [alternating full description with description by implication], Shen Congwen's portrayal of Professor G and his “symptoms” is a case in point. Shen does not describe his illness directly. As a matter of fact, he does not say that Professor G is sick. What Shen Congwen does is to depict how the “girl in yellow” starts to seduce Dashi in a rather mysterious and circuitous manner. The reason why she is doing this is left to the reader's power of inference. The reader has to use his/her own imagination to conjure up a picture of Professor G's “symptoms” on the basis of the description of the “girl in yellow” and her step-by-step seduction of Dashi.

Despite its minor defects, the story “Eight Steeds” brought a breath of fresh

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66 Shen Congwen, “Duanpian xiaoshuo,” 268. 有些作品尤其重要處

222
air into the Chinese literary arena in the 1930s where fiction was becoming increasingly tendentious. Shen Congwen's daring, fresh explorations of sexual psychology and his successful blending of Western techniques and Chinese traditional devices further established him as one of China's foremost writers of his time. Shen Congwen did not rest on his laurels. He went on writing and experimenting. As Shen claimed himself when he was talking about the "Literary Revolution," what he intended to do was "to obtain useful experience from constant failures, and carry on creating thousands of new works in diverse styles and contents to replace all the past works ...." He remained true to his words. The story we are going to examine next demonstrates Shen Congwen's unflagging endeavor to carry on his literary creation and experimentation.

Looked upon by many as a modernist work, "Green Nightmare" is truly an avant-garde story for Shen Congwen's time. It was written in 1944 when Shen Congwen was a professor at the Southwest Associated University in Kunming. From the perspective of literary genres, "Green Nightmare" appears to be a hybrid form of fiction and lyrical prose. It resembles very much the "lyrical novel" that we first discussed in the chapter on Lu Xun's fiction. In Lu Xun's stories, we find that some of
the characters are personae for the self, and on quite a few occasions, the scenery of fiction becomes a texture of imagery, whereas in some of Shen Congwen's avant-garde works, we can discern a much denser conglomeration of natural images imbued with a far stronger dose of subjectivity. Plot or action is not Shen's major concern. Nor does he care much about the causal and temporal movement of the narrative. What he is more interested in is how to reveal the truth of outer reality through subjective perception and self reflection in a lyrical vein. For Shen Congwen, the story becomes a formal design in which he can freely explore his inner experience and feelings. Deeply immersed in traditional Chinese poetics, Shen is very much drawn to the idea of qing jing jiao rong [fusion of feelings and scenes]. By merging the external world with his personal perception and introspective ruminations, Shen Congwen expects to achieve supreme objectivity through a subjective sensibility. In "Green Nightmare," we shall find how Shen Congwen employs fiction to approach the function of poetry or prose, and how he resorts to free mental associations as well as the evocation of imagery and symbolic patterns to attain a "subjective objectivity."

"Green Nightmare" consists of three sections which are subtitled respectively "Green," "Black," and "Gray." "Green" focuses on the perplexity that the first-person protagonist "I" feels when he is surrounded by a lush...

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67 Shen Congwen, "Shen Congwen xiaoshuo xuan ji ti ji," Shen Congwen xuan ji Vol. 5, 260. 從不斷失敗經驗里取得有用經驗,再繼續向前,創造出千百種風格不一,內容不同的新作品,來代替舊有的的一切…
green foliage. "Black" brings the reader back to events which happened five years ago when "I" moved to a country house. It describes the changes that took place in this time period and how "I" bewildered by a dense green expanse attempts to search in darkness. "Gray" again brings the reader forward to the present. "I" discovers that what he has obtained is only one thought after another. Therefore, he has to go back to the country house from the green hills. At night, he comes back to the place he visited in the day, and finds that the mystic green in the moonlight has turned to a stretch of silvery gray. Terrified, "I" feels that "gray is like the form of human life," and flees back at once. It appears as though "I" has re-discovers his "self" lost among the different colors of green, black, and gray. In the warm atmosphere of his home, "I" gradually becomes a real person from a group of abstract concepts. Finally, "I" awakens from his dream, a "new yellow-millet dream." 68

Although there is a loose plot as well as characters in the story, what permeates it throughout are the perceptions and feelings of the protagonist "I." This inward

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68 The expression "yellow-millet dream" (huang liang meng 黃粱夢) has its origin in a Tang tale entitled "Zhen zhong ji" 枕中記 [An experience inside the pillow] by Shen Jiji. It is a story about an impoverished young man named Lu Sheng and his strange encounter with a Taoist priest in a country inn. When the young man complains about his miserable plight, the Taoist priest, whose name is Lü Weng, produces a porcelain pillow, and tells Lu Sheng that he can obtain fortune and fame when he rests his head on it. Lu Sheng follows his advice and finds himself in an entirely different world, living a life of fame and luxury, and experiencing many...
turn of narrative toward inner experience and an active interaction between consciousness and objective reality demonstrate Shen Congwen's dissatisfaction with the conventional form of fiction. In the new, innovative form of "Green Nightmare," he resorts to thoughts, memories, and free associations, in addition to an extensive use of symbolism and imagery. Perceptions, feelings, ideas, thoughts, and memories flash across his mind, and he prefers to think in abstractions and symbols. As Shen Congwen himself claimed, "Now I am crazy. Crazy for abstractions. I see a number of symbols, a sheet of shapes, a bundle of lines, a kind of silent music, and a poem without words. I see the perfect form of life. All this exists very well in abstractions, but extinguishes in front of reality." 69

From the perspective of narration, the new technique that Shen Congwen uses in "Green Nightmare" is somewhat similar to the stream-of-consciousness method in the West, or we may call it a variation of stream-of-consciousness, but in Shen's approach, he focuses his attention more on the smooth, seamless fusion of subjective ruminations and the external world. This is in conformity with the traditional Chinese aesthetics in which the external world is essentially an object for private meditation. By merging one's feelings with the Nature that one is contemplating, hopefully one

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can attain an intuitive apprehension of its true nature and principles.

In the first section subtitled "Green," there are longs passages of introspection, which describe in detail what passes through the consciousness of the first-person narrator. The author devotes much space to a description of the mental process of the protagonist "I," in which sense perceptions are mingled with thoughts, feeling, and random associations. In this section, the author offers us a meticulous depiction of the various kinds of images that "I" perceives. His thoughts, ideas, and associations are intermingled and fused with the colors, sounds, and smells that "I" takes in through his senses when he is lying in a vacant place on a hill surrounded by a luxuriant green foliage. The landscape is dominated by green, but it is not a simple picture of pure green. It is an intricate pattern woven with many shades of green and other colors. The pines and cypresses are "dark green." In the distance is "a vast land of pale green interwoven with brown fields newly dug with glimmering hoes." 70 There are small grasses with different shades of green, which grow among "the thin, withered silvery white stalks of foxtails, and hairy, yellow weeds." 71

The sounds that we hear are also of various kinds: there are sounds of hoes digging earth, sounds of pounding rice in mortars from distant villages, sounds of

遠處淺淡的緑原,和那些剛由閃光鋤頭翻過赭色的田畝相互交錯, ….
flailing from somewhere at the foot of the hill, and the sounds of birds and insects fluttering their wings. As the first-person narrator acknowledges:

I only feel that when I am immersed in the world made up of a stretch of green, a combination of sounds, and a certain nondescript smell, my senses of sight and hearing have become incredibly simple. It would be entirely futile for me to try to describe this world with words stained with the mildew of history.

I am not a total stranger to this place, but at the moment, the things that I perceive with my ears and eyes are a reality more absurd than a dream.  

This is indeed a world composed of the images of colors, sounds, and smells, a world where the external reality merges into the inner experience of the author.

Then the warm caress of the afternoon sunshine makes “I” feel the loving care of an enormous hand. Realizing that it stretches toward every life from billions of miles away, “I” feels that “under the sunshine, life has lost its original meaning.” Some “silvery green dots” among the “ash gray remnants of the cut stalks in the fields” catch the protagonist’s attention. These are the sprouts of broad beans, the seeds of which farmers sew while they were harvesting. Now nourished by sunshine and fertile, moist soil, they have acquired a new life and become an expanse of green.

71 Shen Congwen, “Lù yan,” 14. 銀白光澤的狗尾草細長枯萎黃茸茸雜草
72 Ibid., 14. 只覺得這一片綠色，一組聲音，一點無可形容的氣味綜合所作成的境界，使我視聽諸官覺沉浸到這個境界中後，已轉成單純到不可思議，企圖用充滿歷史罪斑的文字來寫它時，竟是完全的徒勞。地方對於我雖並不完全陌生，可是這個時節耳目所接觸，卻是個比夢境更荒唐的實在

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The thought of life directs “I”’s attention toward ephemera and gnats on the stream, and colorful bugs among the grass. All of a sudden a black ant climbs onto the back of his hand. The ant wields its tentacles, as though it wants to ask a question about the hand and its uses. What follows is a dialogue between the ant and “I,” who delivers a long monologue. It starts with the hand and its role in the evolution of the human species. Then the narrator’s thought moves on to philosophical ruminations about the human brain, man’s “wild thoughts,” culture and civilization. Man’s “wild thoughts” lead to the creation of culture and civilization. When the balance between the two is upset, there is war. In a war, the function of man’s hands is reduced to their primitive role. This is crazy and senseless. Man’s hands should be brought into significant use. The narrator then thinks of human achievements in harnessing Nature, which result from the combined use of both the brain and the hands. What is deplorable is that despite man’s success in conquering the physical world, he is unable to control his own emotions. This leads to various kinds of human tragedies, such as war and family feuds. Even the “sage” is incompetent in this regard. The poet ponders over this matter with his random, dream-like works, but only to be called a “lunatic.”

The lingering movement of the ant reminds “I” of a university student that he met in the past. The student thought that thinking was a preposterous thing to do. His goal was to be a law-abiding citizen, obtain a secure job, and play mah-jongg in
his spare time. The first-person narrator raises questions about how he will use his hands in life. Then he says to himself: “Naturally there are no conclusions. The stretch of green has long conquered me.” 73 He feels as if he has come in touch with the ontological being of life. As he says, “the green which is all around me in the sunshine can be used to symbolize life,” 74 but “life is ultimately trapped up in a dilemma by green.” At the end of “Green,” Shen writes:

All life originates from green. It both benefits from and benefits green, and will ultimately be trapped in a dilemma by green. If the brilliant stretch of blue overhead has proved incapable of freeing us from the trap, then try searching through darkness. Perhaps there will be some different views there. 75

The first section of the story is marked by a flow of thoughts and ideas, as well as free association and reflection. This is somewhat similar to the stream-of-consciousness method. However, Shen Congwen first of all attaches great importance to a detailed description of the protagonist's sense perceptions of the external world, and then based on his contemplation and apprehension of the natural scene, he proceeds to narrate his spiritual enlightenment. In traditional Chinese poetics, in line with traditional Chinese philosophical and cosmological thinking, the description of

73 Shen Congwen, “Lü yan,” 19. 自然無結論可得，一片綠色早把我征服了。
74 Ibid., 19. 在陽光下包圍著我身邊的綠色，也可正用來象徵人生。
75 Shen Congwen, “Lü yan,” 22. 一切生命無不出自綠色，無不取給於綠色，最終亦無不被綠色所困惑，頭上一片光明的蔚藍，若無助於解脫時，試從黑處去捜尋，或者還會有些不同的景象
scenes (jing) is inseparable from that of one's feelings (qing). The best jingjie or "world" that poetry can hope to attain is one in which there is a perfect harmony between "scene" and "feeling." In Chinese thought, what is most important is the harmony between man and Nature, the subjective and the objective, and the abstract and the concrete. Speaking of "I" staying in a green environment, Shen Congwen writes: "... what it [green] has is a world. It seems as though in this world man and Nature tend toward a perfect harmony ..." 76

Unlike the Western stream-of-consciousness technique, which often emphasizes half-conscious and unconscious elements, Shen Congwen's method is characterized by a sober-minded, self-conscious flow of thoughts, which, though random and fragmentary at times, basically observes temporal and spatial boundaries and has a clear linear time sequence.

The fresh approach that Shen Congwen adopted for "Green Nightmare" was like a refreshing wind when it was first published. The innovative method in which the author blends both Western techniques and traditional Chinese devices represents another breakthrough following "Eight Steeds" in a contemporary Chinese fiction largely dominated by conventional realism. In the series of "nightmare" stories, what Shen Congwen attempts to do is to engage in an active interaction between consciousness and the external world. The inward turn of Shen's fiction toward a rich,

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76 Ibid., 20. 它有的只是一種境界。在這個境界中，似乎人與自然完全趨于諧和 ...
perceptive inner world reflects his desire to reveal the true meaning of life by exploring the human psychic “dream land.” For Shen Congwen, subjective contemplation is at least as important as the objective portrayal of objective reality in fiction writing. What is more important, however, is to find an appropriate artistic form commensurable with the intensity of self reflection and aesthetic abstraction.

The new mode that Shen creates in the “nightmare” stories is a further testimony to his belief in the importance of subjectivity and individuality in creative writing and the necessity of experimentation in artistic form. For Shen Congwen, form is meaning. It not only gives life to fiction but also brings it closer to life. Only by means of a well-designed form can a literary work acquire life and make itself accessible to the reader.

Shen Congwen's idea of an autonomous literature and his discontent with the increasing trend to make literature more and more topical and tendentious lead him to forge ahead and create new fictional forms. When the tension between the outer and inner experience grows, Shen Congwen would rather turn inward and experiment with a form and style commensurate with his vision and insight, than adhere to stereotyped modes of expression. As he says in simple and plain terms, when replying to a question about the determinist tendency in some of his short stories,

I do not have such abstruse implications. I have only one purpose, that is, to complete a work in experimentation. What I worry about most is critics
looking for "outlook" or "world view" in my immature works.\textsuperscript{77}

This is exactly where Shen Congwen's greatness lies. At a time when the aesthetic and artistic values of literature succumbed to historical contingency, Shen made a consistent effort in literary experimentation and created works that could be judged only on their own literary merits and in aesthetic terms. Many writers come and go, but Shen Congwen has come to stay. His works have already stood the test of time and become an important part not only of Chinese literature, but also of world literature.

\textsuperscript{77} Shen Congwen, "Da Ling Yu wen" [Answers to Ling Yu's questions], Shen Congwen xuanji, Vol. 5, 279.
CONCLUSION

Literary modernity is an integral part of cultural modernity. In the West, and in China as well, literary modernity started in the wake of their respective enlightenment movements. The splitting of culture into three autonomous spheres of science, morality, and art is considered a great achievement of the Enlightenment in the West. However, this process of cultural rationalization has always been accompanied by growing tensions between these spheres. From the very start, reason, the most important tenet of the Enlightenment, has been accompanied by a critique of reason. In the process of modernity, subjectivistic rationalization has increasingly turned man into an object of modernization. The constant effort to free human beings from the “iron cage” that they unwittingly made for themselves is a recurring theme in the grand symphony of modernity.

In one sense, the successive literary movements in the West reveal the sustained tensions between subject and object, between consciousness and Nature, and between reason and the “other” of reason, and how Western writers have reacted to them. The literary trends, be they romanticism, realism, symbolism, modernism, and postmodernism, or whatever, are an actual embodiment in literary form of the unending struggle to combat the domineering, objectifying tendency of excessive subjectivism and its consequences since the Enlightenment. As Marshall Berman remarks, “… I define modernism as any attempt by modern men and women to become subjects as well as
objects of modernization, to get a grip on the modern world and make themselves at home in it.\footnote{Berman, 5.} Broadly speaking, this definition also holds true for romanticism, realism, and postmodernism.

Like an invisible hand, the venerable notion of mimesis in the Western literary tradition has been silently manipulating the fashions and trends that have come and gone in Western literature. With the concepts of \textit{mimesis} and \textit{poeisis}, which comprise the two poles of mimesis, writers in the West have managed to engage in artistic innovations and revolts. By employing either \textit{mimesis} or \textit{poiesis}, or both of them, they have launched one literary movement after another. As a mediating and reconciliatory device, the mimetic tradition has played an extremely important role in influencing the course of Western literature. When the pendulum swings too fast or too much to the left or right, “mimesis” performs its function and brings the pendulum back to its normal tempo and rhythm. In other words, when literature becomes too much esoteric and abstruse to the extent that only academics and experts can possibly interpret, or too much impoverished and insipid because it bends to money and power, mimesis plays its role to resist these two forms of reification. The reason why some of the avant-garde works (be they modernist or postmodernist) are acclaimed by critics and readers alike is that despite their novel, unconventional experiments, they are, in the final analysis, mimetic or life-referential in one way or another. On the other hand, those works which alienate themselves entirely from the lifeworld and withdraw into self-assertive abstruseness have a short life span. To be rebellious and innovative in art does not necessarily mean...
alienation from everyday life, still less opposition to life. Therefore, to extol avant-gardism without discrimination is as wrong as to level art and life to the same plane. Subjective reflection should and can be complemented and enhanced with intersubjective communication. In the domain of literature, what is needed is subjective expression in a form and style accessible to the reading public and linked to the hermeneutics of human communication.

In our study of modern Chinese literature, one thing that we should keep in mind is that the Western literary tradition, along with the successive literary trends following the Enlightenment, has exerted an immense impact on modern Chinese literature since the May Fourth Movement. It has, in one way or another, influenced the course of modern Chinese literature. One of the reasons why I have devoted so much space to the examination of the Western literary tradition and literary modernity is an attempt on my part to show what really lies at the core of the Western tradition and how its modernity has evolved on top of it. This is a tradition drastically different from its Chinese counterpart. Subjecting these two great traditions to a careful investigation and comparison represents my effort to try to clarify some misconceptions about Western literary movements and their influence on Chinese literature.

As regards Chinese literary modernity, things are indeed quite different. Firstly, although critical reason is also the most important characteristic of the May Fourth Movement, which is looked upon by many as China's enlightenment, from the very beginning, it was intertwined with China's historical contingency. "Science" and
"democracy," the ideas borrowed from the West, were used to attack stifling traditional concepts and institutions. But in the meantime, Chinese intellectuals’ enthusiasm for the Western ideas and technology in their totalistic rejection of tradition was matched in equal measure by their awakening to an independent national identity and enthusiasm to build China into a powerful and wealthy nation. In the Chinese context, "reason" was utilized as a powerful weapon for emancipation from the bondage of Confucianism, as it was one hundred and fifty years ago by the *philosophes* in Europe for emancipation from Christian dogmatism and metaphysical thinking. However, China's social and political imperatives and the lingering hold of traditional ideas determined that China's enlightenment movement was never plain sailing. Before the strong entrenchment of tradition and the mounting demand for national identity, the concept of reason introduced from the West was only a miserable presence. It proved to be a weak voice, soon engulfed in the much louder uproar for national salvation. In the larger historical context, reason as an indispensable means of human emancipation is far from fulfilling its mission in China. The historical imperatives forbade a full-grown sense of reason and the autonomous rational subject, since what really mattered was national salvation and renewal. Collectivism and selfless devotion were more important in this sacred cause. Thus unlike the Enlightenment in the West, which was essentially an intellectual movement, the Chinese enlightenment was from the very start intermingled with a social and political agenda, and the consequences of the May Fourth movement are not only manifest in intellectual and cultural spheres, but also in social, economic, and political fields. The energy and power initially released by the foreign
ideas of "democracy," "science," and "reason" were directed to the lofty mission of spiritual transformation and national salvation, to the neglect of the original goals of the enlightenment movement, such as the eradication of virulent feudal ideas, and the realization of the "sovereign rational subject." In this sense, the May Fourth enlightenment is an incomplete movement.

Secondly, the Chinese cultural and philosophical tradition always takes humanism as its primary concern. As Wing-Tsit Chan says, "If one word could characterize the entire history of Chinese philosophy, the word would be humanism -- not the humanism that denies or slight a Supreme Power, but one that professes the unity of man and Heaven. In this sense, humanism has dominated Chinese thought from the dawn of history." 2 Unlike Western humanism, which is essentially "extrinsic," Chinese humanism is "intrinsic," to use Chung-Ying Cheng's terms. 3 This means that in Chinese thought, man and Nature are intrinsic to each other, and there is no absolute bifurcation between the subjective and the objective, between man and Heaven, and between consciousness and Nature. This emphasis on the unity and harmony between man and reality lies at the root of Chinese literary thought. In the Chinese literary

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3 As Chung-Ying Cheng points out, "Although there can be many versions of humanism, humanisms can be conveniently divided into the extrinsic and the intrinsic. Most humanist thinking in the West is extrinsic, whereas the humanism in Chinese philosophy is intrinsic." He remarks further: "Now the philosophical assumption that nature is intrinsic to the existence of man and man intrinsic to the existence of nature, is the foundation of Chinese humanism." See Chung-Ying Cheng, "Chinese Philosophy: A Characterization," Arne Naess and Alastair Hannay eds., *Invitation to Chinese Philosophy* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1972) 158-9.
tradition where the concept of mimesis is lacking, the conceptions of literature are quite different from those in the Western literary tradition.

For Chinese men of letters, nature is essentially an object for contemplation, not for imitation. The purpose of this contemplation is to achieve an intuitive apprehension of nature and then identify with it. The identification and harmony with the Dao -- the Way of Nature as well as the Way of Humanity, constitute the fundamental premise of literature. This is the reason why "Literature conveys the Dao" has an ever-lasting influence in the Chinese literary tradition. Literature provides an important means to express one's enlightenment and feelings in contemplating nature. In ancient China, literature first and foremost referred to the genres of poetry and prose, since these two forms were best suited for the conveyance of the Dao. Until the Yuan (1271-1368) and Ming (1368-1644) dynasties, drama and fiction only occupied a marginal place in the literary arena and were generally looked down upon by the literati. Almost every

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Confucian scholars in the past often displayed, at least in public, their disdain for drama and fiction, the two literary genres that were related to an oral tradition. The flowering of the drama in the Yuan dynasty was chiefly due to a loosened control of Confucianism over arts and letters. The Mongol rulers were actually indirectly responsible for the growth of drama, since they had a deep distrust for the Confucian scholars who remained unreconciled to the new and alien government. Though a misfortune to classical scholarship, the abolition of the Imperial Examination by the government for the first half of the Yuan dynasty proved a blessing for popular literature. The thriving of vernacular fiction in the Ming dynasty was also an outgrowth of the oral tradition of storytelling. However, it became a much refined literary genre in the hands of such famous scholars as Feng Menglong (1574-1646) and Ling Mengchu (1580-1644). There are quite a few reasons that may account for the development of fiction in the Ming dynasty, one of the most important of which is the impact of the Left Wing of the Wang Yangming school. In contradistinction to the
intellectual was a poet of some sort, who could turn out verses on different occasions to convey the *(Dao)*, articulate *zhi*, and express *qing*.

As has been noted before, the three famous aphorisms in Chinese literary thought -- "Literature conveys the *(Dao)* (the Way)," "Literature expresses the *zhi* ("heart's wish" or "mind's intent") and "Poetry springs from *qing* ("feelings") -- have held great sway in Chinese literature for a long, long time. They summarize in the form of succinct statements the two major tendencies in the Chinese literary tradition: the didactic and the expressive. Despite the fact that these two literary impulses are generally antagonistic to each other, in the Chinese context they are locked in a dialectical relationship. The ambiguity of the word *zhi* shows that Chinese writers do not care what their *zhi* is. "Conveying the *(Dao)*" or "expressing *qing*" are equally justified. In their holistic way of thinking, what is more important is the harmony between man and the external world. The seamless merging of the individual and reality enables the literary work to express emotions and engage in social comment at the same time.

Therefore, the modernity of Chinese literature should be examined from the three perspectives that we have discussed above: the impact of Western literature, the peculiar features of China's enlightenment movement, and the unique characteristics of the Chinese literary tradition. What has played the most important role in shaping the orthodox Confucian doctrine, it stressed "innate knowledge" and an outpouring of *qing* in literary creation. A supporter of Wang Yangming and Li Zhi (a radical iconoclast in the Left Wing), Feng Menglong not only wrote a large number of vernacular stories, but also brought fiction from the margin to the center of literature. See Liu Wu-chi, *An Introduction to Chinese Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana
contours of Chinese literary modernity is China's time-honored literary tradition with its rich legacy and unbroken continuity for over three thousand years. Whether we discuss the problem of Chinese literary modernity or study individual modern Chinese writers, the above-mentioned three factors are the most important things that we should take into earnest consideration, paying special attention in the meantime to the formative role of the Chinese literary tradition.

Modern Chinese writers lived in an age ridden with troubles and crises. Their consciousness was caught up in many unprecedented conflicts and tensions. Unlike their pre-modern predecessors who could move freely between the expressive and didactic views, modern Chinese writers were confronted with the tension between anti-traditional iconoclasm and national salvation. To launch an onslaught against tradition, they appropriated the imported foreign trends and ideas in literature; to combat the threat of foreign imperialism and salvage the nation, they tried to search for or create a benign national tradition. Romanticism, realism, and symbolism introduced from Western literature were utilized all at once in their attack on tradition, but these foreign trends had to be adapted and combined with indigenous modes to convey the new Dao -- national salvation and renewal. Certainly, this does not mean that modern Chinese literature is monolithic. To be sure, there are different schools and trends, but the majority of modern Chinese writers are burdened with the overriding primacy of the new Dao, as well as the
lingering hold of the old Dao. One thing that we should not forget is that the didactic and the expressive concepts of literature in the literary tradition have persisted into the modern age. Like the two sides of a coin, Dao and qing always go together.

Thus viewed from the above perspectives, literary modernity in China can be seen as a process in which modern Chinese writers have responded to the tension and dilemma in which they have been trapped. They attempt to portray their "experience of space and time, of the self and others, of life's possibilities and perils" in their works by searching for a literary mode commensurable with their changing sensibility and insight.

In a tradition which endorses the seamless blending of the self and the external world, there is almost no place for an esoteric literature entirely divorced from empirical reality. No matter what innovative methods or mode a writer experiments with, he seldom produces an abstruse work totally separated from life and inaccessible to readers. China's literary tradition has proved to be an unfailing source of inspiration and creation for modern Chinese writers. By combining it with methods and techniques introduced from foreign literature, Chinese writers are able to develop their own form of literature which possesses distinct Chinese features and is modern in form, style, and theme.

Lu Xun and Shen Congwen, two of China's foremost writers, provide us good examples to illustrate the arguments that I have made above.

In public, the image of Lu Xun was that of a resolute iconoclast and uncompromising fighter against "feudalistic ideas." He fiercely attacked Confucian
subservience and filial piety and was dedicated to the mission of transforming the national character by engaging in literary creation. In private, Lu Xun was actually a very traditional man and was committed to many traditional Chinese values. In this connection, I would like to give one further example to show the pervasiveness of these two conflicting orientations in Lu Xun. As we know, Lu Xun was contemptuous of the lowbrow fiction of the “Mandarin Ducks and the Butterfly” school and critical of its “scholar and beauty” type of romances, since they represented a deviation from the lofty goal of national salvation. However, Lu Xun's mother was an avid reader of popular fiction. Lu Xun sent her Jing fen shijia 金粉世家 [A family of wealth and renown] and Meiren en 美人恩 [A favor from a beauty], two of Zhang Henshui's 張恨水 novels to cater to his mother's taste. Probably because Lu Xun's mother was very much interested in them, Lu Xun sent her more of Zhang Henshui's works, and some of Cheng Zhanlu's 程瞻廬 fiction. As we know, Zhang Henshui was a very famous writer of the “Mandarin Ducks and Butterfly” school, and Cheng Zhanlu was another writer of the same school. It seems to me that this episode is illustrative of two points: firstly, it shows that despite his onslaught on “feudalistic” ideas such as filial piety, Lu Xun was a pious son toward his mother and did whatever he could to please her, as any son in ancient China educated in Confucian morality would do; secondly, it reveals that irrespective of Lu Xun's public denigration of the “Mandarin Ducks and Butterfly”

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5 Berman, 15.
fiction, he actually held an ambivalent attitude toward it.

Lu Xun was indeed a person of profound ambivalence and complexity. In his writing career as well as in his life, he was torn between a radical stance toward tradition and a commitment to some traditional values. The two opposing views of literature in the Chinese literary tradition -- the utilitarian and the expressive -- also left a deep imprint on Lu Xun's mind. Living at a time when China was besieged with disasters and crises, Lu Xun's consciousness was, like many of his contemporaries, caught up in the tension between an iconoclastic radicalism for emancipation from tradition and a fervent quest for national salvation in the face of foreign threat. On the one hand, the complexity and sophistication of his consciousness testify to the profundity of modern China's cultural as well as social crises, and on the other, they serve as a fountain-head as well as a motive force for the creation of a modern fiction which not only bears his own distinct marks, but also brims over with pathos about the condition of modern man. This is a kind of fiction which we can hardly describe only in terms of realism, romanticism, or symbolism. One of the reasons for the impasse that many of the Chinese critics have found themselves caught up in is that constrained by their doctrinaire mindset, they can hardly find any approach other than naming Lu Xun's stories with the labels of sinicized "realism," "romanticism," or "symbolism." As a perceptive and talented writer possessed with an unusual sensibility, Lu Xun already transcended the boundaries of these "-isms." Therefore, it is not right for us to keep ourselves within the limits of these imported and adapted literary trends when we discuss the modernity of his fiction.

The ironic, the lyrical, and the parodic literary modes, which I use to define the
modernity of Lu Xun's fiction, actually point to a literary sensibility which essentially grows out of the fertile soil of China's own literary tradition. To be sure, Lu Xun himself was very much interested in foreign literature, and his fiction was nourished by foreign ideas and techniques, but they were absorbed and merged with indigenous devices to create a work which is typically Chinese. One of the things that have made Lu Xun truly great is that when realism was given the orthodox status and charged with the mission of spiritual transformation and national salvation, he went his own way, carrying on with literary experimentation and creation, little disturbed by dogmas and creeds, for he believed that realism was not the only means that he could resort to in his quest for truth. The three literary modes that Lu Xun adopted for his fiction represent the result of his continuous endeavor in search of form and meaning in twentieth-century China.

The originality and creativeness that these literary modes display demonstrate what a modern Chinese writer steeped in tradition can achieve in his quest for reality and literary modernity. Lu Xun's way to literary modernity in China is neither bending literature to socio-political imperatives, nor making it a duplication of Western literature. What holds the key to Lu's literary modernity is still China's literary tradition, which, combined with the thought and ideas introduced from the West since the Enlightenment, enables a writer to maintain a relatively autonomous stance in his quest for truth and modernity in an age rife with tensions and conflicts.

Comparing Lu Xun and Shen Congwen, we find that Shen Congwen's journey
toward literary modernity took a quite different course, and his fiction was also very much different from Lu Xun's. As has been noted before, the differences between Lu Xun's and Shen Congwen's fiction are manifest in many respects, such as theme, form, and style. However, despite all these differences, if we examine their works in the larger context of modernity, we shall find that they also show many similarities. One of them is the shaping role that the Chinese literary tradition has played in both their works.

Though Lu Xun and Shen Congwen were different in educational background and life experience, they were both immersed in the traditional literary values, and neither of them was exempt from the didactic and expressive views of literature, which had long struck root in the deep recesses of their mind. However, in spite of Shen Congwen's professed commitment to the utilitarian function of literature, he was more biased toward the expressive concept of literature. Furthermore, the emphasis that he laid on the didactic side of literature was also different from that of the majority of intellectuals of the May Fourth: instead of assaulting tradition directly and linking literature with historical exigencies, Shen elevated the role of literature to that of the Chinese classics. The equation of literature with the classics is a clever way of downplaying the role of the classical tradition and asserting the supremacy of subjectivity and individual emotions. In actuality, this is tantamount to declaring the autonomous status of literature. Although Shen Congwen was committed to the ethical and moral concerns of literary works, his conception of literature resembled in a way the Aristotelian notion of literature as the organic union of aesthetic enjoyment and cognitive pleasure. In terms of freeing literature from social and political
interventions and making it obey its own inner workings, Shen Congwen displayed a truly independent and exploratory spirit.

In Shen Congwen's terminology, fiction mainly concerns itself with "human affairs," which consist of two parts: social phenomena and dream phenomena. The former refers to social reality, and the latter relates to "various activities of the individual human mind or consciousness." As Shen says further, the former only provides material for newspaper reports, and the latter usually results in the creation of poetry. Therefore, a good story is one in which these two parts are well blended and merged. Thus in Shen Congwen's mind, a writer's subjectivity and individuality at least play as important a role in the creative process as objective reality. This idea of fiction is very close to the Western concept of the "lyrical novel" in which the author uses the form of fiction to approach the function of a poem. But Shen's fiction is different from the "lyrical novel" in that the purpose of subjective perception and contemplation of the world is to find a harmony between man and Nature. What he attempts to do is not to simply put together the experiencing self and the world he experiences, or to render an image that catches "an emotional and intellectual complex in an instant of time" (Pound's words), but to ensure that the writer is elevated to a jingjie or "spiritual world" in which he can harmonize and identify with the natural world as well as human nature. As he claims,

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7 Shen Congwen, "Duanpian xiaoshuo," 250.
The production of all excellent literary works is inseparable from the use of hand and mind. What is more important is perhaps the “spiritual world” which nurtures hand and mind, a “spiritual world” which can engage in self-reflection and self-retrospection, and absorb phenomena and imagery. One can gradually attain to this world by drawing oneself away from classroom and dormitory, from friends as well as classmates, and quietly coming face to face with Nature.⁹

Therefore, the attainment of this “spiritual world” became the guiding principle which led him to search for literary forms which could accommodate his idea of literary creation. Throughout his literary activities, Shen Congwen proved himself to be a conscientious and untiring experimentalist who was always willing to try out new methods and experiment with innovative approaches.

Though displaying an intense interest in foreign literature and its techniques, Lu Xun seemed to have transcended from early on the doctrines of the “-isms” imposed by some Chinese writers and critics. Shen Congwen was also very much interested in foreign literature and its modes of expression. Like Lu Xun, Shen Congwen also showed an abhorrence of any dogmatic attitude toward imported literary trends. One thing that Shen admired Lu Xun for was that through his daring, unbridled literary innovation and practice, Lu Xun set an example for young Chinese writers and encouraged them to free their pen from the “constraints of dogmatism.” However, in terms of technique, Shen Congwen showed a genuine interest in Western literary methods and devices, and displayed an earnest willingness to try them out in his works.

⁹ He Dong ed., Shen Congwen miaoyu lu, 97.
His effort to learn and absorb foreign technique was conscientious. He experimented with the romantic, symbolic, realist, and modernist methods, and employed them sometimes separately, sometimes all at once in his stories. He also tried his hand at Freudian psychoanalysis and the stream-of-consciousness method. These alien literary modes and devices were knit seamlessly into the Chinese pattern of his work. The result was an entirely new literary mode stamped with Shen Congwen’s own distinct features. The passion for literary experiments and the achievements that Shen Congwen has made through them are what characterize the modernity of his fiction. The process of experimentation itself is the actual embodiment of the quest for reality as well as for literary modernity, and the successes achieved in these experiments mark the various stages that Shen Congwen went through on his journey toward literary modernity.

Shen Congwen's novel experiments in literary form, style and theme do not suggest in any way that his intention in experimentation is to withdraw into a solipsistic smugness by creating an abstruse form few can appreciate. In a way quite similar to Lu Xun's fiction, Shen Congwen's work can hardly be characterized only in terms of conventional realism, romanticism, or symbolism, etc. If we put his fiction under careful scrutiny, we shall find that it consists of many different ingredients taken from both Western technique and Chinese tradition. We cannot say categorically that this story is realist, and that is romantic. Many of his late stories can be described as avant-garde. The feeling that we get from reading his avant-garde works is that instead of separating
us from reality, they actually bring us closer to it.

Like his ancient forebears, Shen Congwen thinks highly of the communicative function of literature. As he remarks, “Antiquity is so remote from the present; and the world is so vast. The communication and connection between human minds have all along depended upon literature.” Communicativeness is perhaps the most essential quality which distinguishes genuine literature from sham literature. For any literature to be genuine, it must be humanist and humane in essence, irrespective of what strange garb it dons, or what grotesque guises it hides in.

The project of modernity in the West is still unfinished, according to Jürgen Habermas. “Postmodernism” is but another attempt to indulge in a moment of irrationality to combat self-centered reason. In China, the successors of the May Fourth enlightenment are still striving to carry on the project of intellectual emancipation left unfinished by their predecessors. In the literary arena, Chinese writers have taken big strides forward on their journey toward modernity, but the avant-garde trend which has emerged since 1985 is yet another variation on the theme to extricate literature from the bondage of the Dao, both old and new. Modernity and tradition have always been locked in a complex, dialectical relationship, which has proved to be not only the motive force but also the unfailing source for the splendid achievements of modern literature, both Chinese and Western. It has shaped the course of modern literature for the past two

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10 He Dong ed. *Shen Congwen miaoyu lu*, 86. 今古相去那麼遠, 世界面積那麼寬,人心與人心的溝通和連接, 原是依賴文學的.
hundred years or so, and will lead it into the unknown future of the next millennium.


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