HERO, NON-HERO, AND ANTI-HERO
A CRITICAL STUDY OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHEN JIANGONG'S FICTION

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This M.A. thesis is a critical study of Chen Jiangong's fiction, chiefly attempting to reveal the process of thematic development in this author's works by way of tracing the hero through non-hero to anti-hero. The first chapter, which is biographical, makes a brief account of Chen's family background, personal experience as well as the unique personality fostered by his ten year career as a coal-miner. The second chapter presents an analysis of the thematic defects of his early fiction, and meanwhile some technical matters are succinctly introduced. The third chapter deals with the stylistic traits -- subject matter, narrative technique and language -- of the three stories which left untouched in the previous chapter due to their different way of representation. In order to show clearly Chen's two styles, a comparison of these three stories with his other early works is frequently made. The fourth chapter is an interpretation of his two mature works "No. 9 Winch Handle Alley" and "Looking for Fun." The centre of attention is mainly concentrated on "the sense of tragicomedy" -- a philosophy of life rather than a mere technique Chen acquired after he disposed of former literary dogmas. The fifth chapter is devoted to a comparative study of his masterpiece "Curlylocks" and how it was influenced by J.D. Salinger's The
Catcher in the Rye The aspect of anti-heroism is especially stressed. The sixth chapter is a summary in which Chen's thematic transformation from heroism to anti-heroism is reiterated and his literary achievements are evaluated.
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"Blooming and contending," though originally a political term, is perhaps most appropriate to describe the literary scene in China in the latter half of 1980s before June 4th, 1989. A great number of young talented writers emerged. When Jia Pingau, Zhang Chenzhi and Wang Anyi were still in the limelight, a batch of newer names had already begun to replace them. The process of supersession was surprisingly swift. Although Ah Cheng is a genius who stood head and shoulders above most of his peers in 1985, he had to yield his literary "throne" to Mo Yan, another unusually gifted writer, in 1986. Contrary to the expectation of critics that Mo Yan might produce greater works, the years of 1987 and 1988 nevertheless saw the rise of Li Xiao, Liu Heng, and Liu Zhenyun as new stars. During this period of time, in fact, young authors worthy of critical attention, for example, Can Xue, Ma Yuan, Xu Xing, Wang Suo, Zhang Wei, Su Tong, Yu Hua, Ge Fei, are too numerous to be listed one by one. It was indeed a competitive literary world "full of sound and fury." In this world, undeniably, Chen Jiangong seems to be too silent, or even according to one critic fell into oblivion to some extent. However, no matter how silent he was, he has already proved with his excellent novella "Curlylocks" that he is one of the
important writers in this period who cannot be easily neglected.

This thesis offers a study that can reveal, by way of tracing the hero through non-hero to anti-hero, the process of development of Chen Jiangong's fiction from the late 1970s to the mid-1980s - that is, a systematic study of his entire oeuvre. Since my undertaking is interpretative for the most part and two full chapters are given to the analysis of Chen's early juvenile short stories, I hope that I have not left such a mistaken impression that the works in this author's initial period are equal in intrinsic literary merits to those he later produced. What are chosen for discussion is based not only upon their "literariness," but also upon the necessity to illustrate his progress.

The first chapter is mainly biographical, attempting to make a brief account of Chen's family background, personal experience, as well as unique personality fostered by his ten year career as a coal-miner. The second chapter presents an analysis of the thematic defects of his early fiction, and meanwhile some technical matters are succinctly introduced. The third chapter exclusively deals with the stylistic traits -- subject matter, narrative technique and language -- of three stories which are purposely left untouched in the previous chapter due to their different way of representation. In order to show clearly Chen's two styles, a comparison of these three stories with his other early works is frequently made. The fourth chapter is an interpretation of his two mature works "No. 9 Winch Handle Alley" and "Looking for Fun." The centre of attention is chiefly
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To the author Chen Jiangong and to my friend Dai Zhengyue, I am deeply grateful for their mailing me books as well as concerned reference material, without which my research would have been next to impossible. I also wish to thank Professor Michael S. Duke for his careful reading and helpful criticism. It was his suggestion that prompted me to take up the study of Chen Jiangong's fiction, and again, it was his correction that helped me avoid many mistakes, though the mistakes still left are of course of my own responsibility.
CHAPTER ONE
FROM MINER TO WRITER

To Chen Jiangong, 1977 was a turning point.

It had been about ten years by that time since he worked as an excavator in a mine in west Beijing. One day when he was riddling gravel at the foot of mountains, or more specifically, lying on his back on a heap of sand to sunbathe, somebody informed him that he had been admitted by the Chinese Department of Beijing University.\(^1\) It goes without saying that a new leaf would soon be turned over in his life.

How fortunate he was, in comparison with his contemporary writers, to be able to enter the university in the first year after downfall of the Gang of Four, let alone a university that is a first-rate one in China. In early 1980s, "student writers" like Chen Jiangong were quite rare, and men of letters usually were not educated in institutions of higher learning. Although some of them

\(^1\) Chen Jiangong, "Momo Qiedangge" [Taking Silence as a Song], The Charm of Spirit [Jingshen de meili], Beijing: Peking University Press, 1988: 269.
did take certain collegiate courses, they were generally not full-time regular students. It comes as no surprise that Wang Meng, the ex-Minister of culture, appealed energetically at that time that writers should improve themselves in knowledge. Obviously, he had observed the prevalent problem: the deficiency on the part of authors in their educational background.

World renowned as the science fiction writer H.G. Wells was, he nevertheless dreamed in his later years about obtaining a degree in Cambridge or Oxford University in order to be a professor. Joseph S.M. Lau, an established scholar of Chinese origin in the United States, frankly admitted that when he was a teenager, his ideal was not to become a writer, but to become a university student.²

To our surprise, however, the admission notice from Beijing University did not cheer up Chen Jiangong at all. He was sunbathing as his fellow worker brought words to him about that encouraging news. He only broke into a smile at what this informant told him, and then turned over so that his back could be exposed to the sun, as if nothing had occurred to him. After his back was warmed up, he got up, going to pick up the letter of admission.³


³ "Momo Qiedangge," *Charm of Spirit*: 269.
You might curse me.

"A man of fake profundity!" you say.

I was unaware of what was good to be a "man of fake profundity." At that time I neither knew Takakora Ken [a popular Japanese film star] nor Hemingway. I simply thought: after my back was sun drenched, nothing would be held up.⁴

That year he was twenty eight years old. Since he had seen and undergone a variety of absurdities and cruelties during the last decade of the Cultural Revolution, he was no longer prone to be emotionally excited. His heart, as he described himself, "had already become as rough as a rock."⁵

In 1949, the year in which the People's Republic of China was established, Chen Jiangong was born into an intellectual family in Beihai City, Guangxi Province. He was a "hereditary scholar" [shuxiang mendi]⁶ so to speak, and therefore, it is not without reason to consider him to be similar in family background to the protagonist Lu Sen in his novella "Curlylocks" [Juanmao]. As his

⁴ Ibid., 270.
⁵ Ibid., 270
father had procured a professorship in People's University of China in Beijing, the whole household then moved up to the capital in 1957, and the later years also saw his mother become a teacher in the middle school attached to Beijing University.

Truly, Chen Jiangong was not born a Beijinger. Yet he spent almost all his life there except the first eight years. After having established himself as an eminent writer, he was frequently away from Beijing either to attend meetings, or to lecture, or simply to travel and sight-see, and he was even so lucky as to join the Chinese writers' delegation and travel to Japan, the United States, Hong Kong and other countries successively. However, this does not mean that he was estranged from the place where he was brought up. His "roots" were still there. It is only there that he felt most at home. He was a true, thoroughgoing Beijinger, so to speak. No wonder that he always took Beijing (including the mining area in west Beijing) as a setting for his fiction (the only exception is "Tears of Tawny Daylily" in which the story happens in Inner Mongolia), and was able to use Beijing dialect, or rather, slang, with facility when he directly presented characters' conversations.

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His father was probably a "problematic"\textsuperscript{8} intellectual. But we are completely unclear as to what was the "problem" that implicated this university professor. Chen Jiangong is unwilling to talk about his private life. When I wrote to him to ask for detailed material about his personal history, he rejected me for the reason that he would not like to make an untimely "exposure" to the general public.

Besides the "problem" of his father, his own love experience is also an enigma. Since most of his early stories are more or less related to love in subject matter, and moreover, some of them were written so emotionally, it is reasonable to infer that they must be based upon his own true experience. However, we are unable to prove it at this point by first-hand material, just as we are unable to prove his father's "problem." What is within the range of our knowledge is actually nothing but the fact that his parent's "historical problem" weighed on his mind like a "heavy burden" and "overshadowed the road he took for twenty more years."\textsuperscript{9} In Bewildering Firmament [Miluan de xinkong], there is a short story entitled "Going to the High Sacrificial Altar" [Zouxiang gaogao de jitan], in which a "problematic" father is indirectly presented through the son's speculation. If we take the story as something

\textsuperscript{8} Chen Jiangong, "My Honest Confession" [Congshi zhaolai], Literature and I [Wo yu wenxue]: 145.

\textsuperscript{9} Ibid., 145.
of an autobiography or semi-autobiography, we will perhaps get some information in this respect.

As the only child in the family, Chen Jiangong was undoubtedly in his parents's good graces. They sent him to the middle school affiliated with The People's University of China. It was quite prestigious, and its graduates were generally able to enter universities without much difficulty. One can predict in all reason that his life would have been plain sailing but for the ten years of the civil turmoil. He could have been enrolled by a university, and like his father, could also have grown into a certain expert in a certain field after he finished with his higher education.

But life was unpredictable and treacherous. As soon as the Cultural Revolution broke out, he was immediately branded as an offspring of "discredited intellectuals." His self-esteem, which he had formed as a child from a cosy middle class family, was greatly injured. Clearly, he did not have a promising future any more, and it was suffering that was awaiting him. In 1968 when he had barely done with his high school studies, he was tossed to the bottom of China's society -- the mine in west Beijing, where he worked for a full decade until 1977. After all, his fate was not the worst among the younger generation in the fanatic days of late 1960s. Paradoxically, he was even rather "lucky," since he was not so unprovidential as to be forced to settle in the remote countryside in inland China.

It was thirteen years ago. A thin adolescent at the
age of eighteen, confident and presumptuous, I went to the Xizhimeng Station, taking a very slow train that was bound to the mine in west Beijing -- the road of life thus began to unfold in front of me.  

This is the beginning of his recollection about his hard experience as a miner in an article entitled "Life with its Dancing Waves" [Shenghuo, xianqile langhua]. He then continued to write:

When there were still sparse morning stars twinkling in the sky, the remote but loud sound of a steam whistle would wake me up and I would then hurry off to the locker-room. Stark-naked, I would put on underground work clothes. It was still so wet with sweat that it was as if I had got into an ice-cold iron armour. I would carry a heavy rock drill to bore holes, and use explosives to blow up hard stone, with the sweat flowing down along my backbone. Or holding a whistle in my mouth, I would jump up and down in the midst of mine cars that were going as fast as shuttles. Until finally, I was knocked down onto the rail and just missed dyings by a hair's breadth...

How many silly remarks did I make? And how many foolish things did I do? Wasn't it my ignorance and immaturity?!

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10 Chen Jiangong, China Youth [Zhongguo qingnian], October, 1981.
But what became of me as a result? I was suspected and unfairly treated. Distressed and irritated, I simply wanted to pound the wall and howl! All of a sudden, however, I was charged with an "important task." The annoying official documents, the boring writing on somebody else's behalf, -- all these things made me even more distressed, even more irritated, and even more want to pound the wall and howl. On the other hand, whenever I stayed with my fellow miners, their sincerity as well as pride in their occupation made me feel as if I had become a lump of coal and had been thrown into the hearth in which a fire was blazing... I also learned how to drink intemperately, how to pretend to be a "troublemaker," and how to speak in vulgar language and shout abuse in the street with no shame. Of course, there were also such times when I studied diligently, practised writing, and did some hard thinking and exploration...  

This is literally a comprehensive, though somewhat unclear, account of what Chen Jiangong underwent during the period he was working in the mine in west Beijing. It is evident that the ten years has made him a totally different person. Ten years before he used to be an impetuous and conceited youngster, yet ten years after he had grown into an introspective, profound, and mature man

11 Ibid.
with a miner's temperament. No wonder that Wang Meng had such an impression after he got acquainted with Chen Jiangong at a writers's meeting: "He is, after all, a man with ten years experience as a miner: young but not naive, insightful and knowledgeable but never ostentatious."\(^{12}\) Is this what we call in proverb "a loss may turn out to be a gain?" Mencius said: "[W]hen Heaven is about to confer a great office on a man, it first exercises his mind with suffering, and his sinews and bones with toil. It exposes his body to hunger, and subjects him to extreme poverty. It confounds his undertakings. By all these methods it stimulates his mind, hardens his nature, and supplies his incompetencies."\(^ {13}\) Can it be that, just as this ancient Chinese sage prophesied, Chen Jiangong's suffering in that unprecedented catastrophe is an indispensably preparatory stage for him to become a writer?

Nevertheless, the Cultural Revolution undoubtedly had its strong negative effect on him. Not only did it mould his tough character and enable him to "speak in vulgar language and shout abuses in the street with no shame," but it also deprived him of

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12 Wang Meng, "Yongyuan zuo shenghuo yu yishu de kaituozhe -- xu'miluan de xinkong'" [Be a Pioneer in Life and Art Forever: Preface to Bewildering Firmament], Bewildering Firmament: 3.

his honesty and made him become a cynical hypocrite who, despite being unsatisfied with reality, was yet very willing to be servile to the people in power. The protagonist Zhong Qi in the short story "Sinuous Rills" [Liushui wanwan] used to be an aspiring youth, but the vicious retaliation and hostile environment eventually deject him. He marries a country woman and is unable to bestir himself any more. To some extent, I believe, Zhong Qi is an authentic portraiture of Chen Jiangong himself in the long space of that holocaust.

During the nightmarish decade, nothing was more horrifying to him than the political persecution which happened in the early 1970s. Suspected of disseminating "dangerous" opinions and organizing a secret clique in the eyes of certain leaders, he was nearly branded as a "counter-revolutionary." He was watched, investigated, summoned for dressing-down, and was even sent to participate in a public accusation meeting. When he saw those having confessed their "crime" with tears all over their faces benignly forgiven and the others who refused to do that handcuffed and taken to the prison, he was greatly nervous, feeling as if he were on tenterhooks. So he was not a bit frightened when a severe industrial accident broke his backbone. On the contrary, he was happy that he was therefore able to stay in the haven of the

Eventually, his firm will collapsed. He began to willingly serve as a "ghost writer" (zhuodaoren) for the leader who had persecuted him. That is to say, every time "Chairman Mao" had his "highest directions" issued, he would prepare some "guidance material" for his bosses. From then on he no longer had an independent thought and personality. Like a reed bending with the wind, he swayed politically. Looking back to what he did in that phase, he made such a description of himself:

On one hand, I was full of indignation and distress, on the other I put on a pitiable look and curried favour with the people in power; on one hand, I was deeply sceptical that something might have gone wrong with the times, on the other I tried my best to find the theory to support the view that whatever had existed was rational; on one hand, I was almost drowned in the muddy stream, on the other I desperately clutched at the wood that could save my life. (146-47)

At any rate, it seems unnecessary for him to be filled with too much remorse. When he was mentally metamorphosed under the pressure of the "times," how could it be that only he himself was

15 "My Honest Confession," Literature and I: 146. Further references in parentheses in the text.
Nominally, he had been a miner for a whole decade, but in fact who knows exactly how much time, especially in his later years in the mine, he spent as a miner and how much time as a "ghost writer?" It is undeniable that the status of "ghost writer" degraded him in some measure, but it also made it possible for him to try his hand at creative writing. In 1973 when he was 24 years old, his first literary product "Seeing Off" [Huansong] was issued. (146) That was a poem, praising the "new emerging thing" -- namely, "workers, peasants and soldiers's attending universities." Later he published a short story about the Red Guards's movement under the title "Lotus Pond With Astounding Billows" [Heze jinglan], which, according to him, was quite influential at that time. (146) In fact, however, they are not literature, but propaganda -- pictorial diagrams of Maoist thought and the Party's policies. Literature, in his eyes, was then simply a "tool by which he could change his personal unfavourable situation." (146)

In 1977, he passed the entrance examinations, and became an undergraduate student of Beijing University. Reminiscing about his working career, he felt quite nostalgic for it. To him, such a hard experience was still precious, because it provided him with what he was unable to obtain in other circumstances and what was probably indispensable for making him both a man and a writer. But meanwhile, he was anxious to transcend it. He was clearly aware that life at the bottom of the society, however useful to him, inevitably had its vulgar and mean aspects. He wanted to get rid
of these aspects. This was his ambivalence, and it was reflected in many of his early stories, in which while he showed his heartfelt sympathy for miners's ignorance and suffering, he nevertheless tried his best to avoid their vulgarism and used a refined bookish language.

He majored in Chinese literature in Beijing University. Of modern Chinese authors in the May Fourth period, he found himself most fond of Lu Xun, though Lao She was also a favourite writer. Since there is no discernible similarity in style between Lu Xun's works and his short stories, the impact of this great master upon him is easily neglected. It should not come as a surprise that so far few of his readers have known that his graduation thesis is an exclusive exploration of the structure of Lu Xun's short stories collected in Outcry and Wandering. What usually catches our eyes is his humour and his linguistic uniqueness, which makes him a parallel to Lao She to a greater extent. Actually, however, he was attracted more to Lu Xun than to Lao She. In one of the letter he wrote to me he explained (without me soliciting his permission for this quotation):

Thematically, Lao She is confined to the 'examination of society' in most of his novels. In spite of my insistence upon making an "examination of society," I would nevertheless more like to get into an 'examination of soul.' This always reminds me of Lu Xun.
It was in the first semester after he had been admitted to Beijing University that he resumed his creative writing, and within the space of the ensuing two or three academic years he produced and published more than ten short fictional pieces, two of which were the winners of national prizes for literature respectively in 1980 and 1981. As a new cynosure in literary circles, he was then indeed in the limelight. Wang Meng wrote a preface to Bewilderling Firmament — his first collection of short stories, commending him as a writer who had "two kinds of brushes" [liangba shuazi]. It seems that he was incomparable among his peers for his great success, which overshadowed, among others, his outstanding classmate Huang Ziping and paled Huang's literary effort into insignificance, though the latter has now become a well-known critic for his subtle, insightful criticism. It is not hard to imagine how complacent Chen Jiangong was at that time!

However, such good times did not last long, and the years after saw him go downhill. It is true that he still published stories at times, and some of them purposely pandered to popular

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17 Huang Ziping's critiques are usually interpretative, hardly with explicit judgements. So sometimes his articles require a careful reading.

tastes, yet he was no longer able to attract the large readership he used to be able to. This situation remained unaltered until he brought out the brilliant novella "Curlylocks," when he was remembered after a long oblivion. But even "Curlylocks" could not restore him to the glory he had enjoyed in former times. It is surely not that his masterpiece "Curlylocks" is inferior in quality to his early oeuvre. It is simply because the emergence of new writers like Ah Cheng, Liu Suola, Mo Yan, and Can Xue after 1985 rendered it impossible for him to be the sole national figure in the arena of literature.
CHAPTER TWO
THE AURA OF HEROISM

Chen Jiangong is not a prolific writer. A book of some three hundred pages can include all his writings published from 1978 to 1986. However, if his heavy school work in Beijing University is taken into consideration, the quantity of his creative production should not be accounted small: 13 stories in all, which were collected into a book under the title Bewildering Firmament.

Looking backwards, even the author himself is dissatisfied with these stories.\(^{19}\) True, two of them were national prize-winners: "Phoenix Eyes" [Danfengyan] and "The Patterned Scarf That Was Blown Away" [Piaoshi de huatoujin], which, in a degree, can be regarded as samples illustrative of the general level of short fiction in early 1980s. But conferment of prizes, possibly swayed by political as well as historical factors, sometimes can not guarantee the quality of the works honored. Despite being a Nobel Prize laureate

\(^{19}\) Chen Jiangong regards his early stories as "preachment of life." See He Zhiyun, "Chen Jiangong and His Fictional World" [Chen Jiangong he ta de xiaoshuo shijie], Hundreds of Schools [Baijia]: 24.
for Literature in 1938, Pearl Buck was for the most part not superior to other best-seller writers. By the same token, Chen Jiangong's prize-winning stories are not necessarily excellent, even if compared with his other pieces of short fiction. The best tale in *Bewildering Firmament* is perhaps the one that gives the book the title, because it is relatively more refined and less disagreeable than the others. Wang Meng in his generous preface to this young writer's maiden book comments: "Comparatively speaking, 'Bewildering Firmament' is complicated in structure, rich in meaning, and deep in the questions it raises. It is so vigorous that my heart thumped after I finished reading it."²⁰ Probably this was also Chen Jiangong's opinion in regard to its merits. Otherwise his first book might have been differently entitled. Worth analyzing and discussing are also the following stories: "Sweetness" [Tianmi], "Sinuous Rills," "Tears of the Tawny daylily" [Xuancao de yanlie], "The Broken Morning Sunlight" [Beirousui de chenxi], "A Troublemaker in West Beijing" [Jingxi youge saodazi], "After Death" [Gaiguan], and "Phoenix Eyes." (The last three stories will be dealt with in the next chapter due to their different mode of artistic representation.) The weakest of all are the essay-like short pieces under such titles as: "Heartfelt Emotion" [Zhongqu] and "The Symphony in Autumn" [Qiutian jiaoxiangyue]: they are actually no better than compositions by high school students.

"Sweetness," though not as good as Chen Jiangong later expected it to be, is after all his first story. What I mean "first" is not according to the table of contents in Bewildering Firmament, but on the basis of the time when it was written. "Sinuous Rills," to be sure, comes first in order of the list, yet chronologically, "Sweetness" is the earliest. As the critic Chen Depei\(^{21}\) claimed, it is the only one Chen Jiangong issued during the years of 1977 and 1978.\(^{22}\) He was probably right, because the rest of the pieces in the collection did not come into being until 1979.

Of an uncouth worker who is so fortunate as to find favour in the eyes of a good-looking and tender-hearted girl, such a love story simply sounds incredible like a legendary tale from A Thousand and One Nights, especially to the rising generation of 1980s. Although they do fairly match in their parental background -- one's father is the head of a mine, and the other's is a senior engineer in the same unit, the two protagonists are quite unequal in terms of their working condition and social status. While the excavator Yunhu is climbing up from the opening of a pit with a

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\(^{21}\) A conscientious but somewhat juvenile Shanghai critic.

coal basket on his back, his sweaty work clothes being frozen over, Linjuan, as a library employee, can comfortably warm herself in her working place with the burning coal which miners have dug out and provided. Surprisingly, however, Linjuan falls in love with Yunhu -- the rash fellow.

To Linjuan, apparently, Yunhu is not an ordinary miner, but a hero with noble quality. It is in the following situation that she feels affinity for him. It is a heavily snowing night. The cold wind is blowing with snow flakes, icy granules dancing wildly. Carrying a fully-loaded coal basket on his back, Yunhu is plodding toward a distant storehouse, "to make a contribution to the country with his own strength." Now it has grown completely dark, and everybody is gone except him. But he still continues with his work, slogging along the road back and forth for altogether more than 20 li. When he gets out of the coal-tunnel, his damp clothes turn to ice; after he goes back into it with his empty basket, the ice is melted by the warmth of his perspiring body. At length, he feels weak and dizzy, and has to grasp the rail and take a breather, with his eyes closed.

Then, the author draws a pictorial scene for us as follows:

When he opened his eyes, he saw the gate of the library which was located in a near distance set

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ajar. There was no light on in the room because of the power failure, but the blazing fire on the hearth set off a slim silhouette of a girl who was standing in the doorway. It seemed that she had been waiting there for a long time...

"Look, your clothes have become frozen. Why don't you come in to get warm by the fire!" Lin Juan called him, her voice being a little bit hesitant. (194)

This is Lin Juan's condescending rather than Yunhu's brazen-faced wooing. Obviously, the former is profoundly moved by the latter's heroic spirit.

Just as the popular Chinese saying goes that love for a person extends even to the crows on his roof [aiwu jiwu], so Linjuan is well disposed later on even towards Yunhu's malodorous sweat and sooty appearance. "In the impression of her fellow work-mates, she [Linjuan] had not been soiled by a single speck of dust. How unimaginable now it was that she loved the cindery smudges on his face and reeking perspiration over his body! This, nevertheless, was the fact. It would not escape any persons who kept their eyes open that Linjuan proudly walked abreast with Yunhu who had soot all over him. She was actually so close to him that he was even able to smell light perfume of her hair and hear her softly humming her favourite lyrical song: 'My heart is full of happiness, as spring is full of beautiful scenery...' When Yunhu warned her not to blacken her white dress shirt, she would pout her lips, saying
lightly but wilfully: 'I like to!'" (192)

It seems that the author never minded at all whether there is such a pretty girl who is willing to besmear her white blouse. The only thing he cared about is how to highlight Yunhu's brilliant image through the assistance of this female companion. It is true, of course, that no hero in the story strikes us with awe more than Yunhu's father Cui Guangzhi does. Director of the mine, Cui Guangzhi falls in a faint on the road one day when he is loaded with a coal-basket. Yunhu carries him home. As soon as the father comes around and sees his son making a fire, he jumps off the bed. Turning the coal-pan upsidedown, he roars: "You won't be cold to death, Team Leader! You still owe 13 tons of coal to the country, and you know what you ought to be doing right now!" (194) Such selfless words, though not so superhuman as to be completely incredible, are rarely heard among commonplace human beings. It instantly demonstrates a formulized heroism of this communist cadre and raises him to the height of something like a figure of heroic tragedy. But he is not a major personage in the story. As an old proverb says: where there is a heroic father, there is a heroic son, so the purpose of portraying the father's greatness is none other than to foreshadow the exceptionalness of his child: who, like a pupil surpassing the master, is to overtake his parent eventually.

Talking about Chen Jiangong's short fiction, a Shanghai critic deliberately excludes "Sweetness" from discussion, because, in his opinion, "this story reflects the author's weakness in
literary viewpoint," which results in "his negligence of speculation and exploration of the fate of different people and of inexplicable things in human life." I am not quite certain if the "weakness in literary viewpoint" refers to Chen Jiangong's inclination to mould heroes. That being the case, it is unquestionable that there are heroes in almost every short story he wrote in his initial period. As a corollary, therefore, almost every short story is possibly marred by "his negligence of speculation and exploration of the fate of different people and of inexplicable things in human life." This is, in fact, an extensive and typical phenomenon. Why should only "Sweetness" be particularly rejected?

A cursory reading of Bewildering Firmament will lead the reader to perceive that there seems to be more or less an aura of heroism about the major figure in each story. The word "hero," which has basically two meanings in English, refers to either a protagonist in fiction and drama, or a person with heroic character. In the context of this thesis, however, the use of this word is exclusively confined to the latter denotation. Vanity Fair, an interesting realistic masterpiece by William Thackeray, has a sub-title: "A Novel Without a Hero." The word "hero" in this case, I believe, is probably a pun, which covers both the meanings I have just mentioned. One may strain his explanation that there is not

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24 Chen Depei, "The Exploration of Life," The World of Novelists: 144.
such a protagonist running through the whole story from the beginning to the end in *Vanity Fair* as in picaresque fiction, or one may interpret reasonably that no character in this writer's novel is able to be ranked as a "hero." Indeed, according to Thackeray's standard, we hardly see any heroes in Western literature since the Renaissance. From King Lear in Shakespeare's play to Julien Sorel in *The Red and Black* and the mutilated captain Ahab in *Moby Dick*, who is a hero in true sense? But the characters created by Chen Jiangong are really different. They are so like the positive personages in both the Russian literature after the October Revolution and the modern Chinese literature during the Maoist era that it should not be shameful for them to claim titles of hero. People like Zhong qi (in "Sinuous Rills"), Gu Zhida (in "Bewildered Firmament") and Qing Jiang (in "The Patterned Scarf That Was Blown Away"), owing to their distinct heroic characterization, will certainly not be overlooked. But can we refuse to admit that the seemingly flawed protagonists, such as Lu Jian and Li Lu (in "The Broken Morning Sunlight" and "Tears of the Tawny Daylily" respectively), are not heroes only because of their excessive complaints and pessimistic dismay?

"The Broken Morning Sunlight" is a psychological story, describing the innermost thoughts of Lu Jian when he goes to attend the celebration of the thirtieth anniversary of his Alma Mater. By using the term "psychological story," I mean to make a distinction from the fiction of stream-of-consciousness in Western literature. It is undeniable that Chen Jiangong does make use of interior
monologue, a different technique that is uncharacteristic of the bulk of his short fiction, to depict an unlucky personage who suffers the way the author probably did himself. But this does not render the story into a typical work of stream-of-consciousness in the Western mode. The technique of stream-of-consciousness in "The Broken Morning Sunlight" differentiates itself, for instance, from that employed by James Joyce in Ulysses. We might as well cite a paragraph in Chapter 6 in that novel, in which Bloom is in the process of going to the cemetery, so that an analogous comparison can be made with Lu Jian who is on his way to Hong Guang Middle School:

Mr Bloom entered and sat in the vacant place. He pulled the door after him and slammed it twice till it shut tight. He passed an arm through the armstrap and looked seriously from the open carriagewindow at the lowered blinds of the avenue. One dragged aside: an old woman peeping. Nose white flattened against the pane. Thanking her stars she was passed over. Extraordinary the interest they take in a corpse. Glad to see us go we give them such trouble coming. Job seems to suit them. Huggermugger in corners. Slop about in slipperslappers for fear he'd wake. Then getting it ready. Laying it out. Molly and Mrs Fleming making the bed. Pull it more to your side. Our windingsheet. Never know who will touch you dead. Wash and shampoo. I believe they clip the nails
and the hair. Keep a bit in an envelope. Grows all the same after. Unclean job.\textsuperscript{25}

In this paragraph, the behavioral and psychological activities of Bloom are both presented in such a way that they are organically interwoven with each other without authorial explanation. By contrast, the protagonist's action in "The Broken Morning Sunlight," almost inundated by his obsession with the past, can only be reproduced in his remembrance. Thus, the stream-of-consciousness Chen Jiangong deliberately avails himself of in the story does not have an effect of psychological verisimilitude as James Joyce creates in \textit{Ulysses}.

On the other hand, however, the lyricism of stream-of-consciousness makes "The Broken Morning Sunlight" similar to some extent with Virginia Woolf's \textit{Mrs Dalloway}. As soon as we open the novel, the passage as follows will immediately unfold itself before our eyes:

\begin{quote}
What a lark! What a plunge! For so it had always seemed to her, when, with a little squeak of the hinges, which she could hear now, she had burst open the French windows and plunged at stiller than this of course, the air was in the early morning; like the flap of a wave; the kiss of a wave; chill and sharp and yet (for a girl
\end{quote}

of eighteen as she then was) solemn, feeling as she did, standing there at the open window, that something awful was about to happen; looking at the flowers at the trees with the smoke winding off them and the rooks rising, falling; standing and looking until Peter Walsh said, "Musing among the vegetables?" was that it? "I prefer men to cauliflowers," was that it?\(^{26}\)

Let us now compare it with the second paragraph in "The Broken Morning Sunlight," to bring to light more clearly their likeness in emotional expression:

It was mottled, the road: the morning sunlight, having been ripped up by dense large leaves resembling many a darkly green claw and thrown down on to the ground, was broken. Numerous spots made of the light were jumping before my eyes. What was unfolded in the front looked like a river, fully filled with drifting duckweed, and with thousands of floating shreds of a broken mirror... How ridiculous man is, sometimes. Pursuit, disillusion; aspiration, frustration... but he will still wish to see a shining morning sunlight that is intact, to let it console his wounded mind. What did he get as

a result? These glittering fragmented pieces. They were
prickling his eyes and lacerating his nerves! How I wish
I could make my wheelchair run over these lighted spots
thousands of times, and crush them into powder!... 27

Nevertheless, their difference is still evident. We notice
that Mrs. Woolf uses in her whole novel, not merely in the
foregoing excerpt, such phrases as "it had always seemed to her," 28
"then, thought Clarissa Dalloway," 29 "she thought," 30 to strictly
distinguish real scenes from description of the flowing of
consciousness. 31 But there are no such analogous equivalents in
Chen Jiangong's "The Broken Morning Sunlight." So the author's
asides sometimes can not be easily distinguished from the soliloquy
of the first person narrator when the context is
ambiguous.

Lu Jian, in fact, is very happy at the outset when he goes to
Hong Guang Middle School for participation of its celebration.


28 Mrs. Dalloway: 3 and passim.

29 Ibid., 3 and passim.

30 Ibid., 11 and passim.

31 For a discussion of the techniques Mrs. Woolf used in Mrs.
"Early in the morning I [Lu Jian] drove fast in my small wheelchair on a quiet road, together with her who was peddling her old bike. Not having yet made its appearance, the sun at daybreak still concealed itself behind mountains. How peaceful, how congenial, was my mind at that time. And how did I wish to sing a song, accompanied by the twittering of birds on twigs, to greet the advent of the morning."  

But unfortunately he meets Zhen Zinang at the ceremony. A former classmate of Lu Jian and also his rival in love for a time, Zhen Zinang is a well-dressed handsome young man, who, by virtue of the power of his father, first returns from the countryside to Beijing, then is sent to work in Moscow. Now it is said that he will soon get a red coloured passport for a diplomat in replacement of his former blue one, and go to Hong Kong for a new post. Zhen's success in his career not only belittles Lu Jian's endeavour, but makes him lose his mental balance. Eventually, Lu Jian quits and goes back home before the ceremony is over.  

In the story, Lu Jian does appear like a person who is no better than a mentally unbalanced grumbler. However, if we do not wish to follow W.K. Wimsatt or M.C. Beardsley to sever the tie that links the author and the work he produces on the excuse of "intentional fallacy," we shall certainly see that the author's   


33 "Intentional fallacy," first put forward by Wimsatt and Beardsley in 1946, means to judge an artistic work in accordance
original purpose is quite beyond the mere representation of his persona's unhappiness. In fact, what he really wishes to display is Lu Jian's rectitude in personality instead of his disgruntlement with social injustice. Lu Jian's morbid jealousy, even if it is a flaw, is in the author's eye undoubtedly excusable because of his disability. Following the reminiscence of his own, one knows that this poor young man is not congenitally handicapped. His physical impairment does not befall him until after he breaks his backbone in "Dazhai field" by working too strenuously. This accident itself should not be insufficient to illustrate his distinct heroism. However, what is more amazing of him is his refusal later on to live off the stipend which will be provided by the government after he is back in Beijing, and his insistence upon making his own livelihood by painting colourful eggs. From then on, he paints them every day, paints so hard that his neck hurts and shoulders ache. It is purely for the purpose of "fulfilling his duty to the country," not that of earning more money. He says to Yu Xin, his girl friend:

with the author's intention is misleading.

34 Dazhai, a very poor area in Shanxi Province, was an agricultural "model" in the Maoist era. Here in this context, "Dazhai" is used as an adjective, meaning "exemplary."
We are not a bit shameful, are we? Isn't it true that we, especially you, do as well as we can in our responsibility?\textsuperscript{35}

Such is his dutiful loyalty to the state. It seems to him that he should deserve social respect. But what he gets in his Alma Mater is actually a contemptuous glance from his former teacher who used to indoctrinate him to contribute to society. His exasperation, therefore, is not sheerly out of an abnormal mentality. At any rate, it is the author's aim that we should realize that Lu Jian's undue grievance, like Zhong Qi's depression for a time in "Sinuous Rills," is at most a slight blemish if contrasted with his virtue -- the devotion in his responsibility to the country.

Li Lu, a female major character in "Tears of the Tawny Daylily," seems to have an as ill-omened fate as her counterpart Lu Jian does. While Lu Jian has his bad luck of breaking his backbone in the Cultural Revolution, as we have seen before, Li Lu is also unable to avert an inevitable trauma in spirit. One being physically handicapped, and the other being mentally wounded, both of them thus fall into the same category of the unfortunate.

\textsuperscript{35} "The Broken Morning Sunlight," Bewildering Firmament: 61.
According to the recounting in the story, Li Lu's family background is "really terrible." Her father, "having done a crime to people before the liberation," flees to a foreign country in 1948, leaving her mother behind. The deserted woman then sees no way out but to kill herself by swallowing a piece of gold. Li Lu, originally so smart and lively, so fond of literature and good at painting and singing, is doomed to suffer for her familial "ignominy." In the Cultural Revolution she is eventually accused of attacking the Party, only because of her vocal performance in Children's Palace for the then Premier Zhou Enlai. Under the political pressure she feels depressed and inferior, and her mind becomes gradually withered. When her would-be boy friend Ding Qi first meets her in the yurt, she just entertains him with a cup of tea. She then retreats into a corner without a single word, looking as if she does not care a bit whom she is receiving and where the received person is from. Even after Ding Qi articulates his love for her, she still can not thoroughly trust him: "Will happiness come to me so easily?" (167) she doubts. She has been really hurt too much and her wounded mind is no longer able to lead her to the pleasure of life. Having learned that Ding Qi's mother intends to stop them from being married, she at length commits suicide. This is a sad story of a poor girl who is politically and socially victimized.

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36 Chen Jiangong, "Tears of the Tawny Daylily," Bewildering Firmament: 156. Further references in parentheses in the text.
In his preface to Chen Jiangong’s *Bewildering Firmament*, Wang Meng makes the following remarks on "Tears of Tawny Daylily:"

"Mildly emotional and succinctly fluent, this story is very easy to read, as though 'it fed our eyes with ice cream.' After reading it, however, I felt that I had not been deeply struck by the tragedy of a girl who has a 'bad' family background. The dramatic scenes, especially the one in which the mother defended her innocence, are shallow though a little bit touching. It was my impression then that this story, just like Li Lu -- the name of its female protagonist that means dew at daybreak, is clear, fresh, but is not valuable, nor will it leave deep traces on readers’s mind."  

Wang Meng’s criticism is no doubt acute. But it is at the same time tinged by his very individualized humour. Li Lu, the name standing for dew at daybreak in Chinese, is surely not a metaphor for her shallowness and worthlessness, as Wang Meng jokingly points out. On the contrary, it is her meritorious purity and innocence that Chen Jiangong wishes to signify by giving such a meaningful name to this heroine. This will be clear if one pays attention to the ending paragraph, in particular the last sentence, in the story: "At daybreak, I was walking on the boundless stretch of the prairie, holding the daylily Li Lu left for me. In the morning sunlight, there glittered numerous dew drops which were crystal clear." (176) We might as well quote another eulogistic description for a further illustration:

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What she had been doing was so amazing, as if she could have shouldered the heavy burden of life with her frail body. During the days of ice and snow, she turned out to be the only girl in the well-digging team in the commune. She went along with the train of horses in the whistling of the north wind, travelling through frozen rivers and waste land, the back of her hands chapped by the cold, and icicles hanging from her fur hat... How unmatched it was with her nice-looking complexion! But she was willing to work in this way. She required nothing, and was even able to put up with the humiliation people usually couldn't. Year in and year out, young educated people there either returned to Beijing, or found another way out. Only did she still remain there. She was always saying: "Let other people go first. I ought to be here." Once she was recommended by the herdsmen for entering a university, but was finally turned down by the leaders of the commune. The party secretary summoned her for a talk, and she said: "I should let other people go to the university first. I will not complain about that. Workers and peasants had been unable to enter universities in the past, and now their children should certainly have the priority."... (160)
Sometimes, we feel, she resigns herself too much to
injustice. The author seems to be incapable of presenting her
goodness in a substantial way without resorting to her meek
submission to adversity. Whenever she is maltreated, she will
condole herself saying: "In this unprecedented movement, this is
an understandable measure, though a little bit excessive." (163)
"Maybe the position of workers, peasants, and soldiers really need
to be consolidated by a revolution. Before the Cultural Revolution,
the Party was indeed too benevolent to people like me. It is right
to be hard on us in order that China may not change the colour." (160) In some readers's eyes, this type of forgivingness hardly
differs from Ah Q's spiritual paralysis. However, one must realize
that it is praised in the story as moral excellence. The most
incredible scene in it, of course, is its climax, in which Li Lu,
upon learning that Ding Qi's mother is coming to dissuade her son
from marrying her, chooses to die without making a slightest effort
in order to change her situation. I have no intention here to get
into such a discussion as to whether this denouement is too
melodramatic. What I like to make clear is simply that Li Lu's
committing suicide is by no means out of her apprehension or
cowardice. She dies just for the love of Ding Qi, or in another
words, she sacrifices herself for the other person. So her outward
impotence actually makes an apt revelation of her inward
virtuousness. Let us note what she says to Ding Qi:

"You don't know what I will possibly bring to you
... You are a Party member, you have your own future...
It has really been not easy for me." (169)

The following utterance makes her selflessness much more explicit:

Ding Qi, don't talk any more please. I love you! I would rather die as long as it is good for you!. (169)

Moreover, the author does not let Li Lu die in a usual way. He deliberately makes such an arrangement in the end that Li Lu can kill herself while rescuing a train from Beijing which carries Ding Qi's mother. To make her end her life for the benefit of thousands of people rather than only for the love of her boyfriend, Chen Jiangong certainly goes a step further to intensify the heroism of his protagonist.

With "Tears of the Tawny Daylily" as a start, the critic He Zhiyun\(^{38}\) said, Chen Jiangong manifested unexceptionally in every piece of his creative works a "directional criticism," that is, his "denunciation and castigation" of the ultra-leftist line. According to him, the suffering of ordinary young people, as what Li Lu has undergone in the Cultural Revolution, "is in fact more

\(^{38}\) He Zhiyun, director of the editorial department of China Youth magazine, is probably the most authoritative critic in study of Chen Jiangong's fiction.
than spear-like protest against, and vehement censure of, the social inhumanity in the ten-year catastrophe."  

But -- I am afraid that I have to make a clarification here -- whatever characterizations are applied to Chen Jiangong's early short stories, "denunciation and castigation," or "spearlike protest and vehement censure," one has no reasons to take his fictional characters as "social protesters." At this point Chen Jiangong is distinctly different from the American writer Upton Sinclair. Sinclair's *The Jungle* is also a social protest work, but its major figure Jurgis Rudkus, who is unable to bear the daily grind of life and social persecution, rises eventually in revolt against capitalist institutions and takes the socialist revolutionary road. The characters depicted by Chen Jiangong, however, are not rebellious people of such a kind. Contrarily, they are models of official morality, outstanding representatives of paradigmatic behaviour, and prim gentlemen who make possible the survival of the society. In short, they are "revolutionary heroes."

The "revolutionary hero" is the term used by Victor Brombert to classify different types of the people with heroic quality. This concept chiefly refers to the person who has the willingness and ability to submit himself to a larger scheme and to associate himself with the destiny of a group. In another words, he can make an epic sacrifice of self to a social or political ideal, or for

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the good of most of the people." Therefore the "revolutionary hero" in Brombert's terms, if I have not misunderstood him, is also equal to what R.W. Mathewson calls the "positive hero" in Russian literature. Of course, the notion of hero is very complicated. Although it basically expresses the idea of the deification of human being, yet no unanimous opinion has so far been drawn on it. There are epic heroes, Christian heroes, romantic heroes, modern anti-heroes, and so on. They are so different, so far as their historical circumstances and personal idiosyncrasies are concerned, that Raymond Giraud refuses to give "hero" a conclusive definition. He says: "Everyman is entitled to his own conception as to what a hero should be." In this thesis I am not going to deal with the issue of hero; even if I like to, I shall not be up to it. My purpose of using Brombert's concept of "revolutionary hero" is no more than that of revealing more clearly what kind of heroic characterization Chen Jiangong makes in his short stories.


In "My Honest Confession," Chen Jiangong admits: "Since I wrote 'Sinuous Rills,' I have always been pursuing an ideal -- God knows how successful I am in my effort. Anyway, I have been working towards this goal: to be sincere and to face up to reality by transcending the ego which is wrapped by the shell of personal gains and losses; to write regardless of popular tastes and to show my unique meditation and exploration of life; and to bring into view the strength of a lofty personality that is characterized by its love for both people and country. Have I ever achieved a bit what I wish to in my pursuit? Is there any story in which I expose my ignorant shallowness and insincere one-sidedness? Or low taste in aesthetic appreciation and insufficiency of greatness in individuality? I would ask myself these questions whenever I take up my pen and finish up with my writing. I am so cautious as though I were, like what ancient people said, 'treading over the thin ice' with fear.'\(^{43}\)

This confession not only makes known what is Chen Jiangong's motives for story writing, but more importantly, summarizes the major features of the heroes in his fiction. Lu Jian is undoubtedly not Li Lu, and Zhong Qi is quite different from Gu Zhida, or vice versa. However, all these characters have heroic temperament in common. Just as Chen Jiangong says, they can all "transcend the ego which is wrapped by the shell of personal gains and losses" and "bring into view the strength of lofty personality that is

\(^{43}\) "My Honest Confession", Literature and I: 148.
characteristic of its love for both the people and country." (I cannot pay a tribute as to whether he has shown his "unique meditation and exploration of life" in what he wrote in his first book.) To be simpler and clearer, we can sum it up just in one sentence: all Chen Jiangong's heroes are communists who never give a thought to personal success and failure. "Being communists" and "giving no thought to personal success and failure," these are the two most distinctive characteristics of the positive personages in his early creative writings.

What I call "communists" does not refer to Party membership. Whether they are Party members we do not know for sure, because the author does not make particular explanations on that in most of the cases. They might be Party members and might be not. This actually does not matter much. Being Party members and being so-called communists are after all two entirely different things. Nowadays there is no lack of such Party members in China who have already been converted from communism to Western democracy, or whose communist creed is in crisis. So they are no longer communists in real sense. Nevertheless, the heroes in Chen Jiangong's short fiction are truly communists, pure and simple, no matter whether they are Party members or non-Party members. The reason I consider them to be entitled to this appellation is chiefly because they embody an outlook on life and firmness in belief that the communists feature in their propaganda in the Maoist era.

Zhong Qi in "Sinuous Rills" is a prime example. Not long after
the story begins he appears in front of us as a communist fanatic. "He [Zhong Qi] had practically been 'spoiled,' he said, working as a miner in Yanlin Mine. Sixty dollars a month he earned, and he didn't even know how to spend them. Moreover the dashing spirit he had had as he was a Red Guard was now on the verge of being dissipated, when he just mechanically worked eight hours a day in addition to having three meals and one night of sleep. He then decided not to work any more and to go to look for his former classmates who had settled in the countryside in Shanxi Province. He told me [Dandan] that the students there, all in one production team, had established a Red Guards's Commune. How wonderful! They were practising communism! Everything would be put together and owned by all: their workpoints, their grain ration, and even the candy which was mailed to them by their mothers... He said that the Cultural Revolution had shortened in an instant our progress to the communist society for at least several scores of years, or probably even more than a hundred years. The Red Guards's Commune, which would not have come into being but for this great revolution, was an encouraging sprout. It was no comparison, he said, with the utopian socialism imagined by Saint Simon and Fourier because it had Mao Zedong thought as its spiritual food."**44**

The Red Guards' Commune, as it is, turns out to be more impractical than Saint Simon and Fourier's fantasized socialist

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**44** "Sinuous Rill," **Bewildering Firmament**: 3-4. Further references in parentheses in the text.
society. It is no wonder that it ends up in failure. But Zhong Qi does not therefore lose his stubborn belief in communism. After he returns to the mine, he starts at once his research program on underground coal gasification, despite being reproached and even punished by the leaders of the mine. It is true that there is no necessary connection between underground coal gasification and communism. Communism may have its underground coal gasification, yet it is also applicable in the capitalist society. Ridiculously, however, underground coal gasification is taken by Zhong Qi solely as the part of the communist cause. "Lenin has already said on certain page in certain volume of his works that underground coal gasification will be the second liberation of workers," (6) he explains to Dan Dan, his girlfriend, with Lenin's words as his corroboration.

However, what is ironic is that Zhong Qi, the man who has been whole-heartedly engaged in his work for communism, should be regarded as a class enemy by communist leaders of the mine. They allege that the old engineer who cooperates with Zhong Qi in this program used to be a "rightist," and it is obvious that Zhong Qi gets roped in by this "bad man" and wants to take the technical road that deviates from politics. Thus, it is not without reason for these communist leaders to single him out as a living target for public denunciation when the class struggle movement is underway in the mine.

Yet Zhong Qi is really admirable: he does not take these cadres seriously, nor does he ever wish to vindicate himself. In
fact, he forgives them in an exceptionally magnanimous manner that is virtually saintlike. After he is released from the "class struggle study class," he explains to Dandan: "The leaders of our mine are by no means bad guys; they just want to follow the trend. It is impossible for them to carry out the class struggle without a living target. To be a leading cadre in basic production unit is now indeed not easy. They have to seize upon something like this and make an issue of it." (9) In Zhong Qi's mind, evidently, what those leaders have done in order to "follow the trend" has nothing to do with communism. "True communism" is still the doctrine to which he firmly sticks:

"I didn't compromise at all on the issues of principle. I have already lodged a protest to the 'Xiucai' [a ghost writer for the leaders of the mine], saying that although I didn't care much if you put me in your black name list for the purpose of enriching your material, you were not allowed to do anything harmful to the program of underground coal gasification. It is quite groundless to say, you know, that the program is merely a fantastic idea. If you don't believe me, then you can look up in The Complete Works of Lenin and make an investigation of the examples of experiments in foreign countries. They surely won't cheat you..." (9)

What Zhong Qi considers to be the "issues of principle" is
actually something related to the cause of "communism." To him the self was unimportant and can be even sacrificed, but there is no way to make him abandon his communist belief. Even when he is finally depressed, as the result of having been persecuted consecutively and foiled everywhere in the hostile environment in the mine, he does not completely give up hope. He is still waiting, with the expectation that some day he will be able to continue to contribute himself to the communist cause. "What can I be doing now but waiting? Like everybody else, I, too, get more than ten dollars as my bonus every month. But nothing can be done except waiting." (26)

People like Zhong Qi who are so obstinate in their adherence to the communist creed are not rare in Bewildering Firmament. Discussing "Tears of the Tawny Daylily," I mainly focused my analysis on the character of Li Lu with few references to her boyfriend Ding Qi. As the male protagonist, Ding Qi is actually a far more thorough communist. He does not forget to teach Li Lu with communist ideology even at the time when he is in the ecstasy of making love with her. "What was shameful was not one's low-ranking position, but the sense of inferiority in one's consciousness. I told her this for her edification, and explained that it was not only the point of view held by Marx and Lenin, but by Mao Zedong as well." As the story is drawing to its end, there is a very emotional passage of Ding Qi's interior monologue, which bears out

"Tears of the Tawny Daylily," Bewildering Firmament: 163.
how inveterate he is in his communist convictions:

Lu Xun was insightful, saying: revolution is not to make people die, but to make them live. What thing is to blame for ruining our dynamic life so much? Revolution is great, bringing to thousands of people confidence, pride and courage. What thing is to blame for distorting it so much? Life is not supposed to be like that! Revolution is not supposed to be like that! Life should let everybody bring into full play his capacity and wisdom; revolution should allow each single believer to contribute himself to it proudly and without the slightest reservation.46

This soliloquy is made after Li Lu is forced to die by so-called revolution. Ding Qi might probably be dissatisfied with the revolution because of the loss of his beloved girl-friend, if he acted in a usual way. But he does not, matter-of-factly. Although he is filled with indignation, his bitter feeling is directed against the "distorted" revolution rather than revolution per se. It goes without saying that he is still a pious disciple of what he holds to be the "true revolution," believing it to be "great," "bring to thousands of people confidence, pride, and courage," and "allow each single believer to contribute himself to it proudly and

46 Ibid., 170.
without the slightest reservation." What Ding Qi calls "revolution," to make it clear, is actually a euphemistic expression of communism.

The communist belief of heroes in Chen Jiangong's fiction is their propensity to understand the philosophy about life and conception of morality which the Party has been advocating. This belief is realized in action when the author is attempting to show how his characters "transcend their selfish egos" and "give no thought to their personal success and failure." In Chen Jiangong's stories, "belief" and "action" are so interwoven with each other that it is hard to distinguish one from the other. "Belief" is embodied in "action" and "action" carries out "belief." That I disconnected them heretofore with emphasis largely on the exploration of what those heroes believe in is only for the sake of convenience of analysis and interpretation. Now I should turn to deal with their "action."

According to Wang Meng, the story "Bewildering Firmament" is quite readable, "as if it fed readers' eyes with ice cream." It is realistic to be sure, but owing to its fluent style, elaborate structure, and legendary characters, it reads like a romantic tale. What is even more worth noticing is the author's purposeful use of symbolic technique, though symbolism is rarely applied in his writings. One has to admit that the way Chen Jiangong handles this technique is very unusual. The symbol in his story turns out to be none other than another fictional work which is, too, metaphoric, — that is Hemingway's The Old Man and the Sea. As Huiwen's
favourite book, this famous novella comes into Chen Jiangong's story quite naturally when this good-natured female character wants her husband to recite something to her to kill time every night. In "Bewildering Firmament," *The Old Man and the Sea* is read twice with shocking modifications. The first time it is being given a recitation, there appears such a long passage of the seemingly original text as follows:

The old Cuban fisherman Santiago had gone fishing on the sea for eighty four days without taking a fish. He was definitely *salao*, having had ill fated eighty-four days!... But on the eighty-fifth day he was again out fishing in his skiff, full of confidence. After two days and one night of formidable fighting, he finally caught a big fish. On his voyage back home, sharks turned up, one at the beginning, then followed by two, and then followed by another one... They hit the big fish that was fastened to the skiff, ripping its meat with their sharp teeth. The old man, single and fatigue, combated against sharks around the boat, with a harpoon held in his hands. The harpoon was grabbed away. Then he tied a knife onto the oar, and the knife blade was snapped by them, too. However, he still had the two oars and the short club and the tiller... At last he killed the sharks... It became dark, and the sea was rough with the increasing breeze. The old man, thirsty, hungry, and wounded, thought while
floating on this cold sea: what if sharks hit me again? What can a man do against them in the darkness without a weapon? I hope I do not have to fight again, he thought. I hope so much I do not have to fight again.  

The second much too altered excerpt of The Old Man and the Sea is quoted at the end of the story:

By midnight the old man fought with the sharks once more, and this time he knew the fight was useless. They came in a pack, tearing off the pieces of meat one after the other... The old man clubbed desperately at what he could only feel and hear, and he felt something seize the club and it was gone. He jerked the tiller free from the rudder and beat and chopped with it, holding it in both hands and driving it down again and again... Eventually, most of the sharks that came had been killed and driven away, except for the last one...

The skiff was back in the harbour. The old man was shouldering the mast when he fell at the top of the bank. He couldn’t get up -- he was too exhausted. What happened to that big fish he dragged back? Ah, it’s really miserable. Only the backbone was left. (142)

47 "Bewildering Firmament," Bewildering Firmament: 117. Further references in parentheses in the text.
The preceding citations virtually make up the synopsis of the whole story of *The Old Man and the Sea*. People who try to find these two non-existent passages in Hemingway’s short novel will surely search in vain. They are not quotations, evidently; they are Chen Jiangong’s wistful adaptation, which serves only for a metaphoric purpose. An English reader probably knows that in his novel Hemingway aimed at the revelation of man’s unswerving pursuit of belief by depicting the fishing process of a tough old man. To Santiago, his “belief” is to catch fish. Although the big fish he drags back has had nothing left but backbone, Santiago is undoubtedly a winner in terms of the fulfilment of what he tries to achieve. The two deliberately adapted excerpts seem to give a full, though concise, allegoric description of his endeavour and hence acquire an association that there exists a similarity between Santiago and Gu Zhida, the hero of “Bewildering Firmament.” Chen Jiangong, for fear that Hemingway’s symbolism may be too obscure for Chinese readership, adds unnecessarily his own comment right after the second remoulded “quotation:”

48 Marcus Cunliff says: "The Cuban’s fight with a great fish is in a way an illustration of the Hemingway code, but in this purest form." "In *The Old Man* he managed to tell a story of a man on his own that is a parable of all humanity." See his *The Literature of the United States*, London: Penguin Books, 1970: 266.
"He," of course, is a pun, referring to Santiago on one hand, and on the other hand, including Gu Zhida, too.

The characters in the foreground in this story are Professor Chen Hao and his daughter Weiwei. They are, however, ordinary people, lacking the quality that is resplendent with heroism. The persons who are really heroic are the professor's first wife Huiwen and Weiwei's boy-friend Gu Zhida, though they appear only occasionally. Since Huiwen is sketchily described in plain language, her characterization acquires in consequence a purified simplicity and transparent clearness, which make her altruism far more straightforward than that of her counterparts.

She is born and brought up in a senator's family. Influenced by Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and Ba Jin's *The Family* which she has read, she runs away from home. She becomes a nurse then, leading an independent life of her own. Of course, impetuosity like this is not rare among young people. Yet it usually ends up in failure. To our surprise, however, Huiwen -- the daughter of a noble family is by no means impetuous as to choose to abandon her family and work in hospital: her fervour is enduring. What is more surprising is that she even falls in love with Chen Hao, the young man who does odd jobs in the hospital at that time. (Unlike Weiwei whose marriage-intended association with Gu Zhida is always the major concern of her father, Huiwen's love with Chen Hao is never
interfered with by her parents. Judging from this thing only, Huiwen's father seems to be really an enlightened Member of Parliament.) She encourages him to take courses in the evening school and subsidizes him with tuition fees. She then urges him to apply to be a regular student in the department of astronomy. In order to let him be wholly absorbed in his studies, she supports his parents with her meagre income without their knowledge. After four years of hard-working Chen Hao graduates. Now it is time that he find a job and take familial responsibility. But Huiwen persuades him, instead, to go abroad to further his study, -- "to open up a brighter career." (115) She says that she can earn her livelihood by darning brocade, laundering clothes, and washing dishes, and in the meantime help out his mother. When Chen Hao returns home with Ph.D. degree, he sees at the first sight that the years of her selfless sacrifice have already left its mark on her:

Huiwen met him in Qianmen Station, dressed in a worn blue slit skirt. Her chubby cheeks had now grown pale and sunken. Moreover, the gold necklace was gone, and so was the gold watch she used to wear -- they had already been sold when money was needed to arrange the funerals for Chen Hao's parents. What she got from the life was several chronic diseases and a pair of red, coarse, and swollen hands... (115)

The ten years of her precious youth thus elapses in her
sacrifice for Chen Hao. "Not only did she sacrifice a decade, but a comfortable life, and a young girl's dream of becoming a writer as well." These things only are sufficient to display her commendable unselfishness. But the author seems to be more ambitious. When Huiwen goes from bad to worse in health and finally has to take rest at home for recuperation, a further description is made of her altruistic consideration for her husband:

Now it was time that he show his love for Huiwen in return. But Huiwen said: "you have your own things to do, and it's not necessary for you to accompany me all the time!" She told him that she only needed him to read either novels or poems for one hour every day after supper, and the rest of time she could take care of herself. And then she asked: "Is this demand too much for you?" (116)

Compared with Huiwen, unquestionably, Gu Zhida is more exemplary in this respect. While Huiwen's altruism, if we intend to find fault with it, is somewhat blemished by the factor of her love, there is no such problems at all with Gu Zhida. A young man of great attainments via means of self-study, he reads whatever books he can reach, no matter whether they are modern or ancient, and in Chinese or in foreign languages. Nevertheless, his diligent study has nothing to do with academic honour, nor does he have desire to establish his reputation as an eminent scholar. With
Chinese old type men of letters, the ultimate aim is to leave their fame for hundreds of generations. This however, is totally unrelated to Gu Zhida. It is a blunder to assume that he wishes to be a great man in literary field in his days. "Only fools believed that they would become giants." (128)

What is even more surprising is that he regards both entrance to graduate schools and publication of articles to be the ways people fish for their reputation and profits. He would rather remain obscure in the factory as a worker and put away a number of the theses he has already completed, when his peers -- some of them are much inferior to him in scholarship -- become graduate students one after the other, and mediocre critics are vying to publish their articles on the theory of literature which is then again open to public discussion. Regrettably, his detachment from practical consideration is not appreciated even by his romantic idealistic girl friends (one of them is Weiwei), not to mention worldly wise common people. They leave him in succession at the end. Nevertheless, he does not care at all and continues to try to do what he likes to, because he has his own conviction in mind: "seeking not honours and positions, but truth only." (129)

Reading of heroes in great literary works, one will feel elevated. With Gu Zhida, however, one does not have such an aesthetic experience. Despite his seeming difference from ordinary mortals, he strikes us as shallow and impractical. The
"uncompassionate" critic Zeng Zhennan remarks bluntly: "Gu Zhida is too obstinate, too gloomy about the cause he is undertaking," because he does not know for sure whether the truth he has acquired will be understood by masses. According to Zeng, famous scholars in former times who have indeed truth in their possession -- say, Sima Qian for example -- will not pose as if they are sombre, unconcerned, and misanthropic. Although they might be "uninterested in their secular gains and posthumous name," they will "surely not ignore the utilitarian significance of their learning after it has been obtained by ordinary human beings." "They were enthusiastic in disseminating knowledge and eager to be engaged in mundane affairs." He comes to the conclusion then that Gu Zhida's "aloofness from worldly pursuits" is "virtually a contempt of the masses" in contrast to great men in history, and his "indulgence in self-admiration...is certainly no good to society and his own career which is yet to be developed." 

Whether famous scholars in former times "are enthusiastic in

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50 A professional critic at the Literary Research Institute of China Academy of Social Sciences.

51 Zeng Zhennan, "Let the Star shed its light into the Multitude of people" [Rang xingguang huiru guangmao de renhai], Soil and Thorn: 46-47.
disseminating knowledge and eager to be engaged in mundane affairs," I am not clear, nor can I assert with assurance that "Gu Zhida's indulgence in self-admiration is no good to both society and his own career." I admit I find Zeng Zhennan's moral judgement of "Bewildering Firmament" rather disturbing. On the other hand, however, he is perhaps right: Gu Zhida is not a mature hero.

Probably a radical at that time, the author himself seems a male chauvinist in his outlook on love. He longs for such an ideal sexual union, in which man wholly devotes himself to his work, while woman trusts, supports, and submits herself to, without the slightest reservation, the person whom she loves, no matter whether he is successful in his undertaking. In the light of this notion he creates Gu Zhida (as well as Zhong Qi and Lu Jian). Although Gu Zhida is selflessly dedicated to his pursuit of truth, "seeking not honours and positions, but truth only," yet in sexual relationship he is very egoistic, almost on the verge of nitpicking and relentlessness. It never dawns upon him that he sometimes should also stoop to please the female he loves. What he wishes in his mind is exclusively how to be courted passionately and worshipped unconditionally. For a positive hero, is this not too self-centred in sentiment?

Furthermore, Gu Zhida's arrogance and eccentricity are not a natural revelation of his insightful transcendence over material matters, but a sham endeavour for the ideal of detaching himself from the worldly pursuit. As a result, his indifference to fame and wealth, as if they were floating clouds to him, only strikes
readers as affected and pretentious, and betrays the pedantic shallowness of this young man who tends to go to extreme.

It is not that I mean to criticize the moulding of heroes. All writers are surely entitled to do that of their own will. What I am mainly concerned is their attitude. In his semi-autobiographical novel *My Life As a Man*, Philip Roth says: "In the story at hand, it would seem to me that from the perspective of this decade particularly, there is much that could be ridiculed having to do with the worship of ordeal and forbearance and the suppression of the sexual man. It would not require too much ingenuity on my part to convert the protagonist here into a farce. Or if not the protagonist, then the narrator. To some, the funniest thing of all, or perhaps the strangest, may not be how I conducted myself back then, but the literary mode in which I have chosen to narrate my story today: the decorousness, the orderliness, the underlying sobriety, that 'responsible' manner that I continue to affect." In this passage, what Roth is chiefly concerned is actually none other than the attitude of writers. The "attitude of writers," I am afraid, is rather vague in conception. By using this term I mean to refers to the depth of authors's thoughts and the finesse they possess in dealing with their characters. "The funniest thing" is usually not the behaviour of personages in literature, but the limitation of authors themselves.

Take Cervantes as an example. Is it that his description of

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52 Philip Roth, *My Life As a Man*, Bantham Books, 1975: 82.
Don Quixote's fighting with windmill purports to panegyrize the heroism embodied in his protagonist's persistent practice of chivalry? Of course, the answer is negative. The theme of Don Quixote is just the opposite. Cervantes wants to show in his novel how unrealistic and anachronistic the chivalry is that is ridiculously taken by Don Quixote as his conviction. Cervantes is not Don Quixote. Far more judicious than the central role he creates, he looks down, on a higher plane, at his "hero" with a humorous and sarcastic attitude. Thus the profundity of his insight into life and understanding of humanity, which are probably unparalleled among his contemporary novelists, made what might have been originally "the funniest thing" become an edification for the reader.

Chen Jiangong, however, is different. Although he is very eager to portray noble heroes in his fiction, the limitation in his thought and in observation renders him incapable of consummating his job. Unaware of the superficiality and fakery of his so-called heroism, he is neither more insightful, nor more sagacious, than the heroes he made. On the contrary, he sometimes even unconsciously took their defects as merits for eulogy, and totally identified himself with them (in most cases, the positive

53 Cervantes says in his preface to Don Quixote that the entire book "aims at no more than to destroy the authority and acceptance of the books of chivalry have had in the world". Don Quixote, New York: Random House, 1941: 22.
figures in *Bewildering Firmament*). One is justifiable to say that he is Zhong Qi, is Lu Jian, is Gu Zhida, and is Qing Jiang. They are only various "implied versions" of the author himself in different stories. It is inevitable, therefore, that Chen Jiangong and his heroes fall together into a dreadful mire of anachronism.

In "The Patterned Scarf That Was Blown Away," Qing Jiang appears as if he were a self-scrutinizer, but in fact, he is so confident and so finicky that it is not a bit inappropriate for him to be a judge of Shen Ping, the female major character in the story whom Qing Jiang both admires and envies. He observes, speculates, and above all, passes evaluation on what he sees of this unusual girl. He literally serves as a moral yard-stick of what is right and what is wrong in accordance with the author's criterion. When he for the first time catches sight of Shen Ping on the passenger ship "Red Star No. 215," he describes the scene as follows:

> When I went out of the engine room to take a breath, I saw a girl standing on the board. With her back leaning against the railing on the side of the ship, she was quietly reading a book, unlike other passengers who were either making inquiries around, or cursing and swearing, or looking up at the sky with their hands placed above

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54 This is a term used by Wayne Booth. For its discussion, see his *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983: chapter 8.
their eyebrows to shut out sunlight... She was completely engrossed in her book, her eyes bright, and the corner of her mouth slightly held up, with occasional palpitation as though her mind were being stirred by something in the book. She was a slim, tall, healthy, and nice-looking girl. Dressed in a simple attire and reading with a preoccupied mien, she was somehow singularly attractive to me.55

There is brimming between the lines Qing Jiang's admiration for this extraordinary female, with whom he has not yet made acquaintance. But what is all the more admirable is Shen Ping's aggressiveness, and that makes him feel inferior: "Are you a true man? You should not be so gutless!" (224) she says, gazing at her admirer with a playful expression in her eyes. Then she continues: "I am not gutless! Not only am I not gutless, but unyielding to my fate, either!" (224) Truly, she leaves for Qing Jiang a sweet impression. But her confidence and courage are even more striking and unforgettable to him.

It is in the famous S University in Beijing where Qing Jiang meets Shen Ping again after two years separation. He is at that time, through his diligent study, just admitted by the same department of the university in which Shen Ping has been studying.

for years. Now his original admiration for her begins to melt away in his suspicion. When Shen Ping complains to him that she will possibly have to go back to teach in her native small town after graduation, "I \[Qing Jiang\] was startled, and suddenly felt that she was very strange." (230) With the days gone by, his disappointment becomes increasingly apparent, for he has found out that her spiritual source for exerting herself to be diligent had come from her vanity. "Not all who work hard is great," (234) he thinks. At last he learns that Shen Ping is in love with a son of a high-ranking cadre, and this boy-friend of her has already taken the Toefl test and is about to go abroad to study at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The words such as "dissatisfaction" are now quite incapable of describing Qing Jiang's feeling. He is really mad, cursing at Shen Ping and her boy-friend to himself: "The muddy stream! The muddy stream in society! The muddy stream of life!" (236)

It is not Chen Jiangong's purpose, initially, to play the role of "guide of life"\textsuperscript{56} to teach young people "which road they should take."\textsuperscript{57} He only wishes to express through Qing Jiang -- his fictional personage -- what he think about life himself.

\textsuperscript{56} Chen Jiangong, "A Random Thought That Has Not Been Blown Away" [Shangwei piaoshi de ganxiang], \textit{Beijing Literature} [Beijing wenxue] No. 5, 1982: 64.

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 65.
Nevertheless, his protagonist eventually turns out to be none other than a teacher of youth, or rather, a potential candidate for the title of hero. But this hero, regrettably, is also somewhat behind the times like his counterpart Gu Zhida. It is obvious that he knows that a great change has already taken place: Shen Ping, after two years study in the metropolis, is no longer the provincial girl as she used to be before, while at the same time China has woken up from her long hibernation, striding into the boisterous era of the early 1980s. However, he still obstinately looks for the patterned scarf and its mistress. Of course, it is as impossible as Rip Van Winkle's vain attempt to find his folk after "sleep."

When he finally comes to realization that he is unable to regain what there used to be in the past, he does not have the slightest desire of trying to understand the new period and new environment. Instead, he is disgruntled, frowning upon everything that is new. He even regards Toefl Test and love with offspring of high-ranking cadres as a "muddy stream." If they are indeed a "muddy stream," a question will then naturally be raised by readers -- how many young people will be insulted by this defamatory denunciation who have gone abroad by way of taking the Toefl test and who used to fall, or are falling, in love with descendents of senior officials?

Isn't it, in fact, that Zhong Qi is such a man of pedantic shallowness? Although he bears in his mind a noble ideal, this ideal has been proved by history to be absurd and impractical. His enthusiasm in helping establish the "Red Guards's Commune" and in
working on the research program of underground coal gasification hardly makes any difference from the courage Don Quixote displays in fighting with the windmill. To make a further comment on Zhong Qi's foolishness seems unnecessary. As I have already pointed out, there is no similarity between Chen Jiangong and Cervantes. While Cervantes sympathetically scoffs at his ludicrous knight, Chen Jiangong, on the contrary, tries his best to praise his hero to the sky, and furthermore does not let off any opportunity to censure Mingwei, a person of the type that is just antithetic to Zhong Qi.

Actually, there is almost nothing wrong with Mingwei. Indeed, it is undeniable that he does not have any noble ideal borne in his mind, but he is commendably a responsible and considerate husband. People as foolish as Dandan (a character of "flat type"58 who never develops, she remains unchanged in thought as a teenager even after she becomes a married woman) can not even help acknowledging that Mingwei is blameless as far as the matrimonial life is concerned. "He [Mingwei] loved me very much," Dandan recounts, "and also knew how to take care of me. Nowadays for married couples, there might be a great deal of troubles: separation, housing problem, difficulty in having their babies taken by a day care center, and the like. However, all these unhappy things were unrelated to us. Mingwei said: we are not born only to be slaves of life; we know

how to enjoy ourselves. He even didn't allow me to wash sheets, and
would rather send them outside to be laundered. He said he didn't
want me to be a 'housewife.' He also said even if we had a baby,
he would not let me be busy around with the house chores all day
long. We could spend more money than other people to have a day
care center look after our child. When the baby grew older, then
we could, without making much effort, send it to June First
Kindergarten...”

In order to enrich their life, moreover, Ming Wei often
manages to get hold of tickets for "reference movies" so that
they can almost every week go to see those features which are
usually only open to restricted circles. On the New Year's Day as
well as other holidays he will take his wife to dancing parties,
only to provoke her sometimes, quite to his surprise. Once Dandan
leaves the dancing party for the Spring Festival before it is over.
Instead of being vexed with her indecorous conduct, Mingwei, as a
considerate and tolerant husband, forgives her, and even thinks
that he may probably be responsible for her untimely leaving. So he
asks her, solicitously: "What happened to you, Dandan? It seems you


60 In China certain kinds of movies such as foreign "erotic"
movies as well as movies which have been criticized for political
reason were usually banned, only accessible to high-ranking cadres
and people of literary circles for their "reference and criticism."
have something on your mind these days. You should not hide it from me. Is it that I did something harmful to you?"  

When he learns that nothing but studying English makes Dandan worry, he consoles her, saying that he himself is also about to start a self-study plan on English and they can improve their foreign tongue by practising dialogue at home. Then he takes the initiative:

Dandan, you look beautiful today!
May I be in luck as to be your partner in dance?
Oh, I'm sorry to have stepped on you.  

It is not my intention here to defend Mingwei or Shen Ping on their behalf. It goes without saying that they are defective. But as human beings, one of the fundamental characteristics is that they will err. Their shortcomings, their compromises, and their failures constitute a universal experience which can not be ignored. A novelist does not have to praise, nor censure, the characters he creates. His task lies in his faithful record (not necessarily using the method of realism) of human experience, or in other words, of the way men usually conduct themselves. Leo Tolstoy is probably exemplary in this respect. Objective, truthful, and accurate, his fictional personage Vronsky (in Anna Karenina)
is not portrayed merely as a dandy. A character of verisimilitude, he is manysided, and hence is open to a variety of interpretations. Unlike Tolstoy, however, Chen Jiangong aimed at agitprop in his stories. He seemed to have made up his mind that his heroes be created only for our admiration and his negative figures only for our contempt. It is by no means his hope that we should have our own opinions in regard to his characters. Therefore, his relationship with readers -- to use a figure of speech which may not be very appropriate -- is just like that of an autocrat with his populace.

According to his own confession, he was indeed filled with a strong emotion when he was initially engaged in creative writing. Whatever was produced by him, its theme must be very plain, either eulogistic and edifying, or critical and censorious. He was totally unaware of this problem of propagandism until he embarked on writing "The Patterned Scarf That Was Blown Away." Although he does make an effort in this story to "express more meditative contemplation upon reality and history," his habitual explicitness in theme nonetheless renders his worthy attempt quite ineffectual. In fact, owing to its evident didacticism, this last story in Bewildering Firmament still cannot be distinguished from the other ones he wrote earlier.

To the majority of readers, therefore, this immature book reads awkwardly, as if it brought them back to the past, to the dark epoch when China was under the reign of Mao as well as the Gang of Four. But we should not be too harsh on Chen Jiangong,
since he was also a victim of politics. No matter how different it was from what it used to be in former times, China in the transition period between 1970s and 1980s was still linked in many ways with the past, and accordingly, writers were unable to completely extricate themselves from the ossified literary dogmas the Cultural Revolution had left for them. This was actually not so much of their willingness to portray revolutionary heroes as their impotence to break through the stale formulae for creative writing under political pressure. If we take a survey of the literature produced during period of time, we will be assured that the elaboration of the hero was a common malady of the time rather than Chen Jiangong's own personal problem. True, there were indeed some genuine artistic works, say Zhu Lin's "The Net" [Wang] and Shi Tiesheng's "Blacky" [Heihei], yet they were very rare to be sure. He Zhiyun was perhaps justified, in spite of an evident attempt to gloss over his literary imperfection, when he claimed that most of Chen Jiangong's early stories were products of the social trend at that time.  

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There is one point I have to complement first.

Chen Jiangong's early stories are all related to love so to speak. A young man at the age of thirty having not yet chosen his lifelong companion, he seemed incapable, whenever he took up his pen, of getting rid of the obsession with his libido, even though it is manifested in a considerably repressed and disguised form.

His first work of fiction published after he entered Beijing University is just such a story, rather platitudinous, about an attachment a coal excavator and a library employee hold for each other. There are also other stories besides "Sweetness" in which love is a major subject matter, for instance, "Tears of the Tawny Daylily," "Sinuous Rills," "Bewildering Firmament," and "The Patterned Scarf That Was Blown Away." In spite of inappropriateness for some stories to be categorized as of such type, they are usually woven around something more or less related to romance. "Going to the High Sacrificial Alter" is a good example. Surely it

can dispense with sentimentality, since its theme is to voice grievances for a "problematic" father who dies an unrighteous death during the Cultural Revolution. But Chen Jiangong put it into a frame of love. He created Xiao Gui, a smart, lovely girl who, by leading readers into the torturous inner world of the first person narrator, makes them know that his father is in fact an honest and kind-hearted intellectual. Someone may disagree on this point, holding that there is nothing between Xiao Gui and "I" that can be called love. What actually happens to them is only an unexpected encounter in a park. But in my opinion, it is just due to such an unexpected encounter that the story reads more romantic and interesting. After finishing reading it, one may possibly still keep pondering over these two personages: what becomes of them later on? Do they eventually fall in love and get married?

Moreover, almost all love stories in Bewildering Firmament are set in Beijing. Dandan and Mingwei go window-shopping on Wangfujing Boulevard (a famous downtown street), Weiwei keeps a tryst with Gu Zhida in his small shabby house situated in Shuncheng Street (in southern Beijing), and Qing Jiang attempts in vain to win Shen Ping in famous S University.65

The story which is somewhat controversial in this respect is perhaps "Tears of the Tawny Daylily." Yet its background is virtually insignificant. If words which are not intrinsically coherent with the theme, such as "yurt," "Wujia River" (in Inner

65 It obviously refers to Beijing Normal University.
Mongolia), and "Qili" (the term for small town in Inner Mongolia), were removed from this tragic romance, Li Lu's misfortune might take place in any locality. Furthermore, both protagonists Ding Qi and Li Lu are born and brought up in Beijing. It is the Cultural Revolution that compells them to go to settle in the countryside in inland China which is totally strange to them. But in essence, they are all the same educated urban youth. It is because of their similarity in urban background that Ding Qi falls in love with Li Lu soon after he gets acquainted with her, and it is also because of the connection which Ding Qi still keeps with his family in Beijing that he finally brings about his girl-friend's tragedy.

Just as Balzac who divided his Comedie Humaine into "Scenes of Parisian Life," "Scenes of Provincial Life," "Scenes of Private Life," so Chen Jiangong, if it is not unsuitable for him to follow the example of this literary giant, might classify his scarce oeuvre into a number of categories: one about urban youth, one about coal miners, one about old city residents of the lower classes, and one about high school students or adolescents. The stories he wrote when he was a student at Beijing University are all about young urban Beijingers, except for the following three: "A Troublemaker in West Beijing," "After Death," and "Phoenix Eyes."

These three short stories were excluded deliberately from discussion in the previous chapter for the reason I have explained. Of them, critics are surprisingly unanimous in positive evaluation, whereas it is not rare for them to have different
opinions, either veiled or straightforward, concerning the bulk of works of fiction produced by Chen Jiangong in his early stage. Wang Meng in his preface to *Bewildering Firmament* frankly confesses that he prefers the stories of "Phoenix" type—referring to that about the life of coal miners. To be sure, it was largely out of his personal predilection that he gave credits to them, and there is nothing absolute in his judgement (for he knew that younger generation might prefer stories of "Firmament" type—referring to that about young urban Beijingers). Zeng Zhennan, however, was quite different. He tended to act like a literary judge. His comment, though fortunately laudatory, is much more definite, decisive and conclusive:

> What is worth our rejoicing is that this hatchet [I can not see any reason why he should employ this metaphor here], which is sharp but not firmly held, is not the only one Chen Jiangong possesses. He also has in his hand three other "Rambling Chats About Everything Under the Sun" [referring to the three stories in question]. It is these three hatchets that he indeed swung excellently,

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and we can not but admire his masterly skill.\textsuperscript{67}

Zeng Zhennan did not seem to feel unjustified in praising stories of "Phoenix" type at the expense of those of "Firmament" type -- to use Wang Meng's terms for categorization. To him, the reason that the former are meritorious is that Chen Jiangong, "being deeply concerned with the fate of labouring people and their feelings...made substantial exploration of life" in these stories. On the contrary, "the exclusion of the labouring people" in the rest of his works "rendered his literary endeavour, however with delicate skill, frivolous and shallow."\textsuperscript{68}

This is, I am afraid, still social criticism of literature based upon Marxist class theory. In his well-known random essay \textsuperscript{[zawen]} "Literature and Sweat" \textsuperscript{[Wenxue yu chuhan]}, Lu Xun did assert, as disseminating of Marxism was gaining momentum in China half a century ago, that the sweat of "exquisite" ladies and that of stupid strong workers are dissimilar.\textsuperscript{69} But he was not, after

\textsuperscript{67} Zeng Zhengnan, "Chen Jiangong he ta de duanpian xiaoshuo" [Chen Jiangong and his Short Stories], \textit{Soil and Thorn} [Nitu yu liji]: 35.

\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., 35.

\textsuperscript{69} "Take sweating, for example. I imagine men sweated in the distant past, they sweat today and will sweat for some time to come. This should therefore count as a comparatively 'eternal'
all, so unwise as to make judgement on which sweat is more artistically valuable. Whoever has common sense of literature knows that *Dream of the Red Mansions* and *The Water Margin* are both masterpieces, though Cao Xueqin describes Chinese gentry in his story, while Shi Naian, instead, takes forest outlaws as his fictional heroes. He knows, too, that no matter how different the novels of Leo Tolstoy and Charles Dickens are -- one is chiefly about Russian aristocrats and the other about people of lower-middle classes in England, both are great works so far as literary metits are concerned. Is there any critic who has ever professed that Cao Xueqin's "exploration of life" would not be "substantial" if not in works of Shi Naian? Or Tolstoy's techniques could only avoid being "frivolous and shallow" when they were handled by Dickens? Without convincing us that these three stories are thematically better, Zeng nevertheless did not misunderstand at least on one point: they are indeed remarkably different in subject matter.

Chen Jiangong was then obviously an urban youth himself. It is natural that stories about this type of people acquires an autobiographic flavour, with the trace of the author himself human quality, but the sweat of 'exquisite' young ladies is sweet, while the sweat of workers 'dumb as oxen' is rank." See Lu Xun, "Literature and Sweat," *Selected Works of Lu Xun*, vol. 2, trans. Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang, Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1960: 382.
betrayed now and then. When he cast his eye on woes and happiness of coal miners, of various types of mortals other than that to which he himself belonged, he consciously contrived for those stories a sub-title: "Rambling Chats About Everything Under the Sun." Taken literally, it suggests that the stories bearing such a sub-title may probably deal with diversified people and multifarious things that are not necessarily related to the author's own experience. Chen Jiangong planned to write ten stories under this sub-title, and so far he has finished five (one of them is actually a novella). They have made him more noticeable, especially outside the mainland China.

If the stories discussed in the previous chapter mainly describe young Beijingers, in particular social injustice from which they suffer, then, as soon as Chen Jiangong was engaged in writing the series of "Rambling Chats," namely, stories of "Phoenix" type, he devoted himself to the presentation of the grief and joy of coal-miners. "A Troublemaker in West Beijing"70 is about long-standing separation of the miner Pi Debao and his wife and difficulty in looking after their baby; "After Death" deals with an ill-starred life of the old excavator Stone Wei who, despite hard working for dozens of years in a mine, can not even get due

70 The literal translation of the phrase "saodazi" (troublemaker) should be "sausy Tartar." See Yang Xianyi's A Dream of Red Mansions, vol. 2, 133.
praise after his death; and "Phoenix Eyes," like Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost* in mood, is a comedic recounting of troublesomeness the male miners usually undergo in the process of looking for a girl-friend.

In fact, "A Troublemaker in West Beijing" does not belong to the group of "Rambling Chats," and there are only two stories in *Bewildering Firmament* -- that is, "After Death" and "Phoenix Eyes" -- which really have that sub-title. When Zeng Zhennan observed that "he also has in his hand three other 'Rambling Chats,'" he obviously made an error with the unconscious inclusion of "A Troublemaker in West Beijing." This surely resulted from his carelessness in reading. Even though, however, "A Troublemaker" does not have this sub-title, it is not unreasonable to regard it as one of that series, for it bears conspicuous affinity in subject matter.

The subject matter is not the sole mark that distinguishes stories of "Phoenix" type from those of "Firmament" type. Judging from it only, "Sweetness" is also supposed to fall into the former category. That stories of "Phoenix" type are different is not merely because they are idiosyncratic in subject matter, but chiefly because they are idiosyncratic in diction and mode of representation. They reveal the author's other differentiative style in artistry, and hence bring to light that Chen Jiangong, a novice as he was in creative writing, had in his hands "two kinds
of weapons, two kinds of pugilism, and two kinds of brushes." Wang Meng believed that "Tears of the Tawny Daylily" and "A Troublemaker in West Beijing" are so unlike that it is impossible for the reader to see at first glimpse that they were written by the same author. Twice readings are perhaps still insufficient. One has to read three times, or even four times, before turning them over in his mind for some moments.

The change in subject matter is probably prerequisite, and then there is an according alteration in diction and mode of representation. Originally, Chen Jiangong wished to adhere to an invariable "style." Even after publishing "Sinuous Rills," he "still confidently moved ahead in the direction of his 'fixed style,'" which he probably thought was most suitable for him. Before long, however, he encountered a problem: a number of coal miners and towns people with whom he was very familiar began to intrude themselves into his imaginary world, bringing along with them their gross language and unrefined witticism. Would he still cherish the established stylistic goal, "insisting that these people be portrayed in the minute and delicate way," (70) or would

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72 Ibid., 4.

he adopt, in accordance with the material he had possessed, a more appropriate method in order to display them more vividly and more effectively? Finally he was determined to choose the latter, and took up another "brush."

Of course, he was not forced to make this change. The variation in his style was subject not only to the raw material which was conditioned and provided by life, but more importantly, to his individualistic, psychological factors. He made such an explanation:

As a writer who lives in a developing social milieu and developing era, as a writer who keeps experiencing, exploring, and meditating upon life, he is bound to be developing in his thought, his feelings, and his aesthetic taste. He will certainly present to the reader a life described from the angle of his altered aesthetic viewpoint. Isn't it inevitable, therefore, that a new style will come out? (70)

He even quoted Mao Dun for an illustration.

When Mao Dun wrote the trilogy Eclipse [Shi] in 1927, his style is melancholy and pessimistic. Yet The Twilight [Ziye], which was published in 1932, is not melancholy and pessimistic any more; instead, it is full of confidence, liveliness, and optimistic spirit. (70)
Lacking sufficient resources, regrettably, I am unable to make a more convincing explanation than Chen Jiangong did himself of the connection between "a developing social milieu" and "a writer who keeps experiencing, exploring, and meditating upon life," let alone make a detailed study in literary sociology and literary psychology which goes too far beyond the scope of this thesis. What I am mainly concerned with is how Chen Jiangong described life in terms of his "new aesthetic viewpoint."

"The new aesthetic viewpoint" might not manifest its traits distinctively unless put into the contrast with the "fixed style." The term "style," once applied in the scholarship of literature, is incapable of freeing itself from diversified -- far-fetched and well-grounded alike -- interpretations made by literary theoreticians. We have to leave this general term aside, with our concentration only focused on the more specific side of the implication of Chen Jiangong's nomenclature.

According to him, the "fixed style" is, "just like xiaokai [small regular script]...a minute and delicate way of artistic expression." Obviously, it basically refers to the characteristics of linguistic aspect. To define the language of the "fixed style," one of the critics used "bookish"\(^\text{74}\) as a modifier, which, without

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prior reading of his critique, happens to be the word I would very much like to make use of myself for a comprehensive generalization. Refined and elegant, delicate and feminine, flowery and beautiful, lyrical and poetical, these are the major features of the language applied in stories of "Firmament" type. With a quotation of the beginning paragraph in "Sinuous Rill" as an example, one may perhaps get an overall impression of what the "fixed style" actually is:

One may have love experience a number of times. But once married, one must get rid off old lingering sentiment, and start a brand new matrimonial life. This was the attitude I adopted when I fell in love with Mingwei and married him. I told him what had happened between Zhong Qi and me, and he understood that. Then we married. How fresh our life was at the beginning! Like a newly bloomed flower, I enjoyed having the gentle breeze, sweet dew, beautiful sunlight, and azure sky. Now one year has barely elapsed since our wedding, yet somehow I can't help coming to this small creek at times, and gazing at it, let myself be immersed in reminiscence of Zhong Qi. Six years before, I had broken up with him. He scolded me. Thinking of that I would be filled with resentment. Now that I had got my husband, and had got a new life, why was I still coming here now and then to
review those old dreams?75

This is a narration from a woman's point of view, alternated with her commentary and description. The narration is bookish, and the commentary and description are mild and emotional. The similes and metaphors applied in the excerpt, such as "like a newly bloomed flower," "gentle breeze," "sweet dew," "beautiful sunlight," and "azure sky," are not only poetical, but strike us as feminine as well.

Under the guidance of "the new aesthetic viewpoint," Chen Jiangong thoroughly remoulded his language:

Everyone says there are more women than men in Beijing, yet somehow many young guys in West Beijing simply cannot find marriage partners.

Is it that they are ugly, like ill-shaped melons or split dates? Or they are idlers loafing at street corner with nothing to do all day long? No, not at all. If you don't believe, you can go look yourself. Outside Sanjiadian, handsome young men are everywhere to be seen! No sooner do you catch sight of a nice-looking guy, with a pair of charming eyes and lovely brows, than another feller, tall, strong, and masculine, will have appeared in front of you. Among them, there are not only model

workers and crackajacks at technical innovation, but amateur singers, amateur violinists, amateur pianists and the like. If they were city residents, it is not impossible that girls would be fascinated by them. However, they live in the suburb -- in West Beijing. They are miners. That's the real problem! Most girls will frown when they learn their would-be boy-friends, standing before them, are engaged in this occupation. So however otherwise perfect, they will equally give a one-word answer: "No!" 76

As the opening of "Phoenix Eyes," this passage, like that in "Sinuous Rills" which I just cited a while ago, is also made up of expository narration. But how different it is!

Poetry, Shelley says, is untranslatable, and translators are traitors. In my opinion, what is untranslatable is not merely poetry. If fiction is remarkable for its strong local or national features, it is bound to lose its original charm in target language, no matter how skilfully it is translated. Unless I quote the original, I will not be able to make English readers fully appreciate through my English version the stylistic difference between Chen Jiangong's two types of stories. What I can probably do to the best of my ability in translation is a rough discrimination.

At any rate, one may have perhaps made out that the lingering sentiment in "Sinuous Rills" has completely vanished here in "Phoenix Eyes." The bookish language is transformed into that of liveliness and toughness, and vulgar phrases emerge in a great quantity. For instances, "not easy to get hold of marriage partners," "like ill-shaped melons and split dates," and "idlers loafing at the street corners with nothing to do all day long." (My English is not so good to make them tough enough.) This kind of language is no longer refined and elegant. On the contrary, they are rather coarse, with strong miners' flavour.

Western fiction of the twentieth century has a marked characteristic -- namely, it does not avoid using obscene words any more. If writers like Charles Dickens in the nineteenth century could only confine themselves to the use of misspellings and ungrammatical expressions when they described directly illiteracy and vulgarism, then in works of modern novelists it seems that their language would no longer be vivid, forceful, and true-to-life without being seasoned with "shit," "fuck," or some such thing. As Chen Jiangong deliberately vernacularized his phraseology, the words that used to be unpresentable came furtively into his stories one after the other:

"Shit, it's really disappointing."77

"Shit, what are you eating for..."  
"Shit, aren't you shameful to bother the leaders with that little matter."  

But like a foot-bound woman who has just been unbound and is trying to ambulate, he seems to be rather cautious and hesitant at the beginning while making use of the bawdy verbalism. Even when Stone Wei is outrageous, his abuse is still temperate:

"How come the Communist Party should have done such a goddamned thing! It isn't that I object to sterilization, but can they carry out this policy the way pigs are castrated, making country women so scared that they have to flee to other places?"  

Certainly, "After Death" is not comparable in this respect with "Curlylocks" in which "shit" seems excessively frequent. At that time, the most common vituperation Chen Jiangong used is a relatively less coarse word "pi" (literally meaning "fart"). According to my inaccurate statistics, there are in these three stories approximately ten abusive phrases that are related to this

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79 "A Troublemaker in West Beijing," Bewildering Firmament; 36.

word.

A reader of acute observation will probably feel at first sight that there is something quite different with the titles of stories produced under the guidance of the author's "new aesthetic viewpoint." It is undeniable that "Phoenix Eyes" could make itself identical with the titles of other stories in *Bewildering Firmament* but for the accompaniment of the speciously charlatanistic sub-title "Rambling Chats About Everything Under the Sun." It is, therefore, unable to convey a graceful and poetical sense. The same is true of the term "troublemaker" (saodazi) in the title "A Troublemaker in West Beijing." Although it is inherited from the female protagonist Lin Daiyu in *Dream of the Red Mansions* -- if Chen Jiangong's "textual research"\(^{81}\) is reliable, it is still unable to procure for itself "a decent position in social intercourse." Not only well-educated intellectuals in Beijing avoid this bawdy phrase as a taboo, but even ordinary Beijingers of lower social strata feel shameful to use it. "Only after one takes a west-bound train, travels through Wukong Bridge, through the apple orchard, then continuously goes westward, goes beyond Sanjiadian, and finally reaches the mining area in West Beijing,"\(^{82}\) then one may perhaps hear it when miners

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\(^{81}\) This term is used by Zhang Weian for the purpose of proving that Chen Jiangong's style is "bookish."

\(^{82}\) "A Troublemaker in West Beijing," *Bewildering Firmament*: 29.
are joking with each other.

Let us take for comparison the titles of stories of "Firmament" type. Of "Sweetness," "Sinuous Rills," "Bewildering Firmament," "The Patterned Scarf That Was Blown Away," "The Broken Morning Sunlight," "Rain, lashing the Neon Lamps," is there any one that does not sound lyrical? Judging from the titles only, without knowledge of the gender of the author, one will perhaps believe that these stories were possibly written by a woman writer. With his critical acumen, Wang Meng found them rather unsatisfying, especially "Rain, Lashing the Neon Lamps" and "The Broken Morning Sunlight." He held that they are too verbose and "lack due embellishment." His criticism is no doubt pertinent. Nevertheless, the point is that Chen Jiangong as a slow and conscientious storyteller could not have been so careless as to neglect polishing his titles. Although "my writings are not prolific, nor excellent," he acknowledges in the preface to his self-compiled collection, "they are not irresponsible products." Therefore the seeming titular clumsiness betrays nothing but his inclination for over-ornateness (though it is unsuccessful). By creating this kind of lingering and emotional titles, he in fact tried to strengthen his elaborate poetical style, at least not to go against it.


He was even meticulous in giving his characters proper names in order that they could be compatible with his style. The names of characters in stories of "Phoenix" type mostly consist of three syllables, for example, Pi Debao, Wei Shitou, and Xin Xiaoliang. They are plain and unpoetical, emitting a special savour which is unmistakably of coal miners's. But in stories of "Firmament" type, almost all the names are made up of two syllables: Zhong Qi, Ming Wei, Li Lu, Yu Xin, Lu Jian, Qing Jiang, Shen Ping, Chen Hao, and Wei-wei. This kind of two syllabic combination is not only musical in tone, but metaphoric in meaning. "Zhong Qi" can be reasonably interpreted as "zhongguo qicai" [genius or great man in China]; "Shen Ping" is equal to "chen-ping" [sunken duckweed] because the surname "shen" is interchangeable with "chen" [sink] in classical Chinese; as for Li Lu, as I have already stated in the previous chapter, is none other than an abbreviation of "liming de luzhu" [dew in early morning] which is obviously a metaphor of purity and innocence.

In "Sinuous Rills," Zhong Qi and Dandan are so excited in front of a quiet creak while they are unbosoming themselves to each other about their ideals, as if they were lost in reverie. It seemed to the author that such an intoxicated state of daydream would not be fully expressed unless in form of poetry. Thus, through Dandan's chanting there interposes naturally a poem in the story:

Facing the small, quiet creek
We have many, many a thing to say
Oh,
Please don’t do it in haste
Look, the stars in heaven
So numerous, that in the creek are reflected...

Facing the small, quiet creek
We have many, many a wish to put into phrase
Oh,
Please don’t do it in haste
Look, the stars in heaven
So numerous, that in the creek glisten...85

When Lu Jian sees the sun still hide behind the black green mountains, his mind is so peaceful, so congenial, that he feels that prose language is not quite qualified to describe it. "How I wish to sing a song, accompanied by the twittering of birds on twigs, to greet the advent of the morning." Then a fragmental poem appears as follows:

I am looking forward to
The rise of the sun which is very bright;
By a tender stroke of hers,

I am made warm at the bottom of my mind.86

In fact, the "citations" from The Old Man and the Sea in the story of "Bewildering Firmament" can also be regarded as a variant of poetry. Its allegoric meaning and exotic flavour are sufficient to make it acquire a kind of lyrical nature different from ordinary narrative. Chen Jiangong seemed to have a fondness for verses, and his first creative work published well before downfall of the Gang of Four was a poem entitled "Seeing-off." But the occasional insertion of poems in his stories is not merely for the sake of showing off his poetical talent, which is actually rather average. Just as he was meticulous in selecting suitable sentence patterns for titles, so he took pains in making use of poems to render his style more elegant and more exquisite. When he was no longer confined by the "fixed style" and managed to handle another "brush," the verses that used to be exploited for the sake of style thus disappear. No trace of them can be seen in stories of "Phoenix" type. "Old Wang, Old Wang, a bad loser in chess game who dares not show up any more,"87 this is perhaps the only doggerel-like rhyme in these three tales. Apparently, it is not to convey poetical emotion, but to reflect children's mischievousness as they are making fun of their old chessmate.


87 "A Troublemaker in West Beijing," Bewildering Firmament: 42.
As an old narrative technique, the application of poetry in fiction can be traced back to the Song Dynasty. Classical Chinese fiction downwards from that period used poetry either to begin a tale, or to elucidate a theme, or to express emotion, or to sum up.\(^88\) It is with a \textit{ci} (a type of poetry most prevalent in the Song Dynasty), for instance, that The Romance of Three Kingdoms begins: "Surging eastward has been the torrent of Yangtsi River/ Seeing a variety of heroes embarking on military venture/ Ere Long, however, they ended up successively in failure/ What there are still here are green mountains/ And red glare of twilight that once in a while appears...\(^89\)

What is more worth mentioning is that in \textit{huaben} (literally meaning "script for story-telling," but here I take it as a genre of fiction) poetry is a technique most frequently used for \textit{ruhua}.\(^90\) However, when Chen Jiangong purposely imitated the form of \textit{huaben}, he did not show as much interest in this traditional technique as he used to do in stories of "Firmament" type. On one hand, he found


\(^{90}\) A special term in study of classical Chinese fiction, meaning "to make an introduction, or get into theme of the story."
ruhua quite adoptable as an interesting means to begin his stories, yet on the other hand he seemed to be unwilling to plunge himself into the difficulty in writing classical rhymed verses. Was he not good at that, or was he afraid that they might read too pedantic, too antiquated? Anyway, his imitation was then greatly metamorphosed, with a roundabout titular explanation substituting for the poetry that should have been adopted at the beginning of his stories:

The pure Beijing dialect is not as same as what we call common speech. In Beijing dialect, there is a great deal of slang which may not be understandable to people who can speak mandarin. One of the examples is "zhuang saodazi" [to simulate a troublemaker]. This phrase, as a matter of fact, came into use hundreds of years ago. Lin Daiyu, in the forty-ninth chapter in Dream of the Red Mansions, makes fun of Shi Xiangyun, saying: "You look like a sausy little Tartar," when she sees the latter coming to Paddy-sweet Cottage wearing an ermine coat given to her by the Lady Dowager, a woollen hood and a sable collar. Here by using "zhuang saodazi," Lin Daiyu only means to say that Shi Xiangyun "pretends to be a bumpkin." Handed down from generation to generation, this phrase has now gradually become a synonym for "feigning
ignorance."91

Of the title "Gaiguan" [the lid is laid on one's coffin], he did following "textual research:"

"Gaiguan lunding" [final evaluation which is passed on a person after the lid is laid on his coffin] is also called "gaiguan shiding." The "patent" of coining this idiom probably belonged to a man living a thousand more years ago by the name of Liu Yi. He said that gentlemen could not as casually conduct themselves as people of lower social status. "One is unable to be finally judged until after one's death!" Since then this idiom had been frequently cited by men of letters in the dynasties of


We can indeed find a very similar paragraph in forty nineth chapter of A Dream of Red Mansions. Yang Xianyi's translation of this paragraph is as follows: "Presently Hsiang-yun arrived wearing an ermine coat lined with grey squirrel given her by the Lady Dowager, a scarlet woollen hood with a gosling-yellow applique of cloud designs and a golden lining, and a big sable collar. 'Look, here comes the Monkey King!' exclaimed Tai-yu laughing. 'She's got a cape too, yet she's dressed herself up like a sausy little Tartar.'" A Dream of Red Mansions, Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1978: vol. 2, 133.
Tang, Song, Yuan, Ming, Qing. Thus, it was widely spread, and is not obsolete even at present time.\textsuperscript{92}

*Ruhua* in classical Chinese fiction is usually related to theme, or tells a gist of what will be happening in the story. It is an essential part, so to speak, since literature was a way to express ideology in former times. But Chen Jiangong's "ruhua" has only formalistic functions. Despite the digression of "textual research" on titles from thematic implication, it is indispensable in creating a lively atmosphere fitting for the depiction of miners's inelegant life. With such an humorous titular interpretation as an introduction, he enables readers easily to get accustomed to his "other brush."

A number of critics were somewhat bewildered by Chen Jiangong's seeming erudition. Zhang Weian said: "The notation of the phrase 'saodazi,' the expounding of the origin of the idiom 'gaiguan lunding,' the designation of the alias 'phoenix eyes,' -- all of them reveal to readers a certain inclination -- a charming bookishness -- which only intellectuals possess."\textsuperscript{93} He Zhiyun, an undeniably expert on Chen Jiangong, usually did a good job in his critical judgement, and most of times his criticism is substantial

\textsuperscript{92} "After Death," Bewildering Firmament: 70.

and insightful. However, quite to my surprise, he simply echoed Zhang's opinion on this point in a published letter to Chen Jiangong: "You clearly showed a particular bookishness in the stories describing the life of miners and residents of older generation in Beijing when you did a research on the origin of 'sao-da-zi,' elucidated the idiom 'gai guan lun ding,' designated the alias 'phoenix eyes,' and quoted the poems like 'as the house is rarely visited, there are hardly any vehicles in front of it.' This bookishness is only characteristic of intellectuals." 94

To me, it seems that Chen Jiangong did not aim at pedantical ostentation in stories of "Phoenix" type, since they were mainly intended to pander to tastes of the masses. Instead of parading knowledge, his "textual research" of either "saodazi" or "gaiguan lunding" serves only as the means for ruhua, which I have explained. Although "zhuang saodazi" originated in Dream of the Red Mansions, it simply means "to pretend to be a bumpkin." At first glimpse, the idiom "gaiguan lunding" is perhaps startling since it was invented by such a celebrity called Liu Yi living a thousand more years ago. Yet in fact, readers will not be awe-stricken, because Chen Jiangong's narration is fairly humorous and sprightly. Instead of saying "Liu Yi," he said "a man by the name of Liu Yi." He might as well have made use of dignified expression such as "'gaiguan lunding' originated..." if he meant to be bookish; but

he simply put it in this way: "the 'patent' of coining this idiom probably belonged to..."

What is more noticeable is that in both the foregoing quoted passages there appears the function word "la," for examples, "ta shuo la" [he said], " 'zhuangshuai chonglen' de daimingci la" [a synonym for "feigning ignorance"]. "La" is one of the most common interjections especially in northern dialects. In stories of "Rambling Chats" series, "la" as well as "ah" is so often used that they are perhaps unmatchable in frequencies with any other words. To express the refined "bookishness" with the rather casual word "la," or "ah," is just like taking aspirin in order to cure a toothache. What will be the effect?

I do not mean to assert that stories of the "Phoenix" type and stories of the "Firmament" type as works produced by "two kinds of brushes" are completely dissimilar without anything in common at all. Actually there is a similarity between them, though it is certainly not their "bookishness." If one insists that explanation of titles be regarded as bookishness, one has to admit that it is totally another sort of bookishness. Obviously, the bookishness in stories of "Phoenix" type is traditional Chinese in nature, whereas the bookishness in stories of "Firmament" type has an exotic and modern flavour.

What makes these two types of stories bear the identical "Chen's brand" are their heroes. Only at this point are they able to be placed on a par as though they were produced by the same casting mould.
Like her counterpart Linjuan (in "Sweetness") who is attracted by Yunhu, Meng Bei (in "Phoenix Eyes") feels a strong affinity for the miner Xin Xiaoliang "simply because this young man she loved was masculine and upright." It is true that Stone Wei (in "After Death") is so fooled by the so-called class struggle that he is quite at a loss as to which way he should conduct himself, but he remains a faithful believer in the Communist Party, preserving until his death a slip of note that witnesses his delivery of three hundred jin of coal to the communists before "liberation." What seems to deserve further commendation is Stone Wei's unusual courage. At the critical moment when Lin Kai has a fatal accident, all work-mates are scared out of their wits by that gory scene except this old excavator:

Desperately he threw himself over to the spot where the accident had taken place. Raking the coal-slack off Lin Kai with his skinny hands, he carried the dead in his arms, and cried in an outmoded language: "Big brother, big brother, you can't go! You can't go!...

At length, he himself is killed by another avalanche. Stone Wei acts so heroically that he will not be inferior by any means if he

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is placed in juxtaposition with Ou Yanghai, the real hero in 1960s who sacrificed his life in order to pull away a stampeded horse on the rail to rescue a coming train.

As for Old Man Wang (in "A Troublemaker in West Beijing"), Wang Meng has already made such a comment: "Once the magnificent image of Old Man Wang is set up, the images of Director Liu and Pi Debao suddenly tarnish in its sharp contrast." Director Liu and Pi Debao are not at all bad persons, though they have flaws and shortcomings which human beings usually do. However, by comparison with the Christ-like Old Man Wang who only thinks of solving other people’s problems without taking a bit consideration of himself, how can these two ordinary men not feel dwarfed?

It seems that Chen Jiangong followed the principle of "three prominences." When he described minor roles, his ultimate purpose was to utilize them to highlight major ones. Because of the aura of heroism around protagonists, some of minor characters who had been strongly influenced by them are accordingly resplendent with

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98 The principle of "three prominences" is: among ordinary characters prominence should be given to positive characters; among positive characters prominence should be given to heroic characters; and among heroic characters prominence should be given to the major heroic character/characters. Writers were obliged to observe this principle during the Cultural-Revolution era.
heroic qualities. In this respect, stories of "Firmament" type and stories of "Phoenix" type hardly differ. The most distinctive example in stories of the latter type is Stone Wei's wife. Since she has been taught by her singular husband with "orthodox" morality, she is naturally better than other ordinary country women. On that day when the funeral is being held, she does not desperately catch hold of the coffin with tears all over her face, asking for more pension than what is supposed to grant her (according to the author, this often occurred with rural women who had little education). What she does at her late husband's funeral is astonishingly reasonable. She first requests that the slip of note which her husband preserves all his life be buried together with him. After that, she begins to admonish her children in earnest: "You should make progress in studies. Look, your dad was superb even on the first day he followed the Communist Party. You should never let me lose face." Such an unperturbableness at the funeral is really exceptional, as if the dead were not her spouse.

In order to make his heroes more sublime, Chen Jiangong had a favourite trick: to contrive to let them die. In "Tears of the Tawny Daylily," he unexpectedly pushed Li Lu to sacrifice herself without hesitation. Nor was he more merciful toward the tragic hero in "After Death," who in the end is unable to escape death, either. In fact, I do not see any necessity for Stone Wei to lay down his life. According to what the author said in an article, death never

befell in real life the old miner who had been taken as the prototype for Stone Wei in "After Death."100 As a very experienced excavator having worked in a mine for dozens of years, he apparently knows how to behave himself as he sees Lin Kai die a violent death at his post. Nevertheless, he is unusually impetuous so that regardless of his own life, he rushes to the dead simply to utter such senseless words as "big brother, big brother," only to get himself killed at last by another collapse.

To Chen Jiangong, it seemed that Stone Wei would not be able to distinguish himself from the commonplace kind of people unless he gave his life away as a sacrifice to the benefit of other persons. In "A Troublemaker in West Beijing," Old Man Wang is indeed amazing in kindness even without contribution at the expense of his death. But the author wished to make his hero greater. He eventually had this old man tumble over on his way to the shop where he is going to buy milk for Pi Debao's baby. As a result, Old Man Wang gets a severe stroke and is sent to hospital, with his death being expected at any moment. No wonder Wang Meng sighed after reading the story: the author was too absolute in assignment of the job for his poor character.101


It is undeniable, however, that the aura of heroism in stories of "Phoenix" type is less conspicuous than that in stories of "Firmament" type. Hence it is easier for this heroism to be neglected as a common trait shared by all that are collected in Bewildering Firmament when the stylistic uniqueness in these three stories becomes overwhelmingly remarkable. What usually caught critics's eye is the dissimilarity in style, not the identity in theme. For this reason, Wang Meng was perhaps blameless no matter how he exaggerated the unlikeness between these two types of short fiction. When we pay close attention to their technical difference, we will surely find out that the most obvious stylistic feature of stories of "Phoenix" type is their use of omniscient point of view.

Omniscient perspective is a traditional narrative technique. It was widely employed both in Chinese and Western classical fiction before the nineteenth century. Since Henry James broached the discussion of the issue of point of view, Western writers of this century, in Europe and America alike, began to notice the accuracy of narrator's vision. It is true, as Henry James's detailed records show, that "to decide that your narrator shall

not be omniscient decides practically nothing,"¹⁰³ and "to decide on first-person narration settles only part of one's problem, perhaps the easiest part,"¹⁰⁴ with such questions as follows still remaining theoretically unsolved: "What kind of first person? How fully characterized? How much aware of himself as narrator? How reliable? How much confined to the realistic inference; how far privileged to go beyond realism? At what point shall he speak truth and at what point utter no judgement or even utter falsehood?"¹⁰⁵ But at any rate, the conscious introduction of the limited point of view in narration showed a marked progress in the art of fiction, and its impact in China can be easily seen in literature of the May Fourth period as well as of post-Mao era.

Skimming through the collection Bewildering Firmament, one will surely note that with the exclusion of stories of "Phoenix" type, almost all Chen Jiangong's early works were written from a first-person perspective. The only exceptions are "Sweetness" and the title story, in which narration is respectively done through the vision of the third-person miner Yunhu and the third-person professor Chen Hao for the most part. When Chen Jiangong "swung the hatchets of 'Rambling Chats'" and deliberately turned to old


¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p.165.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 165.
Chinese tradition, he then transformed the first-person point of view into that of authorial omniscience. This change makes us feel both familiar and old-fashioned, and both customary and platitudinous. In these three stories, Chen Jiangong is no longer a narrator of limited vision. Instead, standing on a high plane which overlooks all that is taking place on the stage of his stories, he not only knows what his characters say and how they behave themselves, but is capable of going into their inner world to observe their mental activities.

If he had described the protracted conflict between Pi Debao and Director Liu in the style of stories of "Firmament" type, he would surely have selected either of them as a central figure and would have then presented the story through a chosen figure's point of view. But in "A Troublemaker in West Beijing," there is no such a central figure at all, or rather, Pi Debao and Director Liu are both central figures so to speak. As an omniscient narrator, the author was commanding, penetrating, and ubiquitous in observation. He not only had the knowledge of Pi Debao's difficulty, but of Director Liu's irresponsibility as well. At the beginning of the story he first made a sketchy description of Pi Debao's background:

Originally, Pi Debao was not at all a "troublemaker." He worked hard and enthusiastically, and was always warm-hearted and willing to lend his hand to his "buddies." At most he would crack a joke, put on an air of a clown, sing all of a sudden a few bars of
Beijing Opera, and turn a somersault that took people around unawares. Everyone liked to get along with him. But recently he was very depressed. His wife worked in a geological prospecting team, and he had been separated from her for seven or eight years. He knew it was pretty difficult to solve the problem of their separation, but he didn't care much in this matter. He was quite easy-going, and moreover, there were not many household chores to bother them. Half a year ago, however, their first baby was born. Because he got the son at the age of thirty five, it does not come as a surprise that he loved it very much, let alone that the baby was a Caesarean birth. Since the geological prospecting team was always on move from one place to another, he was unwilling to let his son lead a vagrant life in bad living conditions. How should he do? He had better go to see the leader again. But the leader happened to be none other than the "Director Liu" [irresponsible director].

Then he immediately switched his vision on to the "irresponsible director:"

On Chinese Lunar Year's Eve, a thick letter from Pi

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Director Liu thought: Why had this old man done this work in my name? 108

As far as point of view is concerned, "After Death" is unique among these three stories, because it seems to have been written in first-person narration. Before long the story has begun, the first-person narrator intrudes to make remarks directly:

Somebody might say: "What's the purpose you take us here around the coffin, babbling out nonsense all day long? Do you want us feel nauseous?" Wait a minute, please. Don't you see I myself am also waiting here for the opening of the memorial meeting? As I am standing in front of the coffin, the images of Stone Wei and Lin Kai flash into my imagination alternately. I can't help being immersed in meditation. Gradually I seem to come to the realization of what is the 'proper way' for one to behave himself. 109

In this passage, in fact, the comment made by the first-person narrator can be taken justifiably as the author's voice. "I" is not a certain character indispensable in development of the story,

108 Ibid., 46.

like his counterparts in fiction of "Firmament" type. In fiction of "Firmament" type, "I" is both a narrator and participant. "I" can be either Dandan, or Lu Jian, or Ding Qi, and "I" plays an important role. Therefore the vision of "I" cannot but be limited. But "I" in "After Death," except for making occasional comments, is not involved in concrete events taking place in the story. At this point we can liken Chen Jiangong's story to Thackeray's novel *Vanity Fair*, in which the first person narrator also serves as a mere commentator. The complete detachment of "I" from other characters in "After Death" makes "I" a substitute for the author and consequently become omniscient in point of view (so does "I" in *Vanity Fair*). As what we may probably find out after reading the story, "I" is equally competent in learning of Stone Wei's personal history and in getting the information of what this old miner talks about to his wife in their private conversation.

Few days after the Liberation, a military representative paid him [Stone Wei] a visit in his hovel. "Stone Wei, you should go to study!" Stone Wei said: "Study? Study for what?" The military representative

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110 For example: "Indeed I am afraid that her nose was rather short than otherwise, and her cheeks a great deal too round and red for a heroine,..." Obviously "I" is not a character, but the author himself. See William Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, New York: American Book-Stratford Press: 3.
said: "When you finish your study in Beijing and come back, you will be a cadre in charge of the whole mine."
"I'm not up to that," Stone Wei simpered, and then hesitating for a while, he said again: "Besides, I... I don't have a pair of trousers..." Liu Zhi said: "Brother Wei, you can wear my trousers." Stone Wei said: "What a trouble if I take the rags off me and make you put them on. Well, you have the trousers and you can go instead of me!" As the result, Liu Zhi went. Later Liu Zhi became director of the mine, while Stone Wei remained a worker till his death.111

This is a piece of the anecdote about Stone Wei in the early period after the "liberation." Then we have the following presentation of the confidences exchanged between this worker and his wife:

No sooner had three days passed since Stone Wei returned from visiting his family in Henan Province, than his wife came at his heels, together with three children. Stone Wei was astonished: "How come you came here, too!" His old woman dared not speak truth and evaded his question. Stone Wei got mad: "Are you crazy to follow me here at my heels only after three days separation?" The

old woman then said: "It is not that I want to come here. They would force me to have the operation of sterilization if I stayed in the village. So I come to talk over this matter with you." Stone Wei was so provoked by this reply that the blue veins stood out on his neck: "You stupid woman! Don't you know how old you are? Even if I want you to have children, you won't be able to do that any more. How come they wanted you to have the operation of sterilization?" His wife broke into sobs, saying: "The cadres in our village said that sterilization was the instruction from above, and each village must achieve certain percentage in having this operation. So all women in our village ran to other places to take refuge... If I reject it, then I can't get the grain ration for next year."

Just as the excessive use of structural words "la" and "ah" on the part of Chen Jiangong is to pander to a taste for popular literature, so the reversion to the traditional omniscience in perspective shows his deliberateness in currying favour with the masses who do not have good literary appreciation. As soon as he abandoned the more sophisticated limited point of view, he was whole-heartedly engaged in building up the style in which phenomenal omniscient narrators are able to compare favourably with

112 Ibid., 76-77.
Chinese story-tellers in old days, or even to outdo them. He did not merely write: "Meng Bei (in "Phoenix Eyes") drove away Zhao Tao and stood as if in a trance at the wicket at which food was sold." In its stead, he let this sentence be preceded by a somewhat archaic phrase "qieshuo"\textsuperscript{113} (it is roughly equal to "let me put the topic back to the original track"), which immediately brings us back into an atmosphere characteristic of traditional novel -- "zhanghui xiaoshuo" [chapter-divided fiction].

Furthermore, the use of "you" in these three stories is so frequent that readers may possibly feel they are listening to a story-teller in an auditorium instead of reading a fictional work at home.

"Hardly had few days passed when Meng Bei standing at the wicket did she have Xin Xiaoliang punished. Don’t you think it was extraordinary?"\textsuperscript{114}

"If you are slack-witted, with the brain as inflexible as an gnarl on an elm, then you are doomed to suffer, to be taken as a laughingstock by other people."\textsuperscript{115}

True, the frequent intervention of this pronoun makes these stories

\textsuperscript{113} "Pheonix Eyes," \textit{Bewildering Firmament}: 104.

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., 96.

\textsuperscript{115} "After Death," \textit{Bewildering Firmament}: 73.
more intelligible for ordinary readers, but as a corollary, the artistic subtlety and refinement vanish at the same time.

He Zhiyun was acute. As he stressed the "essential" sameness of these two types of stories, he had already noticed the nuance in heroism due to the different points of view. In his opinion, Chen Jiangong did not totally identify himself with the characters like Old Man Wang and Stone Wei as he did with the heroes in stories of "Firmament" type. In his letter to Chen Jiangong he wrote: "You loved them (Old Man Wang and the like), felt sympathetic with them, yet meanwhile did not lack in bitter sarcasm and pungent criticism of them. It seems that you were not fond of them unconditionally. When you placed the kind-hearted Old Man Wang between the "troublemaker" Pi Debao and the fly-by-night Director Liu, and let him fabricate white lies to maintain the prestige of that untrustworthy leader even after being met with his irresponsible rebuff, didn't you actually express your deep dissatisfaction with his ridiculous brainlessness and his excessive meek submission? Although Stone Wei is considered by some critic to be 'a man of a gold heart having a complete allegiance to the Party,' that slip of note he preserves demonstrates to readers his foolishness and ignorance rather than his commendable belief."116

If the limitation in point of view prompted Chen Jiangong to

play a heroic role in stories of "Firmament" type, the omniscient perspective in narration in these three stories seemed to prepare a way for him to adopt a detached, humorous, and sarcastic manner. Indeed, he was no longer identical with his heroes. He began to overlook them with a satirical eye somewhat in the way Cervantes did to his Don Quixote. In spite of a slight heroic aura around Old Wang, Stone Wei, and Xin Xiaoliang, they are nevertheless not as perfect as positive protagonists in most of the stories written by him in the same period. Owing to the imperfection of characters — namely, owing to their tragic "sublimity" interwoven with comedic ludicrousness, Li Tuo\textsuperscript{117} and other critics therefore defined stories of "Rambling Chats" as "tragicomedy."\textsuperscript{118} That "A Troublemaker In West Beijing," "After Death," and "Phoenix Eyes" are important as juvenile stories is, in my opinion, chiefly because they portend a transitional possibility that incredible consummate heroes will be replaced by more credible flawed personages in Chen Jiangong's ensuing creative writings.

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\textsuperscript{117} A former associate editor-in-chief of Beijing Literature magazine.

\textsuperscript{118} For its detailed discussion, see next chapter.
"A Troublemaker in West Beijing" received fairly extensive critical attention after its publication. The acclaim as well as the encouragement from critics thus prompted Chen Jiangong to contrive such a general title as "Rambling Chats about Everything under the Sun," under which he issued in succession "After Death" and "Phoenix Eyes." Later, upon his graduation from Beijing University, he resumed to write the third story of this series, and almost two years thereafter, a fourth one.

Owing to the extreme similarity in subject matter, these two "Rambling Chats" stories -- "No. 9 Winch Handle Alley" [Luluba hutong jiuhao] and "Looking for Fun" [Zhaole] -- may well be regarded as companions to each other. For instance, both of them are set in a certain district in Beijing, or more specifically, a small road called Winch Handle Alley. It is said that there are two alleys of the same name in the city: one in the west, and other

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119 This is also the title of the epilogue to Selected Works of Chen Jiangong [Chen Jiangong xiaoshuo xuan], Beijing, October Literature Press, 1985.
in the south. What Chen Jiangong's stories describe is the latter one:

The alley is not very long, looking as if it was a winch handle above a well in former times, with a tiny curve in the middle. When the house number goes up to 9, it is just the place that goes around a curve, too. The facade of No. 9 is not splendid: there is not even a rock for mounting horses, to say nothing of decorative stone lions. However, the compound is the pride of our Capital -- it is a typical Beijing style quadrangle.120

This is where the story is going to happen in "No. 9 Winch Handle Alley." "Looking for Fun" also has the same alley as its locality. The only difference is its house number: it is No 10, that is, the big compound which faces directly the plain forefront of No. 9. The continuity, or relatedness, between these two stories would be clearer if the title of "Looking for Fun" were changed into "No. 10 Winch Handle Alley."

Suitable for this undignified place where there is not even a piece of rock for mounting horses are its residents of lower social strata. Their life, in particular that of the older generation, constitutes the major content of both the stories. Han

120 Chen Jiangong: "No. 9 Winch Handle Alley," Selected Works of Chen Jiangong, p.65.
Delai is a son of poor origins. When he is young, his family often runs short of money and he has to go begging in the village from door to door with a club to fend off dogs. Starving to death, he luckily meets Uncle Li, a kind-hearted old man who, having given him a piece of red potato and taught him some passages from the opera *Lotus*, finally takes him out of the famine-ridden countryside. It is true that this former mendicant has good luck during the Cultural Revolution: being chosen as a "worker propagandist" and even shaking hands with Chairman Mao, but his real status before retirement remains a caretaker of boilers in a paper mill. Li Zhongxiang, another old fellow with his chest and stomach thrust out and hips tucked in while walking, used to be a coffin carrier. Besides, he also works at different times as a pedicab driver, a waiter, plus quite a few other jobs. The greatest success in all his life is, pitiably, no better than becoming a doorman for a famous theatre in Beijing.

The more decorous persons living at No. 9 and No. 10 compounds are perhaps Old Man He and He Xin. Old Man He is quite well-off. In the Cultural Revolution his household is searched by the Red Guards; the confiscated metal items are so plentiful they can even make an exhibition. When the policy is carried out that the money and property expropriated should be returned to original owners and he is compensated in cash for all his forfeited things, his son Stinky buys a motorcycle and thus all of a sudden becomes a celebrity in the alley. Yet Old Man He is far from being a well-
educated gentleman. Upon his re-appearance in "Looking for Fun," he is simply an oldtimer having nothing to do but sitting in a little cranny of the Bean Street Cultural Club to beguile his remaining years with "sawing away" on an erhu [a type of Chinese stringed instruments].

He Xin, to be sure, is by no means more honourable. Although he is an instructor at Qing Hua University and has even published a book "as thick as a brick," his conduct is actually not much different from that of people of lower levels. Perturbed by his wife, a notorious shrew pasting cardboard boxes for a small factory, he is unable to be engaged in academic work and has to kill time in the Cultural Club -- a stamping-ground for oldtimers, with Li Zhongxiang and Qiao Wangyou as his constant companions.

Can we go a step further: Han Delai and Li Zhongxiang, the two old men from the bottom of the society, are variations derived from the same prototype? Han Delai is good at singing The Fourth Son Visiting His Mother [Silang tanmu], "his pronunciation being correct, his voice mellow and full;" (98) while Li Zhongxiang loves Beijing opera so much that he is adept in a variety of tunes such

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121 Old Man He is also a character in "No. 9 Winch Handle Alley."

122 Chen Jiangong, "Looking For Fun," Selected Works of Chen Jiangong, 130. Further references of this story are put in parentheses in the text.
as the ones from Eight Big Hammers [Badachui], Spring in a Beautiful Hall [Yutang chun], Qin Xianglian, and The Censuring of Wang Kui [Yize wangkui]. Han Delai likes to sit on a small stool in his doorway to tell a tall story or two, with a cup of tea being held in his hand; while Li Zhongxiang, "still as cocky as a young whippersnapper," is no inferior as a braggart. Certainly, the ephemeral appearance of the former in "Looking for Fun" reveals on one hand that he is not the same person as the latter; yet on the other hand, it betrays unwittingly the direction of his development: his life eventually continues to last in the person by the name of Li Zhongxiang. If Hai Delai is a contorted, or somewhat exaggerated "flat character" in an extremely politically alienated circumstances, it may be that his counterpart in "Looking for Fun" is a revelation of the normal aspects of his personality in an ordinary millieu.

Of course, this is simply my personal conjecture, which may be rather subjective. But no matter how different these two stories are from Chen Jiangong's earlier works in subject matter, no matter how identical they are with each other in background and characterization, these contribute little to the constitution of the uniqueness which they both share in common. In fact, their distinctive generality largely results from an acquisition and application of the sense of tragicomedy -- a detached and perspicacious outlook on life.

If "A Troublemaker in West Beijing," "After Death,"
and "No. 9 Winch Handle Alley" are compared, one will probably find quite a few similarities in their overall structure and mode of expression. They are all outcomes of the author's same aesthetic standards, though "After Death" is more mature than "A Troublemaker in West Beijing" and "No. 9 Winch Handle Alley" is better than "After Death." For example, all these three stories adopt a method of what is called "tragicomedy," that is, the author writes of a tragedy on the whole, or endows his fiction with a certain tragic element, while in part it is still comedic, full of ridiculous plots and details. This artistic characteristic begins with "A Troublemaker in West Beijing," and is rendered more conspicuous in "After Death" and "No. 9 Winch Handle Alley." Although the latter two stories succeed in portraying Stone Wei and Hai Delai as typical figures with different features and idiosyncrasies, the method Chen Jiangong made use of in writing them is unlike that employed in traditional fiction. He saw some funny aspects in the persons of these two characters: they are often mocked by other people in life and caught in awkward situations; they have certain things in their personality that are incongruous with the times and milieu in which they live. This kind of incongruity, though absurd and facetious in concrete matters, is deplorable, as far as their fate and prospect are concerned. Whether it is Stone Wei's
stubbornness and honesty, or Han Delai's showing-off proclivity branded by the "leftism," a reader is sure to frown and meditate upon it when he finds out that its ridiculousness is rather bitter and astringent.\textsuperscript{123}

"Looking for Fun" would have certainly been included in the genre in question if Li Tuo had written this critical survey from which the above excerpt is taken a few years later. Partly because of his stature as an influential critic, partly because of the vagueness and allusiveness it bears when applied as a non-political term, "tragicomedy" has become popular in study of contemporary Chinese fiction, particularly Chen Jiangong's oeuvre. Since the publication of Li Tuo's essay, more and more critics have paid attention to this "new" literary phenomenon. He Zhiyun spared no effort in his further explication of its nature typical in the stories Chen Jiangong wrote; Wang Xuezhong even issued a thesis on this subject, "On the tragicomedy of Chen Jiangong's fiction,"\textsuperscript{124} in which he develops the argument Li Tuo made into a detailed, though not very cogent, analysis. Nor has Chen Jiangong himself seemed to be able to avoid the topic. When he visited Hong Kong, he specially addressed an audience with a lecture under the title

\textsuperscript{123} Li Tuo, "The Various Types of Stories" [Geshi geyang de xiaoshuo], \textit{October}, No. 2, 1982, p.245.

\textsuperscript{124} See \textit{Beijing Literature}, No. 7, 1985: 77-79.
"The Tragicomedy: its Possibility and Struggle" [Beixiju: keneng yu zhengzha].

Concerning the fiction characteristic of tragicomedy, Chen Jiangong and Li Tuo are essentially at variance, though in a hardly perceptible way. According to the previous quotation, it is clear that Li Tuo's explanation is no different from the general definition in ordinary literary dictionaries, that is, a tragedy as a whole plus partial comedy(s). So evidently, his focus of attention is in large measure concentrated on mode of representation. What Chen Jiangong underscores in this regard, however, is more than mere technical matters. He is chiefly concerned with an attitude toward, or an understanding of, life and society, which he thought should be obtained by writers. In other words, he is chiefly concerned with the sense of tragicomedy. The sense of tragicomedy, as he interpreted it, is actually a perception by which "one is able to transcend tragic reality and do whatever one likes with life on a higher overlooking plane," and by which, moreover, "one is able to be sceptical of the existing state so as to acquire a constant sense of crisis and see absurdity and sadness through a superficially happy life." 


126 Ibid., 75.
That Beijingers talk of death in an optimistic way is perhaps relevant in this case. They do not say: "So-and-so died." They have euphemisms to express this sorrowful notion: "He is gone to hear crickets chirp," or "he is gone to the chimney alley," or "he's gone to enjoy the only pleasure in all his life as a camel does when it gets on a cart," and so forth.\textsuperscript{127} The more appropriate example to illustrate Chen Jiangong's viewpoint is a passage from a comic dialogue called \textit{The Precious Kang}\textsuperscript{128} \textit{[Baokang]} which is cited by himself in the speech made in Hong Kong:

A: Our folks at home can't suffer from hunger; we have never had a taste of it.

B: Your family must have plenty of grain.

A: No, we don't have much grain. But we have a precious \textit{kang}. Lying on it, you'll be full at once if you are hungry.

B: Why, this is really a precious \textit{kang}. Could you tell me how to make it? I want to have one of our own.

A: It's simple. Go back to your home to pull down the old \textit{kang} and re-build it.

\textsuperscript{127} Ibid., 75.

\textsuperscript{128} A "\textit{kang}" is a Northern Chinese bed made of adobe bricks under which a fire can be built.
B: How to do it?
A: With one side a little higher and the other side a little lower, that's it.
B: That's it? It will thus become a precious kang?
A: Exactly. If you've just had meal -- that's actually not our concern -- you may lie on it putting your head on the higher end and legs on the lower one. When you're hungry, what you should do is just the opposite -- put your head on the lower end and legs on the higher one. Isn't it good enough?
B: Oh, -- to make the food come back!\textsuperscript{129}

Can "A Troublemaker in West Beijing" and "After Death" be considered stories which have the sense of tragicomedy? Although both of them indeed adopt a method characteristic of this genre, it is not necessarily that they are written in the mode of what Chen Jiangong means by that term. Actually, Wang Fengxiang's apoplexy and Stone Wei's sacrifice manifest the author's indignant protest out of a sense of righteousness rather than his "transcendence over tragic reality" and "ascent to the higher plane that can overlook human life." So in my view, these two stories can at most claim to be the ones which have been "treated" by tragicomic techniques.

\textsuperscript{129} Ibid., 75.
Chen Jiangong wrote:

In the eye of some shallow writers, tragicomedy is indeed a mere "treatment." They do not realize that it is a philosophy, or an outlook on life. Writers of "the school of absurdity," for instance, simply take "absurdity" as such a thing, believing that they are surely able to keep abreast with Eugene Ionesco provided they trundle monsters and demons. In their hands, therefore, tragicomedy is nothing but a scoop of condiments. What they write behind its camouflage is virtually still Stories to Awaken Men [Xingshi hengyan].

This criticism of the "shallow writers" is perhaps applicable to his own stories, "A Troublemaker in West Beijing" and "After Death." To regard them as modern Stories to Awaken Men is not at all inappropriate. If Li Tuo took these two works of fiction as examples whose techniques are typical of tragicomedy, then in terms of what Chen Jiangong defined six or seven years later, one has a

\[130\] Ibid., 77.

\[131\] A novel written by Feng Menglong in the Ming dynasty. Some of his stories, for example, "The Pearl-sewn Shirt" [Jiangxingge chonghui zhenzhushan], have been translated by Cyril Birch. See Birch: Stories from a Ming Collection, New York: Grove Press, 1958.
good reason to dismiss them as shoddy pieces of this kind. Strictly speaking, his stories with the sense of tragicomedy began with "No. 9 Winch Handle Alley."

One of the notable features of "No. 9 Winch Handle Alley" is its combination of tragic substance with a light, comic narrative. Take the typical quadrangle for instance. It used to be "a pride of the Capital," but after the start of the Cultural Revolution, it has ceased to exist except in name owing to rapid increase in population and stagnation in municipal housing construction. Not only Beijingers, but residents in other big cities, were all greatly perturbed by the problem of their accommodation. However Chen Jiangong seems no longer filled with indignation facing this deplorable reality resulting from ten years of the civil turmoil, quite unlike how he used to appear in his earlier fiction. Acute but scornful, insightful yet pessimistic, he appears as if he has already seen through incorrigibleness of the society.

"Have you ever seen a quadrangle?" he thus started "No. 9 Winch Handle Alley." In his view, a few words about the quadrangle that can display his humour as well as knowledge is perhaps not digressive, since such kind of compound is the stage on which his fictional figures are going to make their performance. "According to the study of an architect," he continued, "The Temple of Heaven was made in imitation of the sky, Sidney Theatre in imitation of the sea, The Pagoda of Kuwait in imitation of the moon, and the Sears skyscraper in Chicago in imitation of mountains. Then, how about the quadrangle? Someone says that it followed in pattern the
array of men holding their children hand in hand. Hey, what a human explanation this is! It makes us common people living therein feel joyful all of a sudden." (65-66)

To compare the quadrangle to world-famous buildings has already been surprising; but this did not suffice for Chen Jiangong. Once again, he ridiculed it via further personification: "However, it is not so appropriate to say 'men holding their children hand in hand' as to put it in another way, 'men carrying their children in arms.' If you don’t believe, you should come and take a look. Undeniably, 'quadrangular walls' still stand as they were, but can you catch sight of 'compounds?' They are all stuffed with simple cabins or shacks put up by people living in there. What if it's not men carrying their children in arms?'... Well, of course, there is no alternative for us. Since China has become more and more large in population, it is unable to hold its children hand in hand any more. The only way out is, undoubtedly, to carry them in arms." (66) With the plight of people taken as a laughingstock, it is clear that Chen Jiangong intended to produce an effect of "laughter in tears." 132

This is one of few examples to show the sense of tragicomedy by way of authorial direct intrusion. In "No. 9 Winch Handle Alley," Chen Jiangong as an overt narrator is actually not very

much visible. Instead of always assuming the responsibility of an officious commentator, he is detached sometimes, letting the ludicrous protagonist Han Delai display to the full his ignorance through his own talk, which is ridiculous to be sure, but in the meantime, also pitiable:

"How terrible, you know, if we workers had not gone to universities to reorganize them!" Old Man Han began to talk about his "stationing" once again. "They were all bastards of capitalists and landlords, corrupted and even taking part in what was called 'Fetofi' (Petofi) club. Earlier I had been ignorant, mistaking the club as a place where you can worship something like a pig. Actually it was far from being that. All cultured guys there read books about adultery. One of them called Thunderstorm [a famous play by Cao Yu which was translated into English by Wang Zuoliang] is written of a whole family making adultery on a raining day and a brother raping his younger sister! How disgraceful it was! I gave them a good lesson: this place of yours is filled with loose women! But they didn't believe me. So what do you think would have happened if we workers hadn't gone there to manage them?" (68)

Another example is Han Delai's "brilliant" remark about the deficit. It is elicited when he sees his neighbours living at the
same compound quite in a flurry, being afraid of a potential inflation which may be caused by the thing they do not quite understand:

"... Whether red deficit or white deficit, you don't have to worry. I tell you, everything is all right in our country! Otherwise, why are newspapers always talking about good situations? Can it be that they are all nonsense? Take water as an example. Even such a thing in China sells! Haven't you ever heard that at Mount Lao, Shandong Province, the water makes fortunes! You get a bottle, fill it with water, put in front of a foreigner, and then he'll pay you! Well, water is inexhaustible; it alone enables you to be in the money. So a leading cadre has said that from now on every household should keep glass bottles in good care and don't waste them any more. At present, water is enough. The problem is that we don't have sufficient glass bottles. If there were more of them, the money would flow in like water from the sea! Four modernizations? Eight would already be realized!..." (73)

Pretentiously optimistic as he is in his bragging, Han Delai's lack of rudimentary knowledge, particularly his mispronunciation of "Petofi," misconception of Thunderstorm, as well as misconception of the "four modernizations,"betrays his
irretrievable tragicness as an ignoramus.

The tragicness, to be sure, is not the definition Aristotle gives to the word in his *Poetics*: namely, a good man falling from success into adversity. Han Delai is by no manner of means a good man, and it is natural that his fate, no matter how changeable, has nothing to do with the tragedy in classical sense. What I mean by "tragicness" is quite loose, mainly referring to the "pathos" demonstrated either by characters or events. Both the above-cited monologues by Han Delai may have well served as suitable illustrations.

Actually, similar examples can be seen everywhere in "No. 9 Winch Handle Alley:" they are too numerous to be quoted one by one. Yet they are rather partial and superficial. The reason I think that Chen Jiangong's fiction with the real sense of tragicomedy begins with "No. 9 Winch Handle Alley" is not merely because of these partial and superficial treatment he made in the story, but mainly because of his overall and substantial grasp of depressing reality with a comedic attitude. Certainly, this sense of tragicomedy entails a deep understanding of the work.

One has to admit that a full analysis or interpretation has not yet been made so far of "No. 9 Winch Handle Alley." "Since its publication," a critic observed, "it seems that this story has not received sufficient critical attention."133 The only essay written

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specially for its discussion is probably the one by Li Guixian, entitled "Watch Out: This Spectre Is Still Wandering" [Jingti: zhege youling haizai youdang]. The other fragmentary commentaries are scattered in articles respectively by Li Tuo, Qian Guangpei and He Zhiyun.

He Zhiyun said: "This third work of the 'Rambling Chats' series, owing to its profundity in thought and substantiality in content, and also owing to its vitality, vivacity, consistency, and harmony in artistic representation... is much better than his other stories, qualified for literature of high order." This is what he wrote in 1982. Unquestionably, "his other stories" in the context refers to Chen Jiangong's earlier creative works, exclusive of "Looking for Fun" and "Curlylocks" which came into being much later. It was the sagacity of He Zhiyun that he did not limit himself to a mere interpretation of its social significance. His judgement in terms of the literary merits of the story showed his insight as a conscientious critic, though what he meant by "profundity in thought" and "substantiality in content" is a bit too sweeping, awaiting more convincing expounding.


At any rate, I agree with him at least on one point: "No. 9 Winch Handle Alley" was Chen Jiangong's best story before 1982. A product of Lao She's, and especially, Lu Xun's influence, which I have mentioned in the first chapter, this story is an imitation of *A True Story of Ah Q* chiefly by virtue of its satirical phraseology as well as general artistic framework. Like the latter, which is both a real portrayal of a benighted peasant during the period of the 1911 Revolution and a metaphoric satire of Chinese national character, "No. 9 Winch Handle Alley" is realistic on one hand, and allegoric on the other. If it is not "blasphemous" to Lu Xun, we may even as well say that it is a contemporary *A True Story of Ah Q*. Only when we realize its twofold layers, especially that of allegorization, can we fully appreciate at a deeper level its sense of tragicomedy.

The appropriateness of He Zhiyun's general evaluation of "No. 9 Winch Handle Alley" did not imply his thoughtful understanding of this story. His unconvincing view resulted in a large measure from his deliberate rejection of its allegoric meaning: he only took it as a work of realism, which, holding its mirror up to reality like a great deal of short stories at that period, faithfully records the situation of Chinese populace mentally persecuted by "leftism." In his opinion, Han Delai is not at all a symbol of totalitarianism. Along with his neighbours of No. 9 Winch Handle Alley, this old codger himself is too a victim of politics. He remarked:
It is undeniable that he has his golden age for a time when he gets a meteoric rise in social status. But if we had visited him before the ten years of the disturbance, would we have been able to differentiate him from people who lived nearby? Isn't it that we also see, after his ephemeral ascent, his inexplicable falling that is so awkward and miserable? There is nothing but that crazy political storm which can account for the vicissitude of his fortunes, just as it accounts for the suffering and rehabilitation of Widow Feng, the old couple of the Hes, and the couple of the Wangs.\textsuperscript{136}

He Zhiyun is not alone in interpreting this story only from the realistic standpoint. When Li Tuo asserted the impossibility of the plot in which Han Delai resells tickets before a movie theatre, he in fact also cast his eye on the surface of realism. I do not mean to deny the realistic aspect of "No. 9 Winch Handle Alley." As a lifelike character, Han Delai is credible with his distinctive personality and peculiarities, especially with his distorted mentality moulded by "leftism." A great many people were then indeed swayed by politics in China the way he is. At this point, He Zhiyun should not be considered incorrect in his criticism, and one can even corroborate his argument by saying that the basic method Chen Jiangong employed to write his story does not

\textsuperscript{136} Ibid., 67.
go a single step beyond realistic scope. Truly, "No. 9 Winch Handle Alley" is blown up in some places, but it is by no means unrealistically burlesque, let alone to rank it as a work of the school of absurdity (the opinion that the story is mixed up with the absurd elements is debatable). The incident of Han Delai's reselling film tickets, contrary to what Li Tuo tried to convince us, is quite feasible: Chen Jiangong himself did see in person an old man do such kind of thing in front of a movie theatre. Moreover, fiction, like "poetry" expounded by Aristotle, is different from history in that it is allowed to describe the thing which, though not necessarily happened in reality, is acceptable within the limits of human experience and imagination. However, realism is not enough to interpret "No. 9 Winch Handle Alley." It is, on a higher level, also allegoric. An analysis attempting to explore its symbolism is made by Li Guixian, though in his article he still did not completely avoid political cliches. Perhaps he was the only critic who held that the obsession of Han Delai -- a close homonym of "haidelai" [still will come back] -- with "left" apparition is metaphorically significant. At this distance we feel he is right. However, even Chen Jiangong himself did not take him seriously then. It was a surprise to him, he said, that the name of Han Delai was so ingeniously explained as something with a politically implied meaning. Li Guixian, to be sure, did not talk nonsense; his insightful view will be more easily agreeable especially when the fact has been noticed that "No. 9 Winch Handle Alley" was issued immediately after the
denunciation of Bai Hua's film script *Bitter Love* [Kulian] on national scale in 1981.¹³⁷

One can be even more excessive than Li Guixian by taking the title as a metaphor. Possibly, this will too make Chen Jiangong surprised. But anyway, a published artistic work is an independent entity, and a critic is entitled to express his own opinion on it, no matter how unacceptable it may be to the author. What is worth noticing here, it seems, is that the title is carefully composed. Why is it Winch Handle Alley instead of any other one? Why is it No. 9 instead of No. 1 or No. 10? Although "Winch Handle Alley" and "9" are not obviously related, they are nevertheless on one point accidentally identical. This has actually been made clear in the story by the author himself:

"The alley is not very long, looking as if it is a winch handle above a well in former times, with a tiny curve in the middle. When the house number goes up to 9, it is just the place that goes round a curve, too." (65)

Not only No. 9 house is right on the curved location, but also "Winch Handle" and "9" are both curved in the very shape of themselves. Thus, the Chinese ideograms and Arabian numeral in the title combine to produce an association that there is in it

¹³⁷ For a detailed discussion, see M.S. Duke, *Blooming and Contending*, University of Indiana Press, 1985: chapter 5.
something crooked, or zigzag, or even bending. Such an association, when put into a proper historical background, has clearly a political reference the way the homonym "haidelai" does, though the latter is more direct and evident.

Of course, our explanation of the title and the name of Han Delai would be too trivial and far-fetched but for the allegoric meaning of the story itself. To understand "No. 9 Winch Handle Alley" at a symbolic level requires a rough knowledge of the Cultural Revolution and its aftermath, just as an adequate realization of the history around the 1911 Revolution as well as Chinese nationalism is essential to understand allusions in A True Story of Ah Q. Lu Xun's novella, though an unparalleled classic in modern Chinese literature, is not completely permanent, generic, and cosmopolitan in its implication. Certainly, Chen Jiangong did not exceed his master in this respect, being engaged in creative writing totally under his huge shadow. "No. 9 Winch Handle Alley," as far as its allegory is concerned, is still historical, specific, and national.

Maybe this is where Chinese and Western writers differentiate themselves from each other. It seems that Chen Jiangong himself was also quite conscious of this disparity, as he asserted in "Tragicomedy: a possibility and Struggle:" "In general, the most wonted mode of expression for the writers on Mainland China is still realism... [Their] tragicomedy is more concerned with the process of history and state of existence, and what they like to present is a sentimental pattern after the mission and
responsibility have been re-established... This type of sentimental pattern...is sceptical in essence, but simultaneously, is patriotically lingering and melancholy."  

Contrarily, Western writers, from his opinion, "appear as if they have smashed the realistic world with their resolute will, and then by means of singular imagination and witty language, they re-create a tragicomedy of fantasized cosmos to express their overall grasp of human civilization and its prospect, as well as their philosophical outlook on the lunatic, twisted and indifferent reality in which they live." Indeed, there exist such representative works as The Castle, Lord of the Flies, and Catch-22 produced respectively by the forerunner of expressionism Franz Kafka, the winner of the Nobel Prize for literature William Golding, and the master of black humour Joseph Heller, and they may well serve as illustrations for what Chen Jiangong meant about Western writers in his above-cited excerpt. Nevertheless, Chinese authors do not have to feel inferior: their creative writing has its own value. There is no denying that the allegory in "No. 9 Winch Handle Alley," in spite of the limitation, has still an excellence, which chiefly lies in its noticeable relevancy with


\[139\] Ibid., 77.
certain aspects in China's social framework.\textsuperscript{140}

At the allegoric layer, the tiny quadrangle of No. 9 Winch Handle Alley stands for the entire Chinese society. This miniature, instead of being as rich and colourful as the symbolic Yoknapatawpha County in Faulkner's fiction, is purposely monochrome, aimed at the presentation of abnormal human relations under dictatorship. It is sheerly a totalitarian world, in which almost all social communications and activities are politically tinged.

There are only two opposite kinds of people in it: the governor and the governed, or rather, the bullying autocrats and humiliated populace. Representing the latter kind are the people like Widow Feng, the old couple of the Hes, the couple of the Wangs, and Zhang Chunyuan. They are, to be sure, not the same characters. Widow Feng is hard to please, the old couple of the Hes are submissive, Zhang Chunyuan is thoughtful and knowledgeable, the couple of the Wangs are of phlegmatic temperament. Sometimes, they have even discord and friction with each other. For instance, Zhang Chunyuan's refusal to install in his home a meter for

measuring electricity gives rise to Widow Feng's resentment, and
the malice which Old Lady He bears towards the small room, whose
shape is like an edge of knife, eventually involves the tenant
living in there.

But after all, to quote what Mao said in his well-known
article, they are still "non-antagonistic contradictions," and
whatever happens among them, they as the governed people have their
own common benefit, and, too, their own common enemy -- that is,
Han Delai. When Han Delai looks triumphant because of resurgence
of the "left" force, there is in the story such a description of
the apprehension of Old Lady He and Widow Feng as follows:

Especially Old Lady He. The door of the "knife-edge
looking" room is, after all, right opposite to that of
her own. If Zhang Chunyuan is down on his luck, who can
say for sure that the northern room in which her family
lives won't be involved? Things like that has already
happened before! When she met Han Delai, his malicious
remarks made her even more scared. Bourgeoisie?
Retaliation? Who do they refer to? Is it possible they
refer to us? Worship foreign things? It must be directed
at Stinky. Thinking of this, she hated Zhang Chunyuan for
courting disaster and bringing it to neighbours, but she
even more resented Han Delai. He would never let go any
opportunity to cause people troubles if he saw them
living a happy life. Isn't he too abominable!
As for Widow Feng, she had already gone back to her room, listless, uttering no words all the afternoon. In the evening when her son was back home, she immediately fired a volley of abusive scolding at him: "What for you come home? Why don't you go back to the factory to work yourself to the bone! I brought you up and never lived a single day at peace. In summer I stitched your shirts; in winter I sewed up your padded jacket. For what? For what? Was it for you -- a man of forty years old now -- looking for troubles so that I won't be able to die with my eyes closed?

The son was confounded: "What's going on with you?"

"What's going on? I don't understand why you like to take the responsibility of something like a director of the factory. Being a worker is good enough! Election, election, now, it'll soon be your turn to be slammed..."

The son said, smiling: "It's impossible. The higher-ups have said that there will be no political movement." Widow Feng had not at all been convinced and still went on with her complaints against him. Being worried about the things related to the factory, Da Shan felt quite at unease with his mother's babbles going on and on for nothing but those purely fabricated by her imagination. He then said: "It's not me alone that's worth your talking-to! If a movement is launched, don't think you will be innocent!... You're all day long
dishonouring "the Communist Party" as a "labour party," and aren't you aware that the walls have ears? Well, if I'm stupid, how about you?...

This was really effective and Widow Feng didn't speak any more. Only after quite a long interval did she get up to clear away the bowls and chopsticks for the supper. She said to herself: "How different will it be from the days when 'the Gang of Four' were in power, if there is really a movement? The hard workers who get up early and sleep late shall have their bad luck? And the sneaky lazy guys doing nothing good at all will be on the loose?... Even an old woman so advanced in years as me has to hold her tongue carefully, otherwise she will possibly be branded as a counter-revolutionary?..." When she was so thinking, she grew rather annoyed with the stuff Han Delai had played up, and meanwhile began to feel somewhat sympathetic with Zhang Chunyuan. As for his refusal to install a meter which had cost her extra money in electricity payment, she even forgot it at that moment. (89-91)

It is not surprising that Han Delai's success, or delight, should purport a disaster, or suffering, for the people who are in so close proximity as to be his victims. Because, obviously, he embodies the ones who persecutes populace -- namely, autocrats. I am convinced that Chen Jiangong, as he was writing "No. 9 Winch
Handle Alley," was quite conscious of its nature as a political parable. Despite He Zhiyun's plausible defence that Han Delai is also a sufferer of "left" line, his view was not confirmed by the author himself. Instead, in his open letter to this critic, Chen Jiangong argues that what he did in the story was "a social and historical examination," and what he was concerned was "the Chinese society after a decade of catastrophe -- a social atmosphere that is indicative of the desire of the general public for a stable situation on one hand, and on the other hand, of their palpable lingering apprehension." In another words, he implied that there was still to common people a potential menace constituted by the existence of autocrats, though some of them have fallen out of power temporarily.

This is perhaps conducive to our understanding of his motive of moulding Han Delai into an allegoric character of totalitarianism. Han Delai, since his meteoric rise from a starving beggar in the countryside to an honoured guest at Zhongnanhai (possibly an allusion to the C.C.P. as a political upstart), has actually become a pretentious, but still rather ignorant, dictator in a symbolic sense. He is an eulogist of the Cultural Revolution, a supporter of the bloody crackdown in Tiananman Square in 1976, a blind optimist of China's economic reform, and an obstinate vanguard for the restoration of "leftism." In the very person of

this character, a rough image of the Party -- a collective dictatorship -- since the calamitous civil turmoil in the mid-1960s is thus cleverly delineated.

His relations with neighbours is literally that of a ruler with his subjects. Once the old couple of the Hes cease to report to him their thought, Widow Feng ceases to flatter him with "ganqing," and the couple of the Wangs cease to listen to him with respectful attention, he feels as if he lost his former prestige and superiority. This kind of sovereign, when he is in power, brings disaster to people, and when he loses power, can only but be an encumbrance, of which Han Delai's later enjoying himself by reselling film tickets for nothing is no doubt a good painting.

Only by understanding the symbolic meaning of "No. 9 Winch Handle Alley" can one appreciate more fully its sense of tragicomedy. In style, the whole story is lively and humorous, yet its theme is of the miserable suffering of Chinese people under the reign of autocracy. This mode of representation analogous to the technique of irony is reminiscent of Yang Jiang's *Six Chapters From Life Downunder* [Ganxiao liuji], in which this female author's sentimentality is conveyed in a marked understatement.

Before committing suicide, her son-in-law Deyi says to her: "Mama, I can't have a bad attitude toward the masses, nor can I talk back to the Propaganda Team, but that doesn't mean that I'm prepared to fabricate a roster and get other people into trouble.
And I'm not about to start lying." 142 When the leaders of worker propagandists forced him to write out a name list three times a day, Deyi killed himself. The tragic suicide of her son-in-law is so unemotionally narrated as though she were mentioning a stranger, she once saw in the street. She gives vent to her feeling probably only in one place in her book where she writes of the famous scholar Yu Pingbo and his wife setting out for countryside to remould themselves: "The departees closed up ranks, with the poet/scholar Yu Pingbo and his wife taking their place at the head of the column, and set out under the red flag. The sight of a revered scholar in his seventies who had to line up like a schoolchild to go to the cadre school was more than I could bear. I turned and headed home..." 143 But it is still a very restrained, very subdued recital. To some extent, I believe, what Chen Jiangong means by the sense of tragicomedy is close to that calm and detached style created by Yang Jiang in understating the unpleasant substance in her little meaningful memoir.

"Ganqing" [really] is a colloquialism prevailing in the district of Beijing. If "gan" is pronounced longer and with an


143 Ibid, 12.
affected sweetness, and "qing" lightly touched and with a quick cut-off, then, according to the author, it will sound emotional. "When somebody is saying something, you can at once take up his conversation by replying: 'Gan-qing!' This is equal to say: 'exactly!' Or: 'Isn't this a sure thing?' Or even in some measure: 'Every sentence you've been speaking is truth.'" (64) But this gleeful interjection, when uttered by Widow Feng, virtually manifests a sadness. An inflexible old woman who is not easy to get along with, she usually grudges using it. One hardly hears, for instance, her speak with her son in such an affectionally flattery way, although the latter is in charge of a factory. Instead, her scolding of him is quite frequent:

"Huh, you're out all day long and only know coming home to eat and sleep. Isn't it you take the home as a motel? You leave the light on at night to waste electricity, but you're simply a so unimportant functionary as a worthless director of a factory. Splendid? Bullshit!" (65)

However, she will lose no chance to chip in with this expression whenever Han Delai strikes up a conversation. Once Han Delai is lavishing praise on the international impact of the Cultural Revolution:

"Do you know, elder sister, there have even risen in revolt the Red Guards in the Imperialistic America
and the Revisionist Soviet!" Han Delai changed his topic to an international issue. "Boy! How brilliant our Cultural Revolution is! It won't take long, you'll be able to wait and see, that Khrushchev (he only knew Khrushchev) and Nixon shall be taken on to a platform and slammed, with plates hanging around their necks...

(68)

Widow Feng immediately chimes in, giggling: "Ganqing!" Readers may perhaps be confused: are his ignorant fallacies really worth her endorsement? This is not the case, of course. As I have pointed out previously, Han Delai is not merely an ordinary resident living at No. 9 Winch Handle Alley, but more importantly, a symbol of the ruling class (the way he talks sounds official too: instead of saying "the Cultural Revolution," he says "our Cultural Revolution;" instead of saying "the United States" and "the Soviet Russia," he says "the Imperialistic America" and "the Revisionist Soviet"). It is largely because of his stature as a horrible incarnation of dictatorship rather than the appealing of the ridiculous conversation itself that he is able to pose himself as an authority to his listener. Widow Feng, from her words and deeds in other occasions, is quite incredulous, and it is obvious that she can not be so silly as to take what Han Delai says as "truth." When she pays him a compliment by using the sycophantic "ganqing," she simply means to make a gesture of her ready submission to the tyranny. As a result, her habitual colloquialism, in spite of its...
seeming merriment which is capable of showing her respectful
docility to that "honoured guest at Zhongnanhai," only makes one
feel pitiful for the depression of people living under the enormity
of political pressure.

The most comedic and bitter scene in the story, which is
symbolic of the totalitarianists reigning over the country and
common people having no alternative but submission, is of Widow
Feng’s shaking hands with Han Delai:

The day he shook hands with Chairman Mao, Han Delai
didn't wash his hands from morn till eve when he was back
home. As soon as he stepped into the doorway of the
quadrangle, he shouted at the top of his voice: "I've
been shaking hands with Chairman Mao!" This sensational
news stirred up the people living either inside or
outside the quadrangle -- male and female, old and young
-- to shake hands with him. Who didn't want to be blessed
by touching something celestial? The Widow Feng living
in the western room is no exception either. Having rushed
out to Han Delai, she grabbed one of his hands and rubbed
it with all her strength. It was from this day on that
she was no longer able to boast, as she used to, of her
persistent honourable chastity: "For a human being, is
it easy? Nowadays young ladies stroll in the street
together with their boyfriends, and even arm in arm.
Isn't it a disgrace! Who else is able to be like me,
faithful to the dead husband all my life without touching a single fine hair on other men! Is it easy?" (67)

When a woman who has been in widowhood for scores of years is finally compelled to break her "chastity" due to Mao's infinite despotic power, isn't it a big joke?!

The upheavals inside the power center greatly affected common people of all strata in the society, of which No. 9 Winch Handle Alley is a miniaturized picture. Like a barometer, Han Delai is very sensitive in reflecting the fluctuation of the autocratic regime from its prosperity to its decline, and then again, from its decline to its prosperity. Taking an advantage of the Cultural Revolution, he puts all his neighbours at the same quadrangle under his control. The couple of the Wangs stand awe-stricken to listen to his "instruction," even if it is "full of crap;" (70) Widow Feng dedicates to him her "gangqing" so in time that it has virtually become "his indispensable fourth meal;" (70) Zhang Chunyuan, though a sober intellectual, "loses the courage he used to have to express opinions in front of him." Let alone the old couple of the Hes: because they are "problematic" in personal history, they have to report to him their thought regularly.

Nevertheless, Han Delai loses his position as head of the quadrangle with Mao's death and the downfall of the Gang of Four. He then feels as if he were dragged into a dire straits, in which he is quite impotent. Even Old Man He who used to be always obsequious to him in the Cultural Revolution now hardly pays him
any respect. This situation of his is vividly described by the tune he sings from the Beijing opera *Four Mothers Visiting their Husbands*:

Recalling my former prestige, how pitiable I am at present!

Like a caged bird, I can't flutter though I still have my wings with me. (78, 98)

However, the residents at No. 9 quadrangle will still live in a constant fear as long as Han Delai exists, just as Chinese people are bound to be haunted by Mao's threatening prophecy that a political movement occurs every seven or eight years. When the "left" force revives, he again puts on his authoritative airs which is almost comparable to that as he comes back home after having had the state banquet at Zhongnanhai. It recurs, therefore, that his remarks are as effective as an imperial edict, and he is capable of acting like a wirepuller to make puppets on stage perform one tragedy after another. One of his victims is Zhang Chunyuan, a serious young man who has been practising creative writing for many years. When Han Delai is making the opportunity of "Bai Hua Incident" to denounce "liberalized" intellectuals, a slim chance appears for this would-be writer: one of his stories will possibly be published. But in such an unfavourable situation, his promising story finally aborts. This episode, though full of humour and making one burst out laughing, actually records the "neurosis" of
the Chinese people's fear of political persecution.

If in "No. 9 Winch Handle Alley" the sense of tragicomedy is indirect, mainly displayed through its allegory, then it becomes relatively direct and hence relatively conspicuous in "Looking for Fun." The author inserted the whole story which is tragic into a comedic frame. Nominally, what he writes about is "looking for fun," yet in fact, it is the deplorable situation of the people living at the bottom of the society: they can only amuse themselves in a cheap way while their life is conditioned by limited means of existence. To them, keeping a pet nightingale is "fun," and so is flying a kite and nursing a bowl of wine over a clove of garlic. Even when they talk about death, they like to say: "He's gone to hear crickets chirp," -- as though they could find some pleasure even in that. This is the kind of things they call "fun" -- so easy to be obtained or realized. Actually, it is a pity rather than fun. Adding a pair of quotation marks to the title, the irony of the entire story, I believe, would be much clearer.

The story concerns the process of the people's looking for fun, with emphasis on those living at No. 10 quadrangle such as Li Zhongxiang, Qiao Wangyou and He Xin. But its locality, instead of being set in a cramped courtyard as it is in "No. 9 Winch Handle

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144 Of this story, I have made liberal use of the translation by Jeanne Tai with occasional minor modification. Her translation, though quite faithful to Chen Jiangong's style, is rather unfaithful in meaning sometimes.
Alley," is now moved to the Bean Street Office Cultural Club. Not very far from Winch Handle Alley, this is a stamping-ground for oldtimers to enjoy themselves in. To imagine it as a magnificent place is obviously misleading. In reality, it is "rather simple and crude." A former warehouse, "it has not even got a ceiling, only rafters sticking out overhead like ribs. The cement floor is pockmarked with bumps and hollows. Performers and audience alike sit on benches arranged in circles that push all the way up against the walls. In the middle of the room is a clearance about the size of your palm, and part of that is taken up by a furnace, leaving room for two or three people at the most. You're all right if you sing standing still, maybe you can even strike a few poses. If two of you wanted to do that you would start bumping into each other. If you want to ham it up you'd better watch out for the furnace." \(^{145}\) For this reason, a full dress performance has never been made there. "At most they do a duet on the 'stage;' anything more than that and some of the parts would have to be sung from the benches." (64)

It is just in such a shabby place that there gather a variety of people of "lower classes" in the neighbourhood. As a cultural club outwardly, it indeed attracts something of actors: someone is trained with Ma Lianliang, someone studies under Gao Qingkui,\(^ {145}\)

someone imitates the style of the immortal Mei Lanfang, and someone belongs to the school of the great Yang Baosen. As a matter of fact, however, it is simply a haven for the people who have multifarious kinds of problems which may range from personal issues to family trouble and even to love entanglement. Although they fill this Cultural Club, they have difficulty even in understanding Beijing operas, not to mention singing them. Evidently, it is not their intention to come to rehearse in all seriousness. Their purpose is instead entirely different: to divert themselves from their predicament, or in another words, to look for fun.

This Cultural Club, to be sure, can not provide them with proper amusement. That they choose it as a place for recreation is only because they have no better alternative while living in the society which is morally restricted and materially inadequate. This is plain to be seen from the cause that finally originates in what happens in the story, -- namely, looking for fun. Old Man He of No. 9 Winch Handle Alley, egged on by Li Zhongxiang to the Cultural Club the way the other diverters are, is quite typical:

One day when Li Zhongxiang was just going out the door, he saw him [Old Man He] squatting in front of the wall on the other side of the alley. "Well, well, what are you trying to hatch here?" Li joked. Old Man He sighed but said nothing. Li had to press him before he would say what was wrong. Turned out the old man was ticked off at his new color TV set: "... who knows when they'll
start smooching or messing around in bed. Or else there'll be these men and women with bare thighs that look just like carrots, bouncing all over the place! How embarrassing to be watching this stuff with my two kids! If I don't watch TV I might miss a good show, but if I do I might get all this crap instead! "Right away Li Zhongxiang saw his opening and jumped in: "Now, now, don't get your nose out of joint about this. Why don't you come with me instead! We'll have some good clean fun!" "Sing opera? But I don't know how." "Don't try to be modest with me. You're a Manchu, aren't you, and all Manchus can sing Beijing opera. You can't fool me. I'll bet you even studied singing -- you probably did the part of the young woman. Yes, and I'll bet you looked pretty good back then. How about singing a few lines to show your stuff?" Would you believe it Old Man He actually got all stirred up, and right then and there belted out a song. But what on earth was our Chief Coach thinking when he said: "You'll do fine! Just come with me and practice with the band for a few days. In no time you'll sound just like Maestro Mei!" (78)

The most interesting is Qiao Wanyou: his going to the Cultural Club to look for fun is simply like those having no way out but be driven to join the Liang Mountain outlaws in The Water Margins. "A slight, wiry man with deep-set eyes and a gentle straight nose, he
had a boyish face and a head of silver hair that gave him a gentle and serene look matchable with his easygoing nature. This was rarely found in what used to be called the 'lower classes.'”

Unfortunately, however, since his wife used to be a proprietress before "Liberation" selling "watch-it food" at Heaven's Bridge, she has acquired a bad habit of poking her nose into other people's private affair and making everything her own business. Qiao Wangyou likes to keep a pet nightingale. But she says: "Twenty cents a day just on birdfeed -- is money burning a hole in your pocket?! You keep this up and I'll feed it twenty cents' worth of poison!" So he has to switch to gardening. His wife still feels rather unsatisfied, though. "Listen," she warns him, "I'm not going to pay for all that water!" She can even find something to nag him for hours on end in his using a toothpick after dinner!

As a good-natured husband, Qiao Wanyou for a long time has not bothered to argue with her. But to his surprise, she should also have meddled with the conjugal life of her daughter and son-in-law. The daughter Xiulian and son-in-law Chuansheng are workers in the same factory. As his own parents's home is not spacious enough, Chuansheng moves into the Qiaos's house after the wedding, living together with this old couple. Mrs. Qiao then summons them into her presence, saying, very solemnly: "It'd be none of my

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\[146\] Ibid., p.88. In order to make it fit my context, I modify Dai's translation slightly here.
business if you're not going to be living here, but since you're
going to be right under my nose I've got to tell you this: That
'thing' [intercourse], it's not like your three meals a day, once
a week is plenty often. If you go at it all the time it's no good
for either of you. Anyway, I'm not going to let my daughter be
abused, understand?" (91-92) Yet as a newly-wedded health young
couple, they sometimes can not stick to this "established plan"
Mrs. Qiao set for them. However, Mrs. Qiao is a light sleeper, and
a mere wooden divider separating her own bedroom from "the
honeymoon suite" is unable to prevent her from waking up at the
slightest rustle in the next room. Without pausing to find out
whether it was fact or fantasy or false alarm, she will bang on the
divider and give them a thorough tongue-lashing. Finally, she
drives them to get a divorce, and people from the courthouse will
be soon coming to their house to investigate. This time Qiao Wanyou
really can not put up with his wife any more, and he comes to Li
Zhongxiang for rescue.

Li Zhongxiang looks at him, his heart sinking. He thinks to
himself: "Of all the problems in the world, old buddy, you had to
come up with something like this! If it was money you needed, I
could give you three or five hundred easy. If you needed some work
done you could count on me and my son, and we could even get more
help. But something like this -- you know how the saying goes: Even
a wise man would have trouble settling a family quarrel." (93)
Without a better idea, he can only say, at length: "Listen, Wanyou,
the ancients said: 'Each to its own.' Stop worrying and don't pay
any more attention to your wife's bitching. Why don't you come with me -- we'll sing a little opera and have ourselves some fun." (93)

"Sing? Opera? Me?" Squinting his eyes Qiao Wanyou shook his head from side to side. "I... d-d-don't know how."

"Well then, how about doing the 'background?'"

"B-background?"

"Sure, background music -- play the gongs, cymbals, strings, anything you like."

"D-don't know none o' that n-neither."

"So you'll learn! I bet you're a natural. Just look at how you learned to scatter paper money."

"Ummmm." Qiao Wanyou thought for a moment, finally sighed and said: "Why not? It sure b-beats being yelled at. All right, I'll try it." (94)

From then on, every evening when the band plays away on their erhus, jinghus, yueqins, hardwood clappers and the like, providing "background" for the action on stage, a thin-faced old man, with his eyes half closed and head swaying, and an erhu in his lap, will be seen sitting in a little cranny on the east side of the "concert hall." This is none other than Qiao Wanyou. Nevertheless, the sounds of erhu does not come from his place; it is from elsewhere. Even after he has become one of the regulars and has been "sawing away" for quite long time, the most he can manage is
still a very simple overture. Even then he often misses his cue.

To Li Zhongxiang, Bean Street Cultural Club seems a panacea for all kinds of problems. He will pull whoever he meets -- even though a total stranger -- into the fold right away if only he learns that "his buddy is down in the dumps:"

"Let me give you some advice. Drown your sorrows in singing instead. Why don't you come with me, I'm in charge over there. You can't sing? Never mind. Even listening can help you forget your troubles." (79)

Just like those old men in Beijing who are always urging you to take rendan pills or those old women in Guangzhou who are forever offering you some "antirheumatism" oil, Li Zhongxiang gives the same prescription no matter what is the ailment: "Come with me, we'll sing a few!" Therefore, it comes not as a surprise that his fellows make every opportunity to poke fun at him: "Hey, Chief, got any more oldtimers on Winch Handle Alley? Why don't you round them up all at once, instead of wasting time going after them one by one?" "You know that pair of stone lions in front of Number Twenty-nine? They've been looking kind of depressed lately. Listen, Zhongxiang, why don't you bring them over for a song or two?" (95)

The only exception is He Xin of No. 10 quadrangle. Without being prompted by Li Zhongxiang, he goes to the Cultural Club of his own accord. He does not, of course, go there for looking for fun, but for seeking asylum instead. An instructor at Qing Hua
University and also an author of a book as thick as a brick whose diagrams, charts, and foreign words make people feel dizzy, He Xin is quite unusual in Winch Handle Alley, so to speak.

Normally, a person of his knowledge and position should not degrade himself to mix up with the oldtimers to beguile time in their stamping-ground. But because of a letter which his former girl-friend writes to him, a storm is generated at his home. His wife wants to charge up to that woman's house to "pour her a pot of shit," and also tries to drag him along with her: "Didn't you just swear you had a clear conscience? Then come with me to tell that bitch off! No? I knew you didn't have the guts! But I do. I'm going to make sure those hussies know never to mess with me. So she wants to snatch you away, eh? Well, she can just forget it!" (103) Since then every female who calls on him, whether colleague or student, has to suffer his wife's black looks, and sometimes she even slams the door right in their face. Furthermore, whenever she sees him writing at his desk, she will storm in and tear everything up, screaming at the top of her lungs: "Go ahead! Write your goddamn book, you son of a bitch! The more you write the worse you get! I'd rather go back to the old days when we were living from hand to mouth!" (104)

Without knowing how to deal with it, He Xin has to take refuge in the Cultural Club so that he may have a moment of peace and quiet. Li Zhongxiang, keen at observation, also feels that there is something weird with He Xin to come to look for fun in such a place as the Cultural Club. "Professor He was a complete ignoramus
as far as opera was concerned. A true fan has certain telltale traits: For one thing, as soon as the gongs and drums start up he would sway and nod to their beat, completely lost in the music whether he was singing or just listening. But Professor Wang merely sat there like a log." (100)

In this episode, the following detail is perhaps the strongest in effect of "tears in laughter." Because of his unawareness of the real reason at the beginning why He Xin joins them to go to the opera, Li Zhongxiang truly takes him as a modern Chen Shimei [a synonym for ungrateful husbands], and in order to teach him a lesson he once sings a passage from The Censuring of Wang Kui specially for this purpose: "Pleas and appeals you would not heed;/ Power and riches have turned you head./ Conscience, honor -- both have fled;/ Cursed be your name long after you're dead." (98) Later on he knows that He Xin's "looking for fun" in the Cultural Club, like that of his "buddies," is simply because he feels depressed and can not find a better thing by which he is able to get rid of his melancholy. Then, he apologizes:

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147 This is typical example to show that the translator Jeanne Dai was not very faithful to the original. She probably spoke Cantonese, so she made several mistakes in pronunciation of characters' names, for instance, "He" misspelled as "Hao," and "He Xin" misspelled as "Wang Jing." Obvious errors like these I corrected when I made quotations.
"Professor He, I'm so sorry, I didn't know. That day when I sang the piece from The Censuring of Wang Kui I was wrong, so wrong..." (104-105)

Nevertheless, He Xin does not even understand a bit of what Li Zhongxiang is talking about:

"What piece?"

"You know, the one I sang the first time you came here."

"Oh, that one. What's wrong with it? I kind of liked it," said He Xin, looking nonplussed. (105)

So Li Zhongxiang is quite right: Professor He Xin is a total ignoramus, unqualified even as a member of audience. Wearing a blue polyester tunic suit, a brown hat, black-framed glasses, and sitting in a corner without a word, he appears as though he were completely immersed in his enjoyment. In fact, however, he is "suffering." The only person who can really find some fun in this poor Bean Street Cultural Club is Li Zhongxiang -- the commander-in-chief of the "band."

Li Zhongxiang, though a seventy-plus ex-coolie, is more or less a fancier of Beijing opera. Most of his "hearties," who do not take interest in it until they are stirred up by his persuasion, are certainly incomparable with him in this respect. He is fascinated by Beijing opera, particularly its star Xiao
Changhua, even when he was young earning his livelihood in a restaurant.

Back then he was a waiter in a snack shop and so poor he couldn't even afford the few pennies for a ticket, but his craving for opera kept gnawing at his insides. So he would pack an order of wontons in a container, march up to the door of the theatre and barge right in. "Hey, where do you think you're going?" "Delivering wontons to the star." The guards actually fell for that line! After the first couple of times they didn't even bother to stop him any more, figuring that whenever Maestro Xiao performed he had to have his order from this particular shop. Truth to tell, none of the wontons ever saw the insides of Xiao Changhua's stomach. As soon as waiter Li got inside the theatre he'd hunker down in a corner somewhere and enjoy the show and the wontons at the same time. Using this trick he got to hear a good many performances by Maestro Xiao, even some by Mei Lanfong. Well, on a diet like this even an idiot could learn to sing a few snatches after a while, and today our friend Li can still do such a perfect imitation of Mr. Xiao's comic accents that he would always bring down the house. (65-66)

He is always dreaming that one day he can acquaint himself
with those famous actors and even sing a few lines together with them. No wonder when he is hired as a doorman for a well-known theatre in Beijing, it is simply beyond words to describe how he is delighted. However, it does not take long for him to discover that even to grant him a janitor for the theatre is little too lavish. Not only young people in the company "pull his leg" by calling him "Director Li" or "President Li," (70) but Mr. Jiang --- the real president --- seems to find that he oversteps his authority. Moreover, at the theatre he has to always use refined language, to which he is not accustomed, lest cultured people make fun of him. It is a surprise, even to himself, that his long-cherished dream should be realized eventually in Bean Street Cultural Club! It is not that there are no fine singers and experienced performers in it. But he knows that everybody is there for the fun of it, not to nitpick. So hardly have three days passed when he perks up again. Right there on Bean Street and right in the midst of coffin carriers, pedicab drivers, snack peddlers, poor folks of all kinds, he at length finds his real "paradise."

Yet ironically, people who have no intention of "looking for fun" in the Cultural Club can only be provided with this place for their recreation, whereas a true fan of opera like Li Zhongxiang indeed capable of finding some pleasure in it has to leave it at last. Because, after all, it is not a dignified place. No matter what fun it is able to offer to Li Zhongxiang, it still remains unaltered as a place that is even looked down upon by his son, let alone decent people of high society. There is nothing that can
upset Dezhi -- his son -- except this Cultural Club. After having fallen in love with a girl-friend, Dezhi demands that his father stop going there so that he will not lose face. Li Zhongxiang then has to quit it, however unwilling he is:

...one evening he gloomily said to Qiao Wanyou: "You go on ahead, Wanyou. I'm not going tonight."

Qiao was completely taken aback. Rain or shine, Li had never missed a single evening. What on earth was going on?

"I don't... feel so good."

Alarmed, Qiao asked: "So why did you even come out? Go home and get yourself to bed right away!"

Li Zhongxiang shook his head, a mournful smile on his lips. Hemming and hawing, he finally said: "To tell you the truth, Dezhi came home when I was having dinner just now and asked me not to go anymore."

"Why not?"

"He said to me, why don't you take up something else instead? You can watch TV, listen to the radio, anything but go howling with the rest of them at the Cultural Club. He said people were laughing at us."

"Why doesn't he mind his own business?"

"Well, I guess in a way it is his business. Didn't I tell you he's got a girlfriend now? The girl lives right on Bean Street, I think it's the one in the plaid
jacket who sticks her head into the Cultural Club once in a while. More than likely she's said something to him about us. I can't say I blame them. To the young folks nowadays we're all just a bunch of old crackpots. My guess is, Dezhi doesn't want her to know his dad is the leader of this pack of old loonies. She might find us embarrassing." (109)

Li Zhongxiang is surely not such a father who is willing to be manipulated by his son as he pleases. But he is aware that life has always been hard to Dezhi. He is sent to the rural commune during the Cultural Revolution. When he returns to Beijing he comes down with tuberculosis. With difficulty he learns a trade at the tailoring school, and is barely able to maintain a living for two of them by opening up a little stall in a market and working late into the night every day in summertime under a street light. It is not until after the age of thirty that he is financially adequate and starts looking for a girl-friend. Now that Dezhi finally gets hold of a girl, isn't it too hardhearted if he rejects his request that may be vital to his promising marriage?! He has to make a sacrifice. There is a scene toward the end of the story describing the son skating merrily in Taoran Pavilion with his girl-friend and Li Zhongxiang, quite bored, sitting there watching them, unable to go to his own favourite place to enjoy himself as he used to. Reading of this, one really feels pity for this unhappy old man.

If the quadrangle of No. 9 winch Handle Alley is a political
world, symbolic of the alienation of commonplace human beings under an autocratic government, Bean Street Cultural Club is an ordinary social scene, reflecting the incongruity between men and society: subjectively they wish to have a rich, full, and meaningful life that fits them, yet in fact, their wish is usually unable to come true when they are still conditioned by conventional norms — moral and economical alike. This is evidently a lamentable state of existence. Nevertheless, the author dealt with it in a humorous and comedic manner and deliberately put up a delightful front for the story. He not only did his uttermost in commenting on "looking for fun" as a popular pastime at the beginning of the story, but for emphasis he repeated it as a conclusion, as though he had been determined to make something happy of unhappiness. No wonder that a critic "was stupefied for a long time" after reading the story. If it were not for a purposeful optimistic stroke in the end, the sense of tragicomedy in "Looking for Fun" could be more implicit and possibly more profound.

Through the analysis of the sense of tragicomedy, I certainly mean to proffer a pertinent and convincing interpretation of these two stories in question which have probably made critics feel "stupefied," but in the same time, it is even more my purpose to stress the breakthrough Chen Jiangong made in the formulae of

148 Hua Ming, "Zhaole zongheng tan" [Various Aspects of "Looking for Fun"], Zhong Shan [Mount Zhong], 1985: 216. Hua Ming is probably a penname of He Zhiyun.
fiction, or more broadly, of the entire creative writing, formed since 1949. As a term now fashionable in study of contemporary Chinese literature, "the sense of tragicomedy" has literally become a synonym for "black humour" since it was expounded by Chen Jiangong. Black humour, an American product, is in essence also a type of comedy if viewed from an aesthetic angle, though a comedy that is full of embarrassment, frustration, and even tragicness of human situation. You may laugh at it, or you may cry at it, or you may read it even without knowing whether to laugh or cry.

In fact, the terminology per se does not matter much. What really matters is substance. In the context of this thesis I can either use "the sense of tragicomedy" or "black humour," and it may not even seem inappropriate if I turn to the employment of the rather banal "critical realism." Although the sense of tragicomedy is probably more suitable for Chen Jiangong's oeuvre, yet in generalization of the literary tendency of both "No. 9 Winch Handle Alley" and "Looking for Fun," these terms, no matter whether it is the sense of tragicomedy or black humour or critical realism, are all able to reveal a common trait. That is, in these two stories, Chen Jiangong is no longer willing to follow what Gogol calls "happy writers," "who evade in a hurry the real people with silly, nauseous, and astonishing weakness, and are only engaged in
creating characters of noble virtues;" or "who hide the truth of life from readers by hoodwinking them into sandalwood smoke and taming their spirit with blandishments, and only show them lovable human beings." (337) In short, he is no longer willing to sing the praise of life but would rather represent it as it is.

As a result, there appears in them a true life, a life which is bitter, absurd, mischievous and frustrating, in spite of a momentary pleasure. In such a life, heroes or heroines cease to exist, and in their place are ordinary flawed people. It is clear that Widow Feng, the Wang couple, the He couple (all in "No.9 Winch Handle Alley"), Qiao Wanyou, He Xin (in "Looking for Fun") do not bear a bit of heroic quality. Even the protagonists themselves are far from being heroes: at any rate, Li Zhongxiang is no better than an honest man at most, and as for Han Delai, even if we do not regard him as a political symbol, he is so weird, ridiculous, and ignorant that he hardly is any different from a clown-type character in melodrama.

Chen Jiangong has a famous, though rather vulgar, dictum: "Don't pretend to be phony." (335) It actually means, according to him, that a writer should "neither gloss over life in order to flow with the tide nor distort reality in order to curry favour with readers." (338) He thought that this was a basic requirement for

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149 Chen Jiangong, "A Basic Requirement for Fiction" [Xiaoshuo qima], Selected Works of Chen Jiangong: 337. Further references in parentheses in the text.

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creating fiction. Almost at the same time when "Looking for Fun" was brought out, he issued a manifesto-like article entitled "A Basic Requirement for Fiction," in which he came straight to his point: "Recently, I feel that fiction should have a basic requirement.... It should at least not pretend to be phony." (335). This soon won acclaim from He Zhiyun, who said what Chen Jiangong stated about the basic requirement for fiction was not only his manifesto but also had become his conscientious practice in his own story writing, and his "No 9 Winch Handle Alley," especially "Looking for Fun," clearly showed that he had grown up from childhood into adulthood in literary world.150

No matter how they are commendable, it is debatable to rank them as first-rate stories. Aside from lacking emotional strength, they are out of fashion in mode of representation. As an economic fact, literature bears a close resemblance to other aspects of a consumer economy which lives by novelty, and so by planned or effective mechanism of obsolescence. That is the reason why nowadays both artists and an increasingly high proportion of readers attach high value to innovation. That is also the reason why these two works of fiction by Chen Jiangong were coldly received by critics. In this sense, it is paradoxical to say that "No. 9 Winch Handle Alley" and "Looking for Fun" are indeed "basic," as far as their literariness is concerned, though this

"basicness" is quite substantial.
CHAPTER FIVE
A CHINESE HOLDEN CAULFIELD

In March of 1986, Chen Jiangong's brilliant novella "Curlylocks" [Juanmao] was issued by October [Shiyue] -- a Beijing literary magazine of mass-circulation. Evidently, this was a landmark in his career as a writer. If "No. 9 Winch Handle Alley" and "Looking for Fun" marked his transformation in literature from "childhood" into "adulthood," "Curlylocks" is his artistic consummation after entering into his maturity.

John Skow talking about the American novelist J.D. Salinger observes: "Salinger is clearly an original, the kind whose shadow is seen not in the writers who precede him but in those who follow. If he were to stop writing now, The Catcher in the Rye would be judged a small masterpiece -- say about the size of The Red Badge of Courage."\(^{151}\) Compared with Salinger, Chen Jiangong may not be such an original. Although one can see his "shadow" in those who follow, it is not impossible to find his foot-steps of imitation in the writings of his literary predecessors. Salinger's impact is

most noticeable, especially in the following two aspects: spiritual defiance of conventions and unique way of representation.

At any rate, we may still borrow Skow's words to describe Chen Jiangong's "Curlylocks" without too much alteration: if he were to stop writing now, if his embryonic novellas "Former Lawbreaker" [Qianke] and "Tragic Solemnity" [Beizhuang] which he has been brewing for quite a long time were to abort due to domestic political unstableness, "Curlylocks" would remain a small classic in modern Chinese literature.

The publication of "Curlylocks" confirmed what a critic had prophesied about Chen Jiangong's story writing: "He is such a person who often remains creatively inactive, but whenever he writes, there must be something worth noticing."152 What is "something worth noticing?" I suppose that referred to thematic or technical experiment. Seeing that "Curlylocks" was critically acclaimed, Chen Jiangong seemed to shun deliberately publicity somewhat in the manner of Salingerian recluse. Unlike his former reaction to his success, he was no longer interested in peddling his creative experience, making known what was in his mind about the theme of the story, and redressing errors or opinionated comments of some critics. He found a rather reasonable excuse for this: "It is the fashion of these years that critics like to

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152 Quoted from Zhang Xingjing, "Juanmao qishilu" [The Apocalypse of "Curlylocks"], Literary and Artistic Review [Wenyi pinglun], No. 6, 1986: 75.
mystify writers and writers tend to let them mystify without a single word of protest. No matter how vulgar this fashion may be, I can not help but follow it.\textsuperscript{153}

In spite of this, he still left us a very short informal essay on his remarkable product under the title "Leisure Talk about 'Curlylocks.'" Actually it is not the kind of article which may satisfy the desire of those who expect its focus will be discussion of "Curlylocks" per se. That he wrote it is probably because it was unavoidable when somebody "had chased him into his home to ask for it." So he had no intention of making it helpful for the reader to acquire a better understanding of what he wrote in this work of fiction. On the contrary, he tried purposely to mystify his novella in the essay by digressively talking about what came to him through a window in his home: "peddlers," "their soot and dust," and "their laughter and vituperation."\textsuperscript{154}

Nevertheless, despite the insubstantiality of this article for the most part, it after all conveys such a message that "when he writes, there must be something worth noticing." That is to say, before writing "Curlylocks," he had already realized there would be a crisis of identification for him, and therefore thematic as

\textsuperscript{153} Chen Jiangong, "Leisure Talk about 'Curlylocks'" [Juanmao xianpian], \textit{China Youth's Daily} [Zhongguo qingnian bao], October 10, 1986.

\textsuperscript{154} Ibid.
well as technical transcendence would be his major task. The
following obscure statement is no doubt the clearest in betraying
this possibility in the whole "leisure talk:"

It is in process of constant crises of identification
and constant option that the writer gradually finds his
ego. This, of course, not only refers to feeling but
includes a way of expression. I do not know if overall
artistic features of "Curlylocks" enable people to feel
my heavi-heartedness in this respect.\textsuperscript{155}

To feel Chen Jiangong's "heavi-heartedness" is not easy,
unless one is conscious of the true thing that caused him to have
the "sense of crisis." According to "Leisure Talk about
'Curlylocks,'" the window in his home seemed to play an essential
role. It is through the window that he heard "Cripple the Third"
set out in midnight with his girl-friend for vending bait, and it
is also through the window that he saw "stallkeepers" ride
platform-tricycles and rush on to a small lane without making any
noise. Certainly, he did not mean to tell us that the function of
the window lay only in its capacity of broadening his vision and
introducing to him new people of lower social strata. His true
point was:

\textsuperscript{155} Ibid.
The window has brought me a crisis of identification and made me feel sorry for an existing condition. Reified, it has made me feel sorry for a way of living.\textsuperscript{156}

But can we totally trust him, believing that the window was really able to account for his sense of crisis and hence for his desire of trying something new in fictional creation? Although it is unwise to deny his own allegation, it is obviously not merely due to the window that he wished to find his ego. The window had already made him acquainted with people from the bottom of the society. If it were the only reason, neither could Lu Sen transcend Li Zhongxiang nor "Curlylocks" differentiate itself from "Looking for Fun." I think that "Leisure Talk about 'Curlylocks'" keeps secret a very important cause, the cause that finally brought him to the realization of a "crisis of identification" — that is, the stimulation of Salinger’s short novel \textit{The Catcher in the Rye}.

It is true that Chen Jiangong has no knowledge of English, but \textit{The Catcher in the Rye} had been translated into Chinese well before he started writing "Curlylocks." As the translation had strong reverberations among college students and young intellectuals, it is unimaginable that he alone did not pay attention to it, not to mention that he and the translator Shi Xianrong are good friends despite their difference in age. The reason he did not refer to Salinger’s novel was perhaps his

\textsuperscript{156} Ibid.
unwillingness to admit being influenced by this American writer, for fear that his story would not be considered original.

Maybe he was unaware that literary excellence does not necessarily lie in artistic novelty, but largely in a proper way of representation. American imagistic poets took Chinese classical verses as their example, and Herman Wauk followed Tolstoy's *War and Peace* either in the mode of saga novel or in the method of life-like realism when writing *Winds of War*. As for Shakespeare's making use of ancient writers's material for his plays and Goethe for *Faust*, they are almost platitudes in literary history. However, one cannot deny the great achievements of Shakespeare's dramas nor Goethe's *Faust*, nor the originality of imagistic poems, nor the value of *Winds of War*.

By the same token, it is neither shameful for Chen Jiangong to be influenced by Salinger, nor necessary for critics -- say, He Zhiyun -- to deliberately disconnect the link between "Curlylocks" and *The Catcher in the Rye* for the purpose of stressing Chen Jiangong as an ingenious writer. To point out the influence of *The Catcher in the Rye* on "Curlylocks" reveals undoubtedly that the latter benefits from the former; but this will not at all affect "Curlylocks" as an outstanding novella. In fact, Chen Jiangong's modelling (not plagiarism to be sure) himself upon Salinger in writing "Curlylocks" demonstrates his successful transcendence both in thought and craftsmanship over his former ego. This is perhaps what Li Tong remarked figuratively: "to violate a law deliberately
can not be accounted a violation."\textsuperscript{157} In my view, Salinger's novel is indeed a very useful key to understand "Curlylocks." So when I deal with this novella, trying to interpretate its "general artistic features," I would feel it inadvisable if The Catcher in the Rye were not taken as a frame of reference.

The generation of his crisis should be largely attributed to the outlook and the way of living of Holden Caulfield as a certain kind of human beings who is socially heterogegeous but individually significant. The critic Lei Da\textsuperscript{158} said in an article "On 'Curlylocks'" [Lun juan-mao]: "Some readers have already found out the similarities between this story ("Curlylocks") and The Catcher in the Rye. This discovery is well grounded... If one compares the plots in which Lu Sen leaves home and Caulfield runs away from school, one has to admit that these two works are strikingly alike."\textsuperscript{159}

Obviously, he has perceived what Holden meant to Chen Jiangong for moulding the character of Lu Sen. This is, of course, not

\textsuperscript{157} Li Tong, "Juanmao shishu" [A Tentative Analysis of "Curlylocks"], China Youth's Daily [Zhongguo qingnian bao], October 10, 1986.

\textsuperscript{158} Lei Da, an editor of Wenyi Bao [Weekly of Literature and Arts], is a very capable and prolific critc.

\textsuperscript{159} Lei Da, "Lun juanmao" [On "Curlylocks"], Fiction Review [Xiaoshuo pinglun], No.6, 1986.
negligible, and will be discussed later on in detail. But here I would like to point out first that the sense of crisis brought about by Holden also caused artistic reactions -- changes, among others, in structure, in style, as well as in diction. This was also made clear by Chen Jiangong himself in "Leisure Talk about 'Curlylocks'" when he affirmed that his crisis of identification "not only refers to feeling but includes a way of expression." Regrettably, however, while some critics took strong interest in indicating the spiritual identity between Lu Sen and Holden, they were apt to ignore stylistic experiments in "Curlylocks" resulting from the motivation of The Catcher in the Rye.

"Curlylocks" begins with such a paragraph:

This chick, riding a little orange bike with tiny wheels, came zooming up on my right, and without making any hand signal cut sharp left, putting her rear wheel right smack in my path. Taken totally by surprise, I frantically shoved my handle bars to the left. "Bang!" my front wheel crashed heavily into the barrier in the middle of the road. I hit the thing so hard I felt my rear wheel leave the ground: probably the same feeling you get when your goddamn horse loses its footing. Luckily I've got good reflexes; I managed to plant my feet solidly on the ground. But my bike fell to the ground between my legs, and the little cassette player in the front basket flew out and landed several metres
This seems to give one the impression that the author got into narration of the story right from the outset. Actually, however, the preceding excerpt serves simply as a prelude: an indispensable explanation for what happens in the ensuing part. Only after a brief transition did Chen Jiangong come to the subject:

Don't start thinking I'm going to tell some story of "fairytale coincidence," now: of how I met her again later at a dance, or ran into her at night school. I'm in no mood to sell you a crock. I have not seen her ever again. The reason I wanted to start my story here is just because the whole thing was so unfair: she was fine -- one little blush, a twinkle of the eye, a wave of the hand, a flash of the teeth, and she hopped on her bike and was off. And all the way home she was probably congratulating herself on the way a young ruffian played the gallant for her. As for me you'll know it all if you keep reading -- my days as a total turkey started right then, goddamn it. (47-48)

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This beginning is almost same as that of *The Catcher in the Rye*. The only difference is that "Curlylocks" gets off to its start with a vivid and dramatic description, while *The Catcher in the Rye* precedes its story with a paragraph of expository narration:

If you really want to hear about it, the first thing you'll probably want to know is where I was born, and what my lousy childhood was like, and how my parents were occupied and all before they had me, and all that David Copperfield kind of crap, but I don't feel like going into it, if you want to know the truth. In the first place, that stuff bores me, and in the second place, my parents would have about two hemorrhages apiece if I told anything pretty personal about them.\(^{161}\)

It goes without saying that this is an introductory opening, with a narrative technique which facilitates a quick switch into thematic development. Salinger does not lead the reader into his real story until after an abrupt turning:

I'm not going to tell you my whole goddam autobiography or anything. I'll just tell you about this madman stuff that happened to me around last Christmas

just before I got pretty rundown and had to out here and take it easy... Where I want to start telling is the day I left Pencey Prep...\(^{162}\)

Such a start foreshadows that the story will be constructed with care, that is, it is to be aimed at narrating a whole organic process of a series of occurrences. In spite of its lack of suspension in plot when the adventure of Holden is told after he is "kicked out" of the school, *The Catcher in the Rye* does avail itself of a typical method for story-writing, the method that enables it to focus firmly on the development of the process from the eve of Holden's leaving school to his returning home: how he fights with his roommate Stradlater, how he is determined to go back to New York ahead of the schedule, how he strikes up an acquaintance with the mother of his classmate on a train, how he dances in the bar with three girls from Seattle, how he is taken in by a pimp and makes a scene in that inexpensive hotel, how he dates with the conservative girl Sally, how he furtively slides into his house to see his younger sister Pheobe, how he lodges at the home of his former teacher Antolini for the night and something unexpected happens, and in the end, how he plans to hitch-hike to the mid-West but fails finally. All of these are the connected occurrences in the process: the necessary episodes for constituting the whole story. The novel begins with Holden's leaving school and

\(^{162}\) Ibid., 1.
ends up with his returning home, and there is no discursive account. What must be brought to notice here, moreover, is that this process, multifarious as it is in terms of what the protagonist undergoes, lasts only three days from the beginning to the end.

The assimilation of the opening part of "Curlylocks" to that of Salinger's novel is only the commencement of its overall imitation of the latter in structure. To follow *The Catcher in the Rye* structurally, "Curlylocks" is marvellous, and even somewhat exceeds its model, because it is more carefully constructed, with the central plot of managing to make eighty yuan go throughout the whole length of the story.

Since Lu Sen seriously damages Dudu's cassette player, he has to get eighty yuan to buy a new one for the compensation. Eighty yuan is almost nothing to people whose jobs are lucrative, but to Lu Sen things are not so easy. A wastrel who fails twice in university entrance examinations and has not yet done anything remunerative so far but "eat and drink like a lord" (50) at home, he is surely incapable of possessing that many "bucks" of his own. It is true he can ask for it, if he likes, from "the old man" -- the associate editor-in-chief of an important newspaper, yet he has been "at loggerheads"163 with him for years and is very unwilling to be manipulated just because of taking his money. The only way out seems to him to make money himself by looking for some manual

163 Ibid., p.50.
job. This, actually, is quite beyond the ability of this young person who has been spoiled by his wealthy family. Later he himself is fairly aware of his possible failure as a physical labouror even before he really takes part in physical labour. It is through one hundred yuan "largesse" given to him in a disguised form by a kind-hearted former classmate Cai Xinbao (a rather sympathetic picture of a nouveau riche) that he finally extricates himself from his dilemma. The quarrelling scene between father and son, the hawking and peddling from market place, the grand occasion of gathering in the Workers's Stadium mainly for the purpose of winning lottery prizes, and so forth, are all relevant parts tightly attached to this central plot instead of being parallel or independent episodes. It is through looking for money that "Curlylocks" gets started, and it is likewise through the solution of this problem that it winds up. This process, interestingly enough, lasts also three days just as it does with Holden from his leaving school to his returning home.

It seems there are something similar between the prescriptions set by French neo-classical writers for dramas and the elaborate structural arrangement of "Curlylocks" based upon what is inherited from The Catcher in the Rye. If "three unities" is a little too much for "Curlylocks," it is no exaggerating that this novella at least meets Aristotle's requirements for time and action. This is Chen Jiangong's innovative, though imitative, effort in the matter of formalistic organization.

As his conscientious experiment, it will be especially
discernible when "Curlylocks" is placed in antithesis with "No. 9 Winch Handle Alley" and "Looking for Fun." Although these two short stories adopt conventional method for narration the way classical Chinese fiction does, they nevertheless have no conventional stories to tell -- the stories that are fully realized in conflict. "No. 9 Winch Handle Alley" seems like a tale about Han Delai, but it is merely his anecdotes intertwined simultaneously with the ups and downs in life of other characters such as Widow Feng, Zhang Chunyuan, the old couple of the Hes and the couple of the Wangs. As for "Looking for Fun," while the greater space is given to the protagonist Li Zhongxiang, there is also an approximately equal quantity of characterization, which comes totally to two chapters, devoted to the minor roles of Qiao Wanyou and He Xing. Their stories, therefore, parallel in some measure that of Li Zhongxiang so to speak, if not supersede it.

If there is a central plot running through "Curlylocks," there is no trace of such a thing in "No. 9 Winch Handle Alley" and "Looking for Fun." These two stories read as though they do not have an opening, nor development, nor climax, nor denouement, so far as plot is concerned. What is called story is just like biographic experience, fragmentary, piecemeal, and lasting a long span of some dozens of years. It is only by virtue of unity in locality ("No. 9 Winch Handle Alley") or in theme ("Looking for Fun") that either of them is barely assembled as a whole. So structurally, they are loose, like an epic rather than a drama in the Aristotlian sense.
This type of fictional form is what Lei Da calls "open structure," which, in his opinion, is opposed to "closed structure" (also in his terms) characteristic of "Curlylocks." I do not know whether "open structure" can reflect "more intricate and complex" phenomenon of society than "closed structure," as is declared by this critic. Nor is it my intention to pass the judgement here as to which structure is superior. What I am interested in is the structural alteration in "Curlylocks" -- an evidential sign through which one is able to see the certain aspect of Chen Jiangong's "heavi-heartedness:" he tried to transcend his former ego in the way of expression.

"Curlylocks" is the fifth in the fictional series of "Rambling Chats about Everything Under the Sun." However, it carries on the tradition of this series only on one point: the language of "Beijing flavour." All the rest of its formalistic features assimilate to those of The Catcher in the Rye owing to its powerful influence. In addition to the structural similarity, "Curlylocks" also bears resemblances with that novel in its selection of its narrative mode. Ever since he began writing his "Rambling Chats" series, Chen Jiangong always narrated his story in an authoritative voice after the fashion of "scripts for story-telling" [huaben]. He did not change a bit this customary way of narration even in "No. 9 Winch Handle Alley" and "Looking for Fun." Truely, "I" does make occasional appearances, say in "Looking for Fun." Yet this

\[^{164} \text{Lei Da, "On 'Curlylocks,'" Xiaoshuo Pinglun, No. 6, 1986.}\]
kind of "I" is not the one who takes part in story but a direct incarnation of the author, as I have already argued in the third chapter. It is not until "Curlylocks" came into being that the author/narrator with omniscient vision really vanishes. As soon as we open this novella, we will find out Chen Jiangong as an omniscient narrator has completely given his way to "I" -- the narrator and at the same time the personage of the story, just in the way Salinger yields to his "I" in his novel.

To indicate the substitution of "I" for the third person narrator in "Curlylocks" is rather incidental, for this will not escape any reader who has skimmed Chen Jiangong's oeuvre. It is the consequence brought about by this substitution -- the transformation from "the art of telling" to "the art of showing"\(^1\) that is more worth our discussion.

In general, modern realistic fiction tends to conceal its artificiality as much as possible in order that artistic works may look more like natural products. Chen Jiangong, however, seemed to like to do exactly the opposite in "Rambling Chats" series before he wrote "Curlylocks," especially in "No. 9 Winch Handle Alley" and "Looking for Fun:" making the reader feel constantly that there exists a simulated narrator outside the story -- that is, that the story is fabricated. For example, no sooner does "No. 9 Winch

\(^1\) For a detailed discussion of the two "arts," see Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, University of Chicago Press, 1983: especially Part II and Part III.
Handle Alley" begin than this "outsider" intrudes to make an explanation on the colloquial phrase "ganqing." In "Looking for Fun," even before the story gets started, the space of the first full chapter has already been spent on authorial commentaries. Later, when the story is in full swing, such a loquacious author can still be seen now and then by way of making either paragraphic transition, or emotional articulation, or conclusive judgement. Evidently, the commentaries or expositions are not organic components of the content. They only function as an element in the storytelling form. Despite the undeniable fact that the author's asides in "No. 9 Winch Handle Alley" and "Looking for Fun" have a predominant effect formally, featuring the artistry of narrative of both the stories, they are not very conducive to the increase of the imagistic appeal of characters.

But as the third person narrator is replaced by the first person in "Curlylocks," a substantial change does occur: the narrator as an outsider ceases to be visible. Unlike its counterparts in previous fiction, now the narrator also plays a role of importance in the story. As a result, the authorial commentaries imposed from outside disappear accordingly, or rather, fuse into protagonist's thought, feeling, opinion, and judgement, through which the characterization of Lu Sen as a human being becomes more poignant and full. That is to say, these commentaries are no longer functional simply in formalistic sense; they are at the same time intrinsic, or even indispensable, particles of the content.

I do not mean to assert that the art of showing must be better
than the art of telling in literary creation. Just as is pointed out by Wayne Booth, *Tristram Shandy* can still enthral us and *Tom Jones* is not at all inferior to those written by the imitators of James or Hemingway in which the scenes are scrupulously "shown."\(^{166}\)

Indeed, it is a truism that since Flaubert, many writers and critics have believed that "objective" or "impersonal" or "dramatic" modes of narration are naturally superior to any mode that allows direct appearances by the author or his reliable spokesman. It is their conviction that the ideal state for fiction is what Jean-Paul Sartre describes: hurling the reader "into the midst of a universe where there are no witnesses" and letting it "exist in the manner of things, of plants, of events, and not at first like products of man."\(^{167}\)

At any rate, I am inclined in theory to accept Wayne Booth's viewpoint, preferring not to make a subjective arbitration in regard to the evaluation of these two "arts." Even so, however, I think in comparison with the art of telling, the art of showing has at least one observable merit concerning Chen Jianong's fiction. This surely has nothing to do with an intention of catering to the modern literary fashion. It is simply for me a matter of utilitarian appropriateness in moulding characters. Chen Jiangong's creative works are not by any means avant-garde, say, like "new

\(^{166}\) See *The Rhetoric of Fiction*: 8.

\(^{167}\) Quoted from *The Rhetoric of Fiction*: 19.
fiction" represented by Alain Robbe-Grillet's *Jealousy*. They are still rather conventional, with portraying characters as a chief task. So when I argued a while ago that "authorial commentaries... fuse into the protagonist's thought, feeling, opinion, and judgement," I have in fact hinted the switch of Chen Jiangong from disadvantage of the art of telling to advantage of the art of showing.

In order to make this point clearer, I would like to take "tamade" or "taniangde" (its closest English equivalent is "shit," but there are also a number of variations in real translation) as an example. Instead of being used as an abuse in conversation in "Curlylocks," "tamade" is a pet phrase of the narrator/agent, or more exactly, his characteristic diction for narration. While it contributes as a significant parlance to the formation of a tough and slangy style of the novella, it more importantly features the mode of expression of the protagonist, paving the way for readers to feel concretely why Lu Sen calls himself "a young ruffian." (48)

In "Looking for Fun," the same "tamade" as a narrative language is employed too, though not so frequently. It precedes, for instance, the exclamatory remark in the beginning of the sixth section that there is no need to worry about the troubles of a disobedient son or a nagging wife. But obviously, "tamade" in this context is not uttered by people with the problems of that kind, but by a detached narrator who has nothing to do with whatever happens in the story. It would have been a good stuff in vivid depiction of personality, yet due to the separation of the
narrator from his characters, it is actually only able to help maintain a literary style that Chen Jiangong has a predilection for, without much value to characterization. This can not but be a pity.

One thing I have to stress here is that that "tamade" is meaningful is not because it is a malediction. The reason why it is being discussed in particular is simply its typicality of the traits of what critics call "language with Beijing flavour." If this kind of language, when conditioned by the art of telling in stories like "Looking for Fun," deplorably provides the author with a discordant offscreen voice for his assuming the voice of a social critic, one will surely notice that "Curlylocks" makes it harmonious throughout by way of combining narration with representation in Lu Sen -- the narrator/agent.

Lu Sen's pet phrase reminds us of those of Holden. The favourite cursing words used by the latter are: "hell," "damn," "Godamn," "lousy," and "sonavabitch," which are as frequent in The Catcher in the Rye as "tamade" in "Curlylocks." Nevertheless, my purpose here is not to show that the origin of this kind of linguistic style in Chen Jiangong's story can be traced back to that American novel. In its stead, I intend to go on to specify the topic in which critics are commonly interested: the identity of the image of Lu Sen with that of Holden.

Speaking the same roguish language is certainly quite eye-catching, but there are also lots of similarities in other aspects between these two adolescents. Holden is a sixteen year-old junior
student "kicked out" of school for "flunking" four subjects of five, while Lu Sen is a twenty year-old high school graduate who is unable to go on with his study in college in that he fails twice in the entrance examinations; Holden is born into a rich family in New York, living with his parents in Park Avenue -- the residential area in Manhattan for high society, while Lu Sen is the son of the editor-in-chief of a newspaper, a high-ranking cadre who is not only wealthy but has power that means much more than money in a feudalistically hierarchial society. Furthermore, both of them are somewhat tainted with the habits of a spendthrift. Holden, having been back in New York, displays exactly like a profligate his gallantry to three young female customers in a bar by paying the bill for them for no reason, let alone he does not care in the least about unnecessarily spending money on taxi rides. Lu Sen does just as well in keeping step with his predecessor. He generously lets go the pretty girl who causes the traffic accident and is supposed to pay for the damage of the bike as well as the cassette player, and poses even more as a dandy when he is buying from Cleaver-face a lottery ticket which triples the original price.

Someone used to express such an amazement: "How Chen Jiangong was inspired to find a so 'strange object' [referring to Lu Sen] in the multitude of human beings, it is still hardly conceivable."¹⁶⁸ One will probably not be so surprised at this

¹⁶⁸ Lei Da, "On 'Curlylocks,'" Xiaoshuo Pinglun, No. 6, 1986.
point, however, if perusing "Curlylocks" in the light of The Catcher in the Rye. Clearly, what inspired Chen Jiangong to find the "strange object" is nothing but Lu Sen's American "brother" Holden. To Lu Sen, Holden's significance lies not only in his status as an expelled student of upper-middle-class origin, but in his capacity of seeing through the shoddiness of seniors and revolting against them. In another words, it lies in his spiritual value of providing a type of anti-conventional and anti-social life -- "a way of living" in Chen Jiangong's terms. This is probably the biggest legacy Holden leaves for his Chinese inheritor.

Although Lu Sen moves under the huge shadow of Holden, his way of living after the fashion of his forerunner makes him transcend all the other peers previously created by Chen Jiangong and hence become a conspicuous "stranger" in this author's fictionalized world. There is no need to indicate the antithesis of Lu Sen and the heroes like Zhong Qi, Lu Jian, Gu Zhida, and Qing Jiang: this is too obvious. Even though Lu Sen is put into comparison with such an ordinary person as Li Zhongxiang, a subtle yet essential dissimilarity between them is still perceptible. He Zhiyun is indeed insightful, saying:

If the artistic circumstances in "No. 9 Winch Handle Alley" and "Looking for Fun," which reflect a certain living state of human beings, mainly reveal the inharmony of men versus environment in innate conflict, then in 'Curlylocks,' men begin to demonstrate clearly
and vigourously a rebellion against their living state.\textsuperscript{169}

What Lei Da says is perhaps right: it is because of his family that Lu Sen's rebellious consciousness breaks forth.\textsuperscript{170} To regard "Curlylocks" simply as a story about the generation gap between father and son\textsuperscript{171} is definitely unwise. However, one should not go to the other extreme as to be blind to the fact that makes up the major part of the novella: Lu Sen's antagonism to his father.

He declares before long the story begins:

To tell you the truth, I've been at loggerheads with the old man at home for years now. Now our relations are like the Iran-Iraq war: fight awhile, rest awhile; rest awhile, fight awhile. (50)

Why do they "fight?" Because the father can not satisfy the financial demand of the son? Or, because he is emotionally partial in his relationships with his two children? Neither of them can account for that. Although Lu Sen does not explain explicitly the

\textsuperscript{169} He Zhiyun, "Chen Jiangong and his Fictional World," Hundreds of Schools, No. 1, 1987: 26.

\textsuperscript{170} Lei Da, "On 'Curlylocks,'" Xioashuo Pinglun, No. 6, 1986.

reason why he has been "at loggerheads with the old man," one can infer from his narration that their confrontation originates from ideological divergences, or from different options of way of living. This protagonist, with a head of curly-hair and with a sneering smile always played around the corners of his mouth, repeatedly asserts to readers his contrariety to "the old man:"

He [the father] has his way of living. I have mine. (59)

In the eye of worldlings, Lu Sen's father is enviable. An editor-in-chief, he has the privilege of riding in a car specially for his personal use whenever he goes out or comes back. He can also avail himself of his position to bring in every few days an extra sum by publishing articles on newspapers and snipping and pasting them together later on to make a book entitled *Talks with Young Friends about Life* or some such thing. Moreover, if there are some benefits -- for example, a trip to Europe or a gift such as a tin of Nestle instant coffee, it is positive that he has his share. So why must Lu Sen be so obstinate as to insist upon choosing that impractical living mode of his own? They are perhaps bewildered. In their philistine view, "sons taking over their fathers' jobs" is unquestionably the most ideal choice for this young man.

Lu Sen's elder brother and sister-in-law are secularly smart enough to accept the living style of "the old man" which they consider both convenient and profitable. They not only listen to
"the old man" with respectful attention, but fawn on him now and then -- a creamed cake for his birthday, among others -- whenever there is a suitable occasion. However, Lu Sen has no intention of following in his brother's footsteps to become "a happy son" of "the happy family," or to "take over his father's job" some day. He has already been aware of the true nature of his father's behaviour, which, he believes, can be generalized in three words: "full of crap." (60) He would rather select another way of living, a way that is neither so easy, nor so productive.

In The Catcher in the Rye, when school has no longer been awe-inspiring to Holden, a persuasive talker -- Holden's former teacher Antolini -- appears. In their conversation Antolini first expresses his solicitude for Holden's present state, believing that he is "riding for some kind of a terrible, terrible fall"172 -- "a special kind of fall, a horrible kind."173 Although, he professes, he does not want to threaten this "kicked-out" student, he actually does so, exaggerating: "I can very clearly see you dying nobly, one way or another, for some highly unworthy cause."174 At the end he gives Holden as a remedy a poem written by a psychologist, which runs: "The mark of the immature man is that he wants to die nobly for a cause, while the mark of the mature man is that he wants to

172 The Catcher in the Rye: 186.

173 Ibid., 187.

174 Ibid., 188.
live humbly for one."  
Antolini's aim is apparent: he wishes to sober up Holden so that he can grow healthily.

Wonton Hou, the teacher who formerly teaches Lu Sen in "Curlylocks," plays a role which, though different in essence, was seemingly very similar to that of Antolini. In spite of having been criticized in an article by Lu Sen's father, Wonton Hou still likes to be concerned for this unfulfilling son far more than for other students just because of his father's position and prestige as a big shot who assumes the chief editorship of an important newspaper. As he learns of Lu Sen's failure in university entrance examinations for the second time, Wonton Hou feels really worried, expostulating in all sincerity: "Review all the material again carefully and try again next year... Even though people now no longer speak of 'sons taking over their fathers' jobs,' still we can't have you going and selling beef and mutton now, can we? We can't have you losing face for your father now, can we?..." (59)

But Wonton Hou's opportunistic advice is virtually ineffectual. While Holden is only impatient with Antolini's philosophy of life for the sake of propriety, Lu Sen is not so polite. He plainly shows his disgust with Wonton Hou, protesting against his admonition: "Please don't talk to me about him [his father]. I couldn't take any more." (59) If Wonton Hou could convince Lu Sen, his father would already succeed in talking him over, and there would be not conflicts at all between them.

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175 Ibid., 188.
conflicts at all between them. Nevertheless, the problem is Lu Sen would prefer to sell beef and mutton and melons rather than live in the world after the fashion of his father, for the latter's living style has already thoroughly disappointed him. He has come to a sober realization: no matter how dignified "the old man" looks, he is in essence a "phony," incredibly distorted and alienated by political dogmas. In order to let readers see the real face of this associate editor, he is unhesitating to disclose his "fake" conduct:

The night before last, the Director of Propaganda came to visit, researching "the points for attention in propaganda" with the old man. They spent two hours at it. After the director left, the old man and the old lady went on "researching" for another two whole hours! What did they "research?" The director's facial expressions: what sort of wordings had seemed to interest him, which topics he had treated coldly they sure make a goddamn hobby out of it. (60)

Interesting is the scene in which how his father touches the hand of a young female reporter is depicted:

That day they were seated in two sofa chairs set hardby each other next to the window. This chick was giving him an account of her work, very seriously and
earnestly, with one hand on the armrest of her chair. Just then I was taking a phone call in the living room and happened to catch sight of that hand. Somehow a feeling of dread came over me. I remember being afraid the old man would try something funny. How right I was. I hadn't yet finished with my call when the old man's big fat hand placed itself right on top of her frail white one! Then he began to pat it again and again, purring, "Wonderful! Wonderful! Little Qin, you're doing a great job. Keep it up, we really need sharp people like you to make our revolutionary work shine...." I almost croaked with rage. What shit! Even when he tries to whore it up he is so full of shit! If you dare, why don't you go find some place else? There you can hug and fondle, kiss, get into bed who'll be there to bother you? But to do such lowdown things while all the time muttering goddamn pious crap about the "revolution" -- that was even more full of shit! (60)

To Lu Sen, "the old man" is greatly lacking in humanity, and therefore his "phony" way of living is certainly very derisible and regrettable. But he knows it would be even more derisible and regrettable if he were to accept his father's living mode. Such cases are not rare around him. Despite ineligibility for ranking among followers of this editor-in-chief, Wonton Hou has already made Lu Sen feel sorry for his customary way of saying: "Is your
father well?" or, "I presume your father is well?" (56) His brother and sister-in-law, a couple of "ideal successor" at home, are simply like the persons who have lost all sense of shame when repeatedly uttering flattery like "boundless longevity," "boundless longevity," (82) though it does not sound as if it will "make a person's flesh creep."

The most pitiable, of course, is his mother. He is clearly conscious that being the "lady" of a VIP presupposes loss of her independence of personality and pursuit of career. She has virtually become a shadow tagging along after her husband. For instance, whenever he leaves home going to take part in some important activity, she will be seen following him immediately and seeing him off at doorway. Then if she can catch sight of an acquaintance or two, "she'll blab on with them endlessly and mindlessly: the old man is visiting northern Europe next month with a delegation, but he hasn't made any preparations at all. That old man -- he's got high blood pressure, and someone told me eating corn silk helps bring it down, but he won't have a bit of it! What shall I do with him!... As if everyone in the entire nation were hanging on the way her old man eats, drinks, pisses and shits." (62)

In the eyes of neighbours in the newspaper compound, she looks as if she is eternally a sweet housewife, with a rich, full family life. But who knows what she really thinks in her mind? A former ballerina, she has already played leading roles in a number of dance dramas and has even been to Moscow to study. The other
"sisters" in her profession in those years have all become associate professors at dance schools, if not go on to become stars. However, she changes her profession after she gets married, totally giving up her beloved career as a dancer. Now she is even unable to endure seeing ballet on television, let alone at the theatre. A shot of "white turnips" lunging on the screen is enough to give her a sudden lurch in her chest, "as if she had been bitten by some goddamn thing." Is this, after all, a happiness or a misery?

If the question of "to be or not to be" perplexes Hamlet, a similar problem, owing to the lessons of his mother and other people, puzzles Lu Sen too -- that is, to become an independent person, or "a pitiable worm waiting for the old man for a handoutout." (51) Sometimes he has not without a momentary idea of taking an easier road. As his father offers him a temporary job at the television station, he is really delighted. He would be fibbing if he were to say that the job is not appealing to him. Yet as soon as he sees the imperious bearing of "the old man:" "his face perfectly expressionless, and his glance rested on the space between his open legs, as if he were lecturing not me, but the thing in his pants," his sensitive self-esteem is aroused.

Thus for eighty yuan, a serious conflict eventually breaks out between the father and son. True, the story has already at the outset told readers that they "have been at loggerheads for years," but this clash is the one which is directly described in "Curlylocks." It in fact originates with Lu Sen's hair:
When it got close to lunchtime, the old man saw his "successor" off and returned to the living room. There he proceeded to strike the pose I was so familiar with: back hunched over, body leaning forward, elbows propped on thighs, chest rising and falling. He looked me up and down, but remained silent for quite a spell. I was peeling an apple. After glancing at him once, I guessed what he was about to say.

"If you think you're so wonderfully beautiful with that hair of yours, from now on you can just go be beautiful in your room."

Once again he called me neither by my nickname nor by my proper name; once again, he did not so much as glance at me. Once again his face remained expressionless as he addressed the crotch of his pants.

I'd known for a long time this day would arrive, goddamnit. Of course, I hadn't thought he'd come out with all this nonsense so soon: after only one day, here he was laying it on thick and heavy. And this was after he'd only gotten me a worthless temporary job and given me a paltry eighty bucks -- if he'd given me anything more, would I have ever lived it down?

I didn't snivel and cringe, but on the other hand I could only have lost face if I'd got all wild-eyed and started a shouting match.
"So just what's wrong with this head of mine?" I asked, tossing my long hair and leaning forward in the chair so that I was also hunching my back and propping my elbows on my thighs, the toes of my slippers flexing, flexing. I gave him the same look he was giving me and said with equall expressionlessness, "As for the reason why I'd grown such a funny head of hair, I'd have to ask you about that."

"I'm not talking about your curls. I'm talking about the length of your hair!"

"Length? What's wrong with the length? How long is revolutionary? How long can it be before it becomes counter-revolutionary? Has your paper ever published an editorial to explain?"

He stood up with a snort and went out... (79-80)

Having been goaded on by his brother's provocative sarcasm, Lu Sen finally makes up his mind to toss that "paltry" eighty yuan as well as the "worthless" temporary job back at "the old man." This is not merely a matter of money and employment; it actually implies Lu Sen's determination to carry out the "fight" with his father, or in another words, implies his resolute pursuit of a living style of his own.

If my brother's contempt had not been gnawing away at me, I probably wouldn't have gone so far as to make
a scene at the old man's birthday lunch. Blanched chicken, crisp fragrant duck, red-braised carp, Dongpo braised pork, Shuanggou spirits, French VSOP cognac, Five Star beer... no, I'm not that big a bastard.

But I got to the point where I just couldn't take it any goddamn more. If I hadn't been able at this point to find a proper excuse to toss the old man's "imperial largesse" back at him, I'd never be able to hold my head up in front of them again -- and I'd lose a dude's self-respect.

"come on, everyone, drink to Papa's boundless longevity!"

Xiao Yan had finally found a chance to display her talents.

"Bound -- less -- lon -- gevity! Bound -- less -- lon -- gecity!" My brother's bright-red lips were parted in a brazen grin.

"And may Mama always have good health!" Xiao Yan's voice was sickly sweet, with an overlay of timidity, whether real or feigned it was impossible to tell. Here was a true-blue Chinese wife sucking up to her mother-in-law.

"To -- Mama"s -- health! To -- Mama's -- health!" Shouts from my older brother and laughter from the old lady.

"Papa." I stood up and extended a full cup of
spirits towards my father.

The old man gave a start, looked at me and raised the cup in front of him slowly, hesitantly.

"Your son is going to make something of himself. Please take the television station job and return it to them. And, and yesterday's eighty yuan -- I'll return them to you too..."

"Sensen, what nonsense are you talking!" The old lady cut short my speech.

Paying her no attention, I tipped back my head and dumped the entire contents of the wine-cup down my throat. "But don't always be making me out to be a pitiful worm, always telling me I'm shooting off my mouth and that my hair is too long..."

With this, I turned round, stalked off to my room, slammed the door and flopped down on the bed. And, goddamnit, did I feel comfortable -- all over! (82-83)

Some critics say that "Curlylocks" differs from The Catcher in the Rye in that its chief concern is closely related to an anti-traditional transition of the Chinese national state of mind -- namely, the father-and-son conflict.\(^{176}\) This sounds rather plausible. Salinger's novel does not touch upon contradictions

\(^{176}\) See Lei Da, "On 'Curlylocks,'" Xiaoshuo Xuankan, No. 6, 1986.
between parents and children, not to mention the feasibility associated with the Chinese national state of mind. The novel comes to the point right at the beginning that it has no intention to narrate things concerning the parents of the protagonist. Except for a few places where that his father is "touchy" and his mother is "hysterical" is briefly referred, "I" strictly dispenses with "all that David Copperfield kind of stuff." What it mainly describes is Holden's antagonism against school: how he hates it, how he discloses its shoddiness, and finally, how he runs away from it, going back to New York. If Lu Sen's rebellious consciousness breaks forth from the inside of his family, it is justifiable to say that the rebellious consciousness of Holden comes from a different source -- the school.

But no matter how Holden's antithesis is unlike that of Lu Sen, their rebellious challenge is same in substance: it is a challenge against the hypocrisy of humanity. Holden tells Sally that the school is "full of phonies."\(^{177}\) The reason he leaves Elkton Hill school where he used to study is not because he "flunked" examinations, but because he was surrounded by these people. In his opinion, the headmaster Mr. Haas at Elkton Hill is "the phoniest bastard"\(^{178}\) he ever met in his life. When he was shaking hands with student's parents, he would pay attention to their appearance and

\(^{177}\) *The Catcher in the Rye*: 131.

\(^{178}\) Ibid., 14.
clothing. "If a boy's mother was sort of fat or corny-looking or something, and if somebody's father was one of those guys that wear those suits with very big shoulders and corny black-and-white shoes, old Haas would just shake hands with them and give them a phony smile and then he'd go to talk, for maybe a half an hour, with somebody else's parents." 179

Having transferred to Pencey Prep, however, Holden still feels dissatisfied. Its headmaster Mr. Thurmer, better as he seems to be than "old Haas," is also a "phony slob." 180 So they are in essence birds of a feather. Pencey Prep cracks itself up: "Since 1888 we have been molding boys into splendid, clear-thinking young men." But to Holden it is simply humbug. "They don't do any damn more molding at Pencey than they do at any other school, and I didn't know anybody there that was splendid and clear-thinking and all." 181 Maybe Ossenburger is one of the two "splendid and clear-thinking young men" molded by Pencey, for "he made a pot of dough in the undertaking business after he got out of Pencey" and contributes some of them to his Alma Mater. So excellent as Ossenburger is, his speech about "Jesus as our buddy" betrays to Holden that he is

179 Ibid., 15.

180 Ibid., 3.

181 Ibid., 2.
still a "big phony bastard."\textsuperscript{182}

It should be noted here what Holden calls "phony" is not merely directed against those people themselves, but chiefly against conventional value system such as the concepts of success and happiness approved by Thurmers and represented by Ossenburgers and their Cadilacs. That is to say, Holden is discontented with traditional "way of living," which, in his view, is sanctimonious and absurd. If he were to accept this mode of living, he would probably accept old Thurmer's reprimand of the "guy" who laid a "terrific fart" in auditorium and Mr. Spencer's addressing him contemptuously as "boy." They make him feel as if his freedom is suffocated and personality is oppressed. He would rather choose another way of living that school does not advocate: the way in which he can live in a small cabin in forest and hold himself aloof from the world, while supporting himself by working in a gas station.

I mean to say that the target of the revolt does not count for much; what is really important is the substantiability of the revolt itself. It is this substantiability that makes Lu Sen become spiritually identified with Holden. Moreover, it also implies that hypocrisy of "the old man" will only be a part of the challenge of this daring teenager. In fact, the world outside his father often manifests its sham aspect when it has been filtered by his cynical eyes.

\textsuperscript{182} Ibid., p.17.
In the special preparatory class for university entrance examinations, there used to be quite a few "chicks" Lu Sen likes very much. The most fascinating is Du Xiaoxi. Of her two long, straight and shapely legs, of the big, loose red sweat-shirt she likes to wear, and of the outline of her plump little breasts, the charm is almost irresistible to him. But he sees through her insincerity as she keeps on saying: "Lu Sen, your compositions are so well-written. I... I actually sort of worship you!" "Your father’s articles are just super! Lu Sen, you’ll be able to follow in his footsteps for sure!" (69) He knows that the one Wonton Hou has asked to read her composition out loud in class has not been him; it has been her -- Du Xiaoxi. What is unendurable is the so-called "inspiration" she uses as a pretext when she goes into the shade with him and wants to "mess around:" "Lu Sen, give me a kiss! Give me some of your inspiration!" (69) This makes him feel nauseous. "I’d actually been in the mood, but as soon as she started in with her 'inspiration' it turned me right off." So he bluntly rejects her: "I’d better not kiss you, then. I only have a little bit of inspiration, just a speck. If I give it to you, what am I suppose to do?" (69)

Of course, to make Lu Sen feel nauseous is not only Du Xiaoxi; the policeman’s swashbuckling rebuke, the chicks’ playing coy for the boys they like along streets, and Du Du’s attempt of passing himself off as a "Chinese of high status" after having been admitted by a university, -- all of them are, too, abominable to him. Lu Sen is indeed such a youth who can not take the status quo
with equanimity: his soul is filled with resentment. As is remarked by Zhang Xingjing, he is recalcitrant both in spirit and in behaviour, suspecting, contemplating, and even challenging general system of ideology concerning the significance of human life, such as conventional (as well as prevailing) mode of existence, its purpose and its evaluation.183

But the problem is: he can neither commit himself to his father's living style as "a happy son" of "the happy family," nor be independent enough to hew out his way in society for fear of being possibly reduced to a monetary slave. He surely does not want to become an upstart like Aubergine; however, he is even more unwilling to serve as a varlet to Bowlhead. When Bowlhead stoops to him with a variety of adulation (for instance, "You're asking for a favour? You're... are you trying to insult me?" "How could I force you to do such a thing!") (109) and wheedles him into taking a hundred yuan, he still feel uncomfortable somewhere in his heart, as if he has lost something, and completely at a loss, cannot think of what it is. He finally realizes no matter how Bowlhead "brown-noses," no matter how he tries to sweet him up with talk about "helping each other," the fact remains that "the jerk" has bought him to be his servant. This is rather ungratifying to him, for it is not the kind of life he has been craving for. Although

the novella is not very clear as to what is his favourite way of living, one can at least conceive in the light of his rebellious defiance of customary way of existence that it must be very idealistic, -- the one which is analogous to that Holden tenaciously pursues.

In view of the uncompromisingness of fighting with his father in order to seek his way of living, we should admit that Lu Sen is a considerably serious youth, having nothing to do with what is called "cynics" or "hyppies." Even if these two terms are somewhat relevant, they are at least biased. At the end of the novella Lu Sen himself also says straightforwardly in summing up his attitude toward life:

Despite some of my behaviour, I think I'm much more conscientious than them [referring to his father and other people] -- almost too conscientious. Otherwise how would I have gotten into such a mess? If I weren't so conscientious, no doubt I'd resemble my brother, playing the goddamn idiot yes-man. At any rate, I certainly wouldn't have bothered getting so righteously worked up about the eighty bucks. I wouldn't have bothered trying to prove something by going to make the money. I wouldn't have bothered ripping up that lottery ticket, nor buying the next one. Nor would I have tried to play the hero for Bowlhead's benefit. On the other hand, I wouldn't feel there was anything so bad about going to Winch Handle
Alley every month to mollycoddle an old man, either.

(126)

At this point, therefore, he is extremely similar to Holden. Holden, to be sure, is not merely a prodigal or a bad student either. He is very serious sometimes. Does not his erasing "fuck" from school's walls a number of times clearly reveal his sincere desire to be "a catcher in the rye?" We absolutely have no reason to doubt it.

Nevertheless, being conscientious in pursuing his ideal does not mean that Lu Sen is an unusual hero of Zhong Qi's type. Any reader will not take him as such a person. The only thing that can show his superiority to ordinary people is his sober self-consciousness, as if he alone is in possession of his faculties while others are all intoxicated. But in conduct he remains a rather commonplace character, with quite a few shortcomings and defects apart from his incapability of doing well in study. However, he has no intention to gloss over his imperfection. He likes to make it exposed. While Holden calls himself a "terrific liar," he jokingly labels himself as a "young ruffian." Furthermore, he even admits that his thoughts will run amok when he espies brassieres hanging out to dry on a neighbour's balcony. He would cease to be a "good boy" long ago if there was even one chick in that preparatory class who is not so "phony" as Du Xiaoxi.

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184 The Catcher in the Rye: 16.
His weakest point doubtlessly lies in his naivety. It is this juvenile naivety that he depends upon in confrontation with the stalwart secular world. He wishes to transcend it, yet as soon as he faces reality, his aspiration becomes so infirm that it is almost on the verge of being smashed. There is in the novella a passage of conversation between a fifteen-or-sixteen-year-old boy and a man of about thirty with rather sunken cheeks: it may well be regarded as the one symbolizing the state of his impracticality:

"Listen to that! Listen to the roar that thing makes! Some 'roar' yours makes -- putt putt putt! You'd better get a new one, quick, And let me tell you: nothing less than a 250 will do!" In the crowd of onlookers was a man of about thirty with rather sunken cheeks who seemed to know an awful lot about bikes. Patting the Suzuke 100 on which he had just delivered his homily, he passed the owner a cigarette.

"Well, brother, why don't you get yourself a bike and have some fun?"

"Wouldn't I like to! This is the right kind of toy for a dude! But... you'll give me the money?"

Everybody burst out laughing.

"Hah! Well then what're you doing here just looking at other people's bikes and talking about them? What a stupid waste of time." A fifteen-or-sixteen-year-old kid
couldn't keep his trap shut.

"Little brother, you're wrong there. Besides, aren't you just standing around looking too?"

It looked as if this Hollow-cheeks fellow intended to teach his "little brother" a lesson.

"Do you watch soccer?"

"Of course."

"Hah! Well then, why don't you join the national team?"

"......"

"Do you like to watch... horseriding on the grasslands?"

"It's all right."

"Hah! where are you gonna get a horse?"

"......" (75-76)

To the adult Hollow-cheeks, the ridiculousness of the callow lad is too unsubstantial to withstand a single blow. If this adolescent can stand for the inexperienced Lu Sen and the man for his sophisticated father, then it is obvious that in the eyes of the father Lu Sen's rebellion is likewise vulnerable. In The Catcher in the Rye, when the former teacher Antolini persuades Holden to live in a humble manner rather than to die nobly, he has actually seen his student's naivete: he is totally unaware of the unfeasibility of his ideal in real life. As a child from a family of upper-middle classes, Holden is far more frail in willpower than
Huckleberry Finn. Huckleberry Finn's dream of escaping to the West is realized at length, while Holden's comes to nothing. He has to return to the conventional track eventually.

Regrettably, Lu Sen is by no means superior to Holden, even though the latter is unequal in comparison with Mark Twain's protagonist. True, there is not an explicit denouement (or a way out) arranged for him in "Curlylocks." However, is it conceivable that Lu Sen can become an independent man only because of his "getting so righteously worked up about the eighty bucks" while most of the time still financially relying on "the old man?" Or will he not have the same fate as that of the major role Oliver in Segal's *Love Story*, returning home in the end to ask for forgiveness as well as largesse since he is so incompetent and arrogant as not to be up to any kind of practical works?

His brother's eye is indeed penetrative: "If you've really got the guts, then don't depend on the old man for anything. If you don't succeed, and you end up coming back, then don't be a pot calling the kettle black." (64) He is perhaps right in what he observes. Toward the end of the story, Lu Sen has got his hair cut, looking like a "stupid idiot." Subjectively, he does not intend to ingratiate himself with his father with this kind of hair style, but in fact, he has indeed prepared a way for his father to accept him. Therefore, some critic described him as a "noble youth lacking spiritual ballast."185 This, in my opinion, does not quite hit the

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185 Lei Da, "On 'Curlylocks,'" *Xiaoshuo Pinglun*, No. 6, 1986.
vital point. It seems more proper to me to define him as an idealist who is grandiose in aims but puny in abilities.

In theme and in artistic method, "Curlylocks" is faithful in taking Salinger's novel as its model. However, its verisimilitude of moldering characters and reflecting social life makes it become purely Chinese and avoid being a mere imitation. It seems quite all right to say that "Curlylocks" is a Chinese The Catcher in the Rye and Lu Sen is a Chinese Holden Caulfield. Lei Da commented:

It is my conviction that one day -- hundreds of years later -- when someone comes across the magazine October which has already turned yellow and crispy and read this novella 'Curlylocks,' he will surely be ecstatic as though he discovered a treasure, for he sees a living history through Lu Sen's singular psychology as well as through the certain Chinese culture and urban scenes related to him.\(^{186}\)

This witty remark is a high evaluation of "Curlylocks" as a realistic work. There is no geographical limit for spirit of human beings, nor taboo that literary form or technique can not be transplanted internationally. "Curlylocks," instead of being unreadable and inferior because it has been influenced by The Catcher in the Rye, will nevertheless enthral us forever with its

\(^{186}\) Ibid.
own thematic and artistic fascination.
CHAPTER SIX

ANTI-HERO

It is noticeable from the general title of this thesis that "non-hero" and "anti-hero" are two different concepts.

Admittedly, "non-hero" is an uncommon term, though not my coinage. It denotes all flawed, ordinary people who are ineligible for the appellation of hero yet not mean enough to be regarded as rascals. The non-hero usually consists of city dwellers of lower classes or less educated workers and peasants. Devoid as he is of heroic deeds or heroic ambition, he nevertheless does not have the slightest dubiousness as to the norm of heroism in conventional value system nor rebellious consciousness against it in living mode. Instead, he looks up in reverence to whoever is traditionally considered to be a hero, taking the outlook on life as his moral codes that the hero approves. Perhaps, it is more appropriate and

clearer to categorize this type of person as "middle character." The reason I resort to this conception, be it "non-hero" or "middle character," is only because I intend to express a neutral state, which is neither heroic nor anti-heroic. In this respect, Li Zhongxiang in "Looking for Fun" is no doubt a prime example.

At the either side of him stand Zhong Qi and Curlylocks who respectively represent the hero and anti-hero. It is not infrequent that the "anti-hero" is confused with the rogue in the picaresque novel. In fact, however, he is distinctively a phenomenon of modernism. True, he lacks heroic elements, but this deficiency has nothing to do with his incapability of acquiring them. It merely implies his suspicious, even negative, attitude toward heroism, or rather, his unique way of striving for his anti-traditional aim. He may perhaps be inadvertent, or conscientious, or tenacious, or resolute, in the process of his pursuit; nevertheless, one thing remains invariable: he is always sober as if he alone is awake while all others are inebriated. So

188. "Middle character," first put forward by Shao Quanlin -- a late communist literary critic -- in 1962, refers to unheroic characters in literature, at that time, especially ones in Zhao Shuli’s fiction.

189. For example, Hugh Polman says: "...the concept of a protagonist without heroic qualities is as old as the picaresque novel." See A Handbook to Literature, The Odyssey Press, 1962: 27.
exaggeratingly, he is worthy to some extent of the title of a "modern hero."

On the subject of anti-hero, what Sean O'Faolain writes in his collection of critical essays, The Vanishing Hero, is quite helpful:

This personage is not a social creation. He is his own creation, that is, the author's personal creation. He is a much less neat and tidy concept, since he is always presented as groping, puzzled, cross, mocking, frustrated, and isolated, manfully or blunderingly trying to establish his own personal, supra-social codes. He is sometimes ridiculous through lack of perspicacity, accentuated by a foolhardy if attractive personal courage. He is sometimes intelligent, in the manner of Julien Sorel or Stephen Dedalus. Whatever he is, weak or brave, brainy or bewildered, his one abiding characteristic is that, like his author-creator, he is never able to see any Pattern in life and rarely its Destination.¹⁹⁰

This passage is suitable even as an overall generalization of the mental attitude of Curlylocks, except for the two points that

are possibly inappropriate: the author Chen Jiangong may not agree with his anti-hero's expressed views and conduct, and Lu Sen, instead of trying to establish his own personal, supra-social codes, is on the whole simply a displaced person.

From hero through non-hero to anti-hero, Chen Jiangong has accomplished a creative course: short but not by any means easy. Of course, Lu Sen still seems rather insufficient so far as the thoroughness of his rebellion is concerned, especially when he is juxtaposed with the up-and-coming "unrestrained young men" (wanzhu)\(^1\) which is a remarkable feature of "Wang Suo's phenomenon."\(^2\) Wang Suo's "I" figures not only see through all shoddiness, but know how to deal with it; not only defy traditional values, but are smart enough as not to make a slightest effort to

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\(^1\) First used by critic Lei Da in his article "A Survey of 1988 fiction" (Lun yijiu baba nian xiaoshuo chaoxi) (Xiaoshuo Xuankan [Selected Works of Fiction], No. 1, 1989: 108) and then in another essay entitled "On Wang Suo's Phenomenon" (Writers, No. 3, 1989), this term includes not only the bulk of Wang Suo's fiction, but the stories by Xu Xin and Liu Yiran such as "The Rest of It all belongs to You" (Shengxia de dou shuyu ni) (Xiaoshuo Xuankan, No. 5, 1989) and "The Youth of Rock Music" (Yaogun qingnian) (Xiaoshuo Xuankan, No. 1, 1989).
establish those of their own. They certainly have mental affliction, yet it is totally concealed by their apathetic, sarcastic, and cynical manner. Like people who have had all kinds of experience, they are mature and sophisticated without the slightest naivety and servitude.¹⁹³

However, I do not think that the rise of "unrestrained young men" will diminish the value of Curlylocks as a "strange fictional character." On the contrary, it increases his importance, for it will not escape the perceptive reader that it is Curlylocks that prompts the final formation of the anti-hero as a new dominant force in literature. I do not mean, to be sure, to object to the application of the popular term "Wang Suo's phenomenon," which now connotes a certain literary trend that is spiritually anti-conventional. To substitute it for "Chen Jiangong's phenomenon" or some such thing is quite meaningless and unnecessary. What I wish to make clear here is actually one point: the historical value of Curlylocks for study of anti-heroism -- a phenomenon so prevalent in contemporary Chinese literature that it is not to be easily ignored.

Literary criticism is not prophecy. Nor do I have the desire to predict what kind of works will be produced by such an author "who must have something worth noticing whenever he writes." Who

could indicate in advance that Chen Jiangong would write "No. 9 Winch Handle Alley" after he finished *Bewildering Firmament*? Or "Looking for Fun" would be followed by "Curlylocks?" When we are expecting the publication of his next two novellas, "Former Lawbreaker" and "Tragic Solemnity," the only thing we are certain is that he will probably continue his "exploration of soul," namely, he will probably continue to provide us with anti-heroes like Curlylocks, who are significant not only in their social and historical value, but in their value as human beings.

It is not unreasonable for us to have such an expectation. Chen Jiangong, we believe, is to prove with his new creative works that he will remain a writer worthy of our attention.
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GLOSSARY

(A) Authors

Ah Cheng 阿城
Can Xue 残雪
Cao Xueqin 曹雪芹
Chen Jiangong 陈建功
Feng Menglong 冯梦龙
Ge Fei 格非
Lao She 老舍
Li Xiao 李晓
Liu Heng 刘恒
Liu Suola 刘索拉
Liu Zhengyun 刘震云
Lu Xun 鲁迅
Ma Yuan 马原

Mo Yan 莫言
Shi Naian 施耐庵
Shao Quanlin 邵荃麟
Su Tong 苏童
Wang Anyi 王安忆
Wang Meng 王蒙
Wang Suo 王朔
Yang Jiang 杨绛
Yang Xianyi 杨宪益
Yu Hua 余华
Zhang Chengzhi 张承志
Zhang Wei 张炜

(B) Authors (Continued)

Chen Dazhuan 陈达章
Chen De Pei 陈德培

Chen Xinyuan 陈信元
He Zhiyun 何志云
Chen Juntao  陳駿濤
Huang Ziping  黃子平
Lei Da  雷達
Li Guixian  李貴賢
Li Tuo  李陀
Liu Shaoming 劉紹銘
Liu Xiaobo 劉曉波
Liu Zaifu 劉再復
Qian Guangpei 錢光培
Shen Zichao  盛子潮

Hua Ming  华銘
Song Yiaoliang 宋耀良
Wu Xiaoling 吳曉玲
Xiao Hua 晓華
Xu Zidong 許之東
Zhang Weian 張維安
Zhang Xingjing 張興勤
Zhao Gui 趙玫
Zou Ping 鄒平

(C) Characters

Cai Xinbao  蔡新寶
Cui Guangzhi 崔廣志
Chen Hao  陳昊
Chuansheng 傅生
Dandan  丹丹
Dezhi 德志
Ding Qi  建綺
Dudu  都都
Du Xiaoxi  杜曉曦
Gao Qingkui 高慶奎
Feng Guafu 馮貴婦
Gu Zhida  顧志達
He Laotai  何老太
Huiwen  惠文
Huntun Hou  胡錄侯
Li Lu  李露
Li Yufang  李玉芳
Lin Juan  林娟
Lin Kai  凌凱
Liu Zhi  劉志
Liu Zhuren 劉主任
Lu Jian  魯健
Lu Sen  卢森
Meng Bei  盧蓓
Han Delai 赫德来
He Laotou 赫老头
Qiao Wanyou 郭万有
Qing Jiang 秦江
Shen Ping 沈萍
Wang Shuangqing 王双清
Wei Shitou 魏石头
Weiwei 薇薇
Xiao Yan 肖雁

Mingwei 明伟
Pi Debao 皮德宝
Xing Xiaoliang 辛小亮
Xiulian 秀连
Yu Xin 于馨
Yunhu 云虎
Zhang Chunyuan 张春元
Zhao Tao 赵涛
Zhen Zinan 郑子楠

(D) Titles (Chen Jiangong)

Bei Rousui de chenxi 被揉碎的晨曦
Beixiju xiaoshuo: keneng yu zhengzha 悲喜剧小说：可能与挣扎
Changba, dan qingyong ziji de shengying 唱吧，但请用自己的声音
Changshi yu xiwang 尝试与希望
Congshi Zhaolai 循实招来
Danfengyan 丹凤眼
Danfengyan diandi 丹凤眼点滴
Gaiguan 盖棺
Jingxi youge shaodazi 京西有个骚道士
Juanmao 鬃毛
Juanmao xianpian 鬃毛阅篇
Liushui wanwan 流水弯弯
Luluba hutong jiuhaob 银韩把胡同九号

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Miluan de xinkong 迷乱的星空
Momo jiedangge 黑黑且高歌
Piaoshi de huatoujin 飘逝的花头中
Qiutian jiaoxiangyue 秋天交响乐
Shangwei piaoshi de duanxiang 尚未飘逝的断想
Shenghuo, xianqi le langhua 生活, 撒起了浪花
Xuancao de yanlei 萧草的眼泪
Yu, podazhe nihongdeng 雨, 泼打着霓虹灯
Zhaole 找樂
Zhongqu 乘曲
Zouxang gaogao de jitan 走向高高的祭坛
Zuodao xiaoji 提刀小记

(E) Titles (others)

Chen Jiangong he tade duanpian xiaoshuo 陈建功和他的短篇小说
Chen jiangong he tade xiaoshuo shijie 陈建功和他的小说世界
Chen jiangong xiaoshuo de beixiju tese 陈建功小说的悲喜剧特色
Dongdang de digu 动荡的低谷
Fengdouzhe de jingzhong yu zange 奋斗者的警钟和赞歌
Geshi geyang de xiaoshuo 各式各样的小说
Guanyu chen jiangong de biji 关于陈建功的笔记
Jingti: zhege youling haizai youdang 警惕：这个幽灵还在游荡
Laonian de chengshi yu qingnian de chengshi 老年城市与青年城市
Lun Juanmao 论鬃毛

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