

COMING OF AGE IN A TIME OF TROUBLE:
THE BILDUNGSROMAN OF SU TONG AND YU HUA

by

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Abstract

The focus of this study is coming-of-age in a time of trouble reflected in contemporary Chinese *Chengzhang xiaoshuo* / *Bildungsroman* fiction. Selected works of two major Chinese writers – Su Tong and Yu Hua – are treated as cultural metaphors that reflect on the growth and future of Chinese youth in an abnormal era – the Cultural Revolution – and how they deviate from Mao Zedong's promotion of the “morning sun at eight or nine o'clock” and “the socialist new man.”

The chief scholarly significance of studying these writers' coming-of-age stories are two. First, this study will expand the boundaries of studies of the literary genre of *Bildungsroman*. By referring two Chinese authors' stories to the theoretical corpus of the *Bildungsroman*, I explore the interaction between the literary genre and individual Chinese literary works, and demonstrate how these Chinese stories enrich the *Bildungsroman* literary genre by providing a body of parodic *chengzhang xiaoshuo*. Second, this study will contribute to our understanding of the social history of the Cultural Revolution, the two writers providing an alternative perspective to show the disastrous effects of Chinese Cultural Revolution on the Chinese people, especially the young.

The methodology of this dissertation is a combination of close readings of original Chinese literary texts and literary analysis informed by scholarship on the *Bildungsroman* genre and psychological and sociological theories of adolescence.

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A Note on the English Translations

The following English translations are used for some of the primary sources (in brackets):

Raise the Red Lantern, by Michael S. Duke. (Su Tong: "Qiqie chengqun")

My Life as Emperor, by Howard Goldblatt. (Su Tong: *Wo de diwang shengya*)

Rice, by Howard Goldblatt. (Su Tong: *Mi*)

Cries in the Drizzle, manuscript form, by Allan H. Barr. (Yu Hua: *Zai xiyu zhong huhan*)

Boy in the Twilight, manuscript form, by Allan H. Barr. (Yu Hua: "Wo meiyou ziji de mingzi")

Past and the Punishments, by Andrew F. Jones. (Yu Hua: "Wangshi yu xingfa," "Yijiu baliu nian")

To Live, by Michael Berry. (Yu Hua: *Huozhe*)

Chronicle of a Blood Merchant, by Andrew F. Jones. (Yu Hua: *Xu Sanguan maixue ji*)

Page references to Chinese and English texts are given at the end of each quotation respectively. Unless otherwise noted, all other translations from the Chinese originals are mine.

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Introduction

They experienced a unique coming of age. Exactly how the Cultural Revolution affected this generation is still unclear.

— Joseph W. Esherick, ed.

The Chinese Cultural Revolution as History

The focus of this study is coming-of-age in a time of trouble reflected in contemporary Chinese *chengzhang xiaoshuo* 成长小说/*Bildungsroman* fiction. Selected works of two major Chinese writers – Su Tong and Yu Hua – are treated as cultural metaphors that reflect on the growth and future of Chinese youth in an abnormal era – the Cultural Revolution – and how they deviate from Mao Zedong's promotion of the “morning sun at eight or nine o'clock” 早晨八九点钟的太阳 and “the socialist new man” 社会主义新人.

My close reading of Su Tong and Yu Hua's *Chengzhang xiaoshuo* stories and novels reveals how the utopian vision has given way to an essentially pessimistic view of the future of the Chinese young people in the late 1960s and 1970s, subverting the optimistic image of the “successors to the cause of proletarian revolution” sanctioned by the Chinese Communist Party (hereafter CCP). In both Su Tong's “Toon Street Series” 香椿树街系列 and Yu Hua's *Zai xiyu zhong huhan* 《在细雨中呼喊》 (*Cries in the Drizzle*) with the Cultural Revolution as their historical background, teenagers, representing the hope of society, grow up in a morally degenerate and politically

suppressed society. They are dissatisfied, restless and unable to find meaning in their lives. Despite being confronted with the trials and ordeals that in another setting would have led them to maturity, their goals remain unclear and their lives meaningless. They wait in vain for their future to arrive.

Analyzing these writers' coming-of-age stories expands the study of both the literary genre of *Bildungsroman* and the history of the Chinese Proletarian Cultural Revolution. My dissertation represents an understudied approach to the works of these two major Chinese writers in terms of literary and social history.

In the field of literature, the *Bildungsroman* is a Western literary concept. While Chinese writers such as Su Tong and Yu Hua may not necessarily be influenced by the European tradition, their coming-of-age stories resonate with affinities to this literary genre. With their cultural and historical particularities, they enrich the *Bildungsroman* as a literary genre in particular and human literature in general. In the field of social history, I propose to analyze the thematic content of Su Tong's and Yu Hua's coming-of-age stories and evaluate their positions on the effects of the Cultural Revolution upon Chinese youth. Readers of these novels should focus not on the young protagonists, but rather on the world in which these young people have lived and found themselves aliens. These stories provide a fresh perspective on human suffering in general, and in particular, on Chinese people's suffering through the man-made disaster of the Cultural Revolution.

The methodology of this dissertation is a combination of close readings of original

Chinese literary texts and literary analysis informed by scholarship on the *Bildungsroman* genre, and informed by psychological and sociological theories of adolescence. An important aspect of my study will be an examination of the historical and cultural contexts of modern China and modern Chinese literature.

Bildungsroman is a German term that means “novel of formation,” “novel of initiation,” or “novel of education.”¹ This novelistic form appears in all the major literary traditions. Scholars and critics such as Hegel, Dilthey, Lukacs and Bakhtin have all investigated this literary genre in their books. “The subject of these novels is the development of the protagonist’s mind and character” from childhood into maturity, “often through a spiritual crisis” wherein he recognizes his “identity and role in the world.”²

When we look into Chinese literary tradition, we find an abundance of biographical writing that covers the entire life of a specific figure in the form of *zhuan* 传. In the twentieth century, however, the *Bildungsroman* form has flourished in China.

The novelistic form of *Bildungsroman* in Chinese literature first attracted my attention when I was reading Yu Hua’s *Cries in the Drizzle*, a novel in which the protagonist, as an adult, recounts the many trials and tribulations of his youth. This story reminded me of Su Tong’s stories in the “Toon Street Series” otherwise known as the “Young Blood” 少年血系列, a term that Su Tong prefers.³ Despite the two writers’

¹ M.H Abrams, *A Glossary of Literature Terms*, 7th edition, Toronto: Harcourt Brace College Publisher, 1999, p.193.

² Ibid.

³ The term “Toon Street Series” was created by the critics to name Su Tong’s stories and novels which have the theme

diverse writing styles and plot arrangements, their stories all deal with the theme of the individual's self-realization and socialization. Both writers admitted that their writings are deeply influenced by their childhood experiences during the Cultural Revolution and that the stories are projections of their own shadows and pain.

Quite significantly, these stories differ greatly from the same kind of stories written by Chinese writers during the period from 1949 to 1977. During that time, most Chinese writers followed the model sanctioned by the Communist Party: with the guidance of the Party Secretary and the help of model party members, the frustrated young men and women, usually through a series of trials and episodes, finally realize that the ultimate goal in their lives is to construct a new socialist China, and to become the successors of the cause of the proletarian revolution. The protagonists in such stories as Wang Meng's 王蒙 *Qingchun wansui* 《青春万岁》 (*Long Live Youth*), Yang Mo's 杨沫 *Qingchun zhige* 《青春之歌》 (*The Song of Youth*), Liang Bin's 梁斌 *Hongqi pu* 《红旗谱》 (*Song of the Red Flag*), Ouayng Shan's 欧阳山 *San Jia Xiang* 《三家巷》 (*Three Families' Lane*) all fit into this stereotype of youth.⁴

Growth is an amazing journey from human heart to outside world. The inner dissatisfaction, mobility, fear and curiosity of the young protagonists in Su Tong and Yu

of young people's growth in the fictional *Toon Street* in a Chinese southern city. Some of these short stories are compiled in one collection with the title *Young Blood*. Therefore the critics also called Su Tong's coming-of-age stories "Youth's Blood Series."

⁴ See Fan Guobin 樊国宾, "Zhuti zhi shengcheng - dangdai chengzhang xiaoshuo zhuti yanjiu" <主体之生成 — 当代成长小说主题研究>, Nanjing University, submission date of this Ph. D dissertation is April 15, 2002. In this dissertation, Fan gives a thematic review of *chengzhang xiaoshuo* novels written from 1949 to 1976. In chapter 2, I examine Yang Mo's *The Song of Youth* in detail.

Hua's stories drives them to find meaning in their lives. However, they grow up in an abnormal era in which traditional Chinese belief and morality are completely rejected. These children grow up untended like wild grass. In their case, this freedom does not lead them to maturity, but to destruction.

Though many insightful research papers and articles have been published on the writing of Su Tong and Yu Hua, most of them focus either on their so-called "avant-garde" stories written in the 1980s, or on Su Tong's new historical novels, such as *Wo de diwang shengya* 《我的帝王生涯》 (*My Life as Emperor*) and *Wu Zetian* 《武则天》 (*Dowager*), his family sagas, such as "the Maple Village Series 枫杨树系列" and *Mi* 《米》 (*Rice*), and the women series, such as "Hong fen" <红粉> (Red and Pink) and "Cixiu" <刺绣> (Embroidery), and Yu Hua's more realistic full-length novels, such as *Huozhe* 《活着》 (*To Live*) and *Xu Sanguan maixue ji* 《许三观卖血记》 (*Chronicle of a Blood Merchant*), written in the 1990s. For example, in her article *On Su Tong*, Wang Haiyan examines the narrative/poetic, urban/rural, destiny/defiance, individual/history dichotomies in Su Tong's stories;⁵ in "A Review at the end of the century," Zhang Yingzhong discusses Su Tong's stories of the Toon Street series, Maple Village series, and historical series, and argues that Su Tong is obsessed with "reflecting upon the past."⁶ Some scholars, such as Zhao Hongqin, Huang Jinfu, Wu Yiqin, focus on some specific

⁵ Wang Haiyan 王海燕, "Su Tong Lun" <苏童论> (On Su Tong). *Anqing Normal School Journal* 安庆师范学院学报, 1994. 4, pp. 80-85.

⁶ Zhang Yingzhong 张应中, "Shiji mo de huimou" <世纪末的回眸> (A Review at the end of the century). *Modern Literary Magazine* 现代文学杂志 1994. 5, pp. 30-33.

but recurring themes in Su's stories, such as the degenerated lifestyle in southern China, escape and return, and life versus death.⁷

The criticisms on Yu Hua's full-length novels are mainly conducted by Chinese scholars and critics such as Chen Sihe, Wu Yiqin and others. Professor Chen Sihe indicates that Yu Hua rebuilds or revives Chinese popular society in these novels.⁸ For his part, Wu Yiqin attempts a comparison of the writing style between Yu Hua's early stories and his novel *Chronicle of a Blood Merchant*, stressing that the later work marks Yu Hua's farewell to "hypocritical works".⁹ In their writings, critics Yu Xuan and Zhang Hong argue about one of the obvious techniques - repetition - in Yu Hua's novels.¹⁰

While these articles make various helpful and interesting assertions about the works of two major Chinese writers, unfortunately, there remains no systematic and comprehensive analysis of Su Tong and Yu Hua's coming-of-age stories.

Despite the neglect of literary critics, both Su Tong and Yu Hua think highly of their *Bildungsroman* stories and the influence of their childhood on their writings. In an article

⁷ Zhao Hongqin 赵洪琴, "Wu ke taobi: Su Tong yu nanfang" <无可逃避: 苏童与南方> (Nowhere to Escape: Su Tong and the South), *Zhejiang shida xuebao* 浙江师大学报, 1994, 3, pp.40-44.

Huang Jinfu 黄金夫, "Chuzou yu fanhui: Su Tong xiaoshuo jianlun" <出走与返回: 苏童小说简论> (Leaving and Returning - A Brief Discussion of Su Tong's Stories) in *Zhejiang shida xuebao*, 1994, 3, pp.45-47.

Wu Yiqin 吴义勤, "Su Tongxiaoshuo zhong de shengming yishi" <苏童小说中的生命意识> (The Implication of Life in Su Tong's Stories) in *Jiangsu shehui kexue* 江苏社会科学, 1995.1, pp. 116-121.

⁸ Chen Sihe 陈思和, "Yu Hua: After transition from Avant-garde Writing to Narrative on Popular Society" 余华: 由先锋写作转向民间之后 in *Contention on Literature and Arts* 文艺争鸣, vol. 1, 2000, pp. 68-70.

⁹ Wu Yiqin 吴义勤, "Farewell to Hypocritical Form" 告别“虚伪的形式” in *Contention on Literature and Arts* 文艺争鸣, vol.1, 2000, pp. 71-77.

¹⁰ Yu Xian 余弦, "Poetic Repetition" 重复的诗学 in *Contemporary Writer Criticism* 当代作家评论, vol.4, 1996, pp. 12-15.

Zhang Hong 张闳, "Questions on the Narrative of *Chronicle of a Blood Merchant*" "许三观卖血记"的叙事问题 in *Contemporary Writer Criticism* 当代作家评论, vol.2, 1997, pp. 19-23.

titled "Drawing upon Childhood," Su Tong states:

[I] recall my occluded and lonely childhood with a love-hate sentiment. . . . Whether carried with love or hate, of all the baggage carried through life by a writer, the memories of childhood are perhaps the heaviest item of luggage. No matter if these memories are grey or bright, we must carry and treasure them. We have no alternative. . . . We are bound to employ childhood to record some of our most mature thoughts.

现在我怀着热爱和憎恨想起我的封闭而孤独的童年生活 . . . 热爱也好, 憎恨也好, 一个写作者一生的行囊中, 最重的那一只也许装的就是他童年的记忆。无论这记忆是灰暗还是明亮, 我们必须背负它, 并珍惜它, 除此, 我们没有第二种处理方法 . . . 我们都将利用童年记录一些最成熟的思想。¹¹

Yu Hua, in the preface to the Italian version of *Cries in the Drizzle*, emphasized that this is a book of memories:

My experience is that writing can constantly evoke memory, and I believe these memories belong not merely to myself. They are possibly an image of an era, or a brand left by the world on a person's spirit. . . . Experience is always more stark and powerful than memory. . . . Memory cannot restore the past. It only reminds us once in a while of

¹¹ Su Tong, "Tongnian shenghuo de liyong" <童年生活的利用> (Drawing upon Childhood), in *Shijie* 视界 vol. 4: p.163.

what we had before.

我的经验是写作可以不断地去唤醒记忆，我相信这样的记忆不仅仅属于我个人，这可能是一个时代的形象，或者说是一个世界在某一个人心灵深处的烙印。”“经历总是比回忆鲜明有力....回忆无法还原过去的生活，它只是偶然提醒我们：过去曾经拥有什么？”¹²

The deficiency in the scholarship on Su Tong's and Yu Hua's *Bildungsroman* is the motive force behind the writing of this thesis. I hope to make an overall analysis of the two writers' stories with the coming-of-age theme in order to fill this void and to establish that Su Tong's and Yu Hua's constant aim in their writing is to examine the existence of human beings marginalized in history. While not necessarily aiming at overt political criticism, Su Tong's and Yu Hua's works seek to identify how individuals, especially the young, survive or fail to survive in 20th-century China.

This study will contain five chapters. Chapter One will begin with an introduction of the term *chengzhang xiaoshuo* — the Chinese counterpart of *Bildungsroman*. Then I will make a critical review of Western critical thought on the nature of *Bildungsroman* as a literary genre. I will further discuss the difference between and overlap of autobiography, memoirs, autobiographical fiction, and the *Bildungsroman*. Specifically, I have chosen to base my discussion on the definitions and theories employed in Franco Moretti's *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*, Jerome

2. Yu Hua, "Wo yongyou liangge rensheng" <我拥有两个人生> (I Have Two Lives), in *Wo Nengfou xiangxin ziji* 《我能否相信自己》 (*Can I Believe in Myself?*), Beijing: Renmin ribao chubanshe, 1998, p. 148.

Buckley's *Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding*, and Martin Swales's *The German Bildungsroman from Wieland to Hesse*.

In Chapter Two, I will first examine the Chinese literary tradition of autobiographical and biographical writings in both fiction and nonfiction. I will refer to Wu Pei-yi's study on pre-modern Chinese autobiography. Then I will discuss the literary context of modern Chinese fiction from the May Fourth Movement in 1919 to the 1990s. I will explore the changing patterns of the *Bildungsroman* in the different discourses in modern China. In the May Fourth era, under the influence of the May Fourth enlightenment movement and the literary influence of Japanese I-novel and translated European fiction, the *Bildungsroman* emphasizes the awakening of the awareness of one's self as an individual human being and describes the psychological state of young Chinese intellectuals including their inner contradictions, frustrations and oscillations, when they pursue their independence, individuality and freedom. Representative works are Ding Ling's 丁玲 "Shafei nüshi de riji" <莎菲女士的日记> ("Miss Sophia's Diary"), Yu Dafu's 郁达夫 "Chenlun" <沉沦> ("Sinking"). In the 1930s, in the literary discourse of so-called "revolutionary literature," the main theme of *Bildungsroman* became young people setting out on a revolutionary journey, such as in Ba Jin's 巴金 trilogy, *Jia* 《家》 (*Family*), *Chun* 《春》 (*Spring*) and *Qiu* 《秋》 (*Autumn*) and Mao Dun's 茅盾 trilogy, *Huanmie* 《幻灭》 (*Disillusion*), *Dongyao* 《动摇》 (*Vacillation*) and *Zhuiqiu* 《追求》 (*Pursuit*). This theme continued into the Mao Era,

during which time the ultimate goal of fictional young men and women was to become successors of the cause of the proletarian revolution; representative works are Yang Mo's 杨沫 *Qingchun zhi ge* 《青春之歌》 (*Song of Youth*) and Wang Meng's 王蒙 *Qingchun wansui* 《青春万岁》 (*Long Live Youth*).

In the 1980s and early 1990s, a dramatic change occurred in the Chinese *Bildungsroman*. Young Chinese writers, such as Su Tong and Yu Hua, reflecting upon their childhood experiences during the Cultural Revolution, presented a devastating image of Chinese young adults in the Mao Era. In the 1990s, female writers such as Chen Ran 陈染 and Lin Bai 林白 and later Wei Hui 卫慧 and Mianmian 棉棉 touch upon the theme of young women's coming of age. The stories written by these female writers were more autobiography than *Bildungsroman*, however. Chen Ran's and Lin Bai's stories focus on the awakening experiences of female protagonists, such as in *Siren shenghuo* 《私人生活》 (*Private Life*) and *Pingzhong zhishui* 《瓶中之水》 (*Water in the Bottle*). The young men and women in Weihui's and Mianmian's stories, *Shanghai baobei* 《上海宝贝》 (*Shanghai Darling*) and *Tang* 《糖》 (*Sugar*), reflect upon their struggles to live in a highly globalized and commercial Chinese society that has exposed them to sex, drugs and rock and roll during their teenage years. Their writings are to be read more as documentation of cultural phenomena rather than as literary works.

In Chapter Three, I will examine Su Tong's "Toon Street Series," which includes the full-length novel *Chengbei didai* 《城北地带》 (*North Side Story*), and his short stories

“Cheng hualunche yuanqu” <乘滑轮车远去> (“Roller Skating Away”), “Shangxin de wudao” <伤心的舞蹈> (“The Sad Dance”), “Wuhou gushi” <午后故事> (“An afternoon incident”) and “Sangyuan liunian” <桑园留念> (“Memories of Mulberry Garden”).

In the 1980s, Su Tong wrote the “Toon Street Series” in which he explores the experiences of the protagonists during their formative years. The setting of these stories is on Toon Street, a shabby street in a southern city, named after the street Su Tong himself grew up on in Su Zhou. As Su Tong writes in one of his stories, “Toon Street is the hallmark of southern China, it is also a symbol of degeneration 香椿树街是南方的标志，也是堕落的象征。”¹³ Toon Street is a gloomy, damp, filthy and debauched place where only plants and mould grow exuberantly. People living on this street, both adults and children, lead vulgar lives devoid of meaning and idle away their time every day. This impression is a subversion of the traditional image of southern China, which is famous for its exquisite culture, delicate gardens, graceful women and learned men.

Toon Street, as the background of Su Tong’s stories, is not only a geographic setting, but also signifies a specific temporal space – 1966-1976, the period of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. During the Cultural Revolution, the Confucian value system was rejected, the friendly, candid and sincere relations between people in traditional Chinese society were severely damaged, and independence and individuality were severely circumscribed if not completely suppressed. All that remained were numb

¹³ Su Tong, *Nanfang de duoluo* 《南方的堕落》 (*The Degeneration of the South*), Taipei: Yuanliu chuban gongsi, p.118.

and indifferent masses of people. Toon Street, representing the epitome of China's hopelessness in the 1970s, in Su Tong's words, is like a "pit" [*keng* 坑] full of chaos and dark desires. There, natural desires are released in their crudest form, leaving no space for delicate, warm or beautiful things.

Chapter Four deals with Yu Hua's full-length novel, *Cries in the Drizzle* and three short stories called "Wo danxiao ru shu" <我胆小如鼠> ("I'm Timid as a Mouse"), "Siyue sanri shijian" <四月三日事件> ("The April Third Incident") and "Xiaji taifeng" <夏季台风> ("Summer Typhoon").

Cries in the Drizzle is an adult's reminiscence of his boyhood from six to eighteen years of age. From the perspective of a boy, Yu Hua gives his reader a child's understandings of family, friendship, sex and marriage as well as more abstract themes of existence including fate, birth and death. He sparingly adds comments by the adult character to provide his readers with a whole view of the events and problems. The protagonist's experiences produce a series of artistic effects from a strong sense of abandonment to great loneliness, inescapable fear, feelings of alienation from family, yearnings for friendship, and psychological trauma with the disappearance of hope and fantasy. In three short stories, Yu Hua focuses more on the psychological development of the teenage characters, which constitutes a haunting history of fear, restlessness and daydreaming. Yu Hua presents a philosophical reflection on youth and their maturity in a time of trouble. "Maturity" is no longer perceived as an acquisition, but as a loss. The

fading of individuality into an arid sameness is in itself an enormous regression.

In the conclusion, I will link the two Chinese writers' works to the theoretical corps of the *Bildungsroman*. Because of the chaotic social and political background of 1970s' China, none of the trials the young heroes experience can be used to develop their fortitude. Instead, these experiences only lead to destruction. In this way, we can see that the negative outcomes of the youthful adventures somewhat turn the European genre on its head, creating something of a parodic *Bildungsroman*.

Similarly for the contribution to our understanding of the social history of the Cultural Revolution, the two writers provide an alternative perspective to show the disastrous effect of Chinese Cultural Revolution on the Chinese people, especially the young. In the last two decades, numerous books have been written to record Chinese people's sufferings during the Cultural Revolution in forms of memoirs, oral history, and fiction, such as Feng Jicai's *Voices from the Whirlwind – An Oral History of the Chinese Cultural Revolution*,¹⁴ Rae Yang's *Spider Eaters: A Memoir*,¹⁵ and Zhang Xianliang's *Lü hua shu* 《绿化树》 and *Nanren de yiban shi nü ren* 《男人的一半是女人》, and so forth.¹⁶ In academia, the "Cultural Revolution has a riveting impact on the fledgling field of contemporary China study."¹⁷ For example, Anita Chan has done a substantial study

¹⁴ Feng Jicai 冯冀才, *Voices from the Whirlwind: An Oral History of the Chinese Cultural Revolution* (Yibaige ren de shinian, English Selections), New York, N.Y.: Pantheon Books, 1991.

¹⁵ Rae Yang, *Spider Eaters: A Memoir*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.

¹⁶ Zhang Xianliang 张贤亮, *Lü hua shu* 《绿化树》, Beijing: Zuojia chubanshe, 1987. *Nanren de yiban shi nü ren* 《男人的一半是女人》, Beijing: Zuojia chubanshe, 1987.

¹⁷ Joseph W. Esherick's, Paul G. Pickowicz's and Andrew G. Walder, *The Chinese Cultural Revolution as History*, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2006, p.1.

of Red Guards in *Children of Mao: Personality Development and Political Activism in the Red Guard Generation* as early as in 1985.¹⁸ The newly published books, such as Roderick Macfarquhar's and Michael Schoenhals' *Mao's Last Revolution*¹⁹ and Joseph W. Esherick's, Paul G. Pickowicz's and Andrew G. Walder's *The Chinese Cultural Revolution as History*,²⁰ make more systematic and comprehensive examinations of this historical event. As keen social observers and creative writers, Su Tong and Yu Hua portray the tragic coming-of-age experience of Chinese adolescents in a time of tremendous social upheaval, and compel us to consider the cultural, educational and psychological consequences of the Cultural Revolution upon the authors' own and the later generations. As Joseph Esherick and two other authors say "They experienced a unique coming of age. Exactly how the Cultural Revolution affected this generation is still unclear."²¹

¹⁸ Anita Chan, *Children of Mao: personality development and political activism in the Red Guard generation*, London: Macmillan, 1985.

¹⁹ Roderick Macfarquhar and Michael Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution*, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006.

²⁰ Joseph W. Esherick's, etc eds., *The Chinese Cultural Revolution as History*. The essays in this volume reflect a new era of research by scholars who have immersed in the many new sources of the Cultural Revolution.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p.28.

Chapter 1

Bildungsroman as a Literary Genre

When Su Tong and Yu Hua wrote about the coming-of-age of Chinese youth during the Cultural Revolution, they might not have been aware of the term *Bildungsroman*, nor consciously have used its pattern to structure their stories, but their writings do fit into this literary genre. It is useful to include Su Tong's and Yu Hua's works in the theoretical corpus of *Bildungsroman* even though it is a western literary concept. It is not because these theories are indispensable to understand these Chinese literary experiences, but because by placing the Chinese texts in comparative perspective the "'Chineseness' of these texts is historicized and becomes relational to the outside world."²² The interaction between the literary genre and the individual literary work is one of my concerns in this study.

When Martin Swales discusses the German *Bildungsroman*, he points out that the notion of genre is requisite to "any understanding of literary texts," and that the vitality of any genre lies in the interaction between general "expectation" and specific practice, between theory and its "individuated realization in an actual work." The genre provides a certain "expectation" for the individual novels, and in turn, these novels "vivify" that

²² Yingjin Zhang, "Introduction: Engaging Chinese Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies," in *China in a Polycentric World: Essays in Chinese Comparative Literature*, Yingjin Zhang ed. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1998, 7.

“expectation” by their “creative engagement with it.”²³ It does not matter how much or to what degree the actual work has fulfilled the expectation; it all helps to enrich its genre. The genre serves as a “structuring principle within the palpable stuff of an individual literary creation.”²³ It is with this process, as it works in certain Chinese fictions in the twentieth century, that I shall be concerned in this study.

In this chapter, I will first introduce the term *chengzhang xiaoshuo* 成长小说, the Chinese counterpart of *Bildungsroman* in modern and contemporary Chinese literature, then I will introduce the *Bildungsroman*, as a literary genre, by tracing its origin and development, reviewing its principal thematic concerns and clarifying some indispensable questions by referring to the writings of such scholars as Martin Swale, Franco Moretti, Jerome Hamilton Buckley, Jeffrey Sammons, and Fritz Martini.

The term *Bildungsroman*, as a literary genre, was introduced to Chinese readers along with the translation of the *Bildungsroman* novels, such as *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*²⁴ and *Green Henry*.²⁵ In the summer of 1943, Feng Zhi 冯至 translated *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* into Chinese and also wrote the preface. In this preface, Feng Zhi translated the terms *Bildungsroman* and *Entwicklungsroman* as *xiuyang xiaoshuo* 修养小说 and *fazhan xiaoshuo* 发展小说 respectively, and for the first time,

²³ Martin Swales, *The German Bildungsroman from Wieland to Hesse*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978, pp.10-12.

²⁴ *Wilhelm Meister Volume 3* (Years of Apprenticeship Books 7-8) was written by German writer Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe. The third volume of Goethe's great romantic novel resolves the problems in the two earlier volumes.

²⁵ *Green Henry* is one of the most important novels in European literature, and undoubtedly the greatest masterpiece of fiction by the Swiss writer Gottfried Keller. Keller wrote *Green Henry* during the years 1846-1855. His own life spanned almost the whole of the 19th century and his philosophy and ideals are pictured in this massive poetic novel. He reveals his country, his youth, his studies as an artist and his development as a man. This introduction is quoted from <http://www.calderpublications.com/books/0714502650.html>.

introduced this literary genre to Chinese readers with *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* as an example.²⁶ In December 1979, Liu Banjiu 刘半九 translated the term *Bildungsroman* as *jiaoyu xiaoshuo* 教育小说 in the preface to his translation of *Green Henry*.²⁷ There is no reliable evidence to show who first used the term *chengzhang xiaoshuo* 成长小说 to refer to the *Bildungsroman*. Dai Jinhua 戴锦华 and Cao Wenxun 曹文轩 were said to be the first to use this term *chengzhang xiaoshuo* publicly in a seminar on Cao's story, *Red Tile* 红瓦, sometime between 1997 and 1999.²⁸ However, as early as 1993, the literary critic, Li Yang, had already used this term in his article "Jingdian wenben fenxi: qingchun zhi ge yu chengzhang xiaoshuo" <经典文本分析: <青春之歌>与成长小说> (*The Song of Youth* and the *Bildungsroman*) in the book *Kangzheng suming zhi lu* 《抗争宿命之路》 (*Up Against the Predestination*).²⁹ Since the late 1990s, this term has been used extensively by Chinese literary critics. For example, Chen Sihe 陈思和 refers to Wang Meng's 王蒙 "Zuzhibu xinlai de nianqingren" <组织部新来的年轻人> (*New Comer in the Organization Department*) as a *chengzhang xiaoshuo* in his book, *Zhongguo dangdai wenxueshi jiaocheng* 《中国当代文学史教程》

²⁶ This preface was written in the summer of 1943, and revised in 1984. The Chinese version of *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, translated by Feng Zhi and Yao Kekun, was published in 1988. Feng Zhi, Yao Kekun, trans., *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* 威廉·麦斯特的学习时代, Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1988.

²⁷ Gottfried Keller, *Lü yi hengli* 《绿衣亨利》 (*Green Henry*), Liu Banjiu, trans., Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1980.

²⁸ In the preface to *Kanshangqu henchou* 《看上去很丑》 (*It Seems Ugly*) (written by Sangdi 桑地, Beijing: Dazhong wenyi chubanshe, 1999), Cao Wenxun pointed out that it was time to use the term *Chengzhang xiaoshuo* as a literary genre. In Xu Meixia's 许美霞 M.A. thesis, "Lun dangdai chengzhang xiaoshuo de neihan yu ge'an" <论中国当代成长小说的内涵与个案>, the author wrote that in an interview, Sang Di told the author that Cao Wenxun and Dai Jinhua were the first people to use the term *Chengzhang xiaoshuo*.

²⁹ Li Yang 李扬, *Kangzheng suming zhi lu* 《抗争宿命之路》 (*Up Against the Predestination*), Changchun: Shidai wenyi chubanshe 时代文艺出版社, 1993.

(Contemporary Chinese Literature Syllabus).³⁰ In this dissertation, I will use the term *chengzhang xiaoshuo* to refer to Chinese *Bildungsroman* in order to remain consistent with current Chinese academic usage of the term. The term *chengzhang* literally means “to form and grow” which is similar in connotation to the German term *Bildung*.

Chengzhang xiaoshuo, as a specific literary genre, has only been recognized and studied by both Chinese writers and literary critics since the late 1990s. A few M.A. theses and Ph.D. dissertations have been written to explore the development of Chinese *chengzhang xiaoshuo* from different perspectives and to attempt to fill the theoretical void in this genre of modern Chinese literature. For example, Fan Guobin 樊国宾, who completed his PhD at Nanjing University in 2002, “elaborates the narrative forms of [Chinese] *Bildungsroman* from 1949 to 1976” in his Ph.D. dissertation, “Zhuti zhi shengcheng — dangdai chengzhang xiaoshuo zhuti yanjiu” <主体之生成 — 当代成长小说主题研究>.³¹ That same year, Sun Jing’s 孙婧 MA thesis posited that the development of the modern Chinese *Bildungsroman* is “historic proof of the Nation’s modernization . . . [and] the abstract symbol of national development.”³² Tian Guangwen 田广文 indicates that puzzlement 困惑 is the main theme of the *chengzhang xiaoshuo* written in the 1990s in his M.A. thesis, “Kunhuo de zhangwang —

³⁰ Chen Sihe, *Zhongguo dangdai wenxueshi jiaocheng* (Contemporary Chinese Literature Syllabus 中国当代文学史教程), Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2001.

³¹ Fan Guobin 樊国宾, “Zhuti zhi shengcheng — dangdai chengzhang xiaoshuo zhuti yanjiu” <主体之生成 — 当代成长小说主题研究>, Nanjing University, submission date of this PhD dissertation is April 15, 2002.

³² Sun Jing 孙婧, “Zhongguo xiandai chengzhang xiaoshuo de xushixue yanjiu” <中国现代“成长小说”的叙事学研究>, M. A Thesis, Qingdao University, submission date is April 15, 2002.

xinchao chengzhang xiaoshuo lun” <困惑的张望——新潮成长小说论>, in 2002.³³ In these scholarly tracts, each author develops his own definition of the *chengzhang xiaoshuo*. Their definitions, however, merely reiterate those proposed by Western critics a hundred years ago, and miss the most significant concern of the *Bildungsroman* — complex inwardness. In this study, I will not give my own definition of Chinese *chengzhang xiaoshuo* because, I believe, Chinese literature is best understood in the context of world literature, or human literature. The Chinese experience in *chengzhang xiaoshuo*, in my opinion, enriches the *Bildungsroman* as a literary genre. Therefore, instead of giving a definition of Chinese *Bildungsroman*, I prefer to trace the history of the term *Bildungsroman* in the European literary tradition and to treat the uniqueness of the Chinese *chengzhang xiaoshuo* as a contribution to the *Bildungsroman* genre in particular and to world literature in general.

Youth is a period of life full of contradictory developments: “individuality and socialization, autonomy and normality, interiority and objectification.”³⁴ In the introduction to *Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding*, Jerome Hamilton Buckley calls the season of youth “the space between,” inspired by Keats’ words: “The imagination of a boy is healthy, and the mature imagination of a man is healthy; but there is a space of life between, in which the soul is in a ferment, the

³³ Tian Guangwen 田广文, “Kunhuo de zhangwang – xinchao chengzhang xiaoshuo lun” <困惑的张望——新潮成长小说论>, M.A. thesis, Shangdong Normal University, submission date is April 30, 2002.

³⁴ Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*, London: Verso, 1987, p.16.

character undecided, the way of life uncertain, the ambition thick-sighted. . . .”³⁵ This space between childhood and adulthood is far from happiness; young people are easily “bruised and wounded” when they encounter reality. “The happy season of youth” is just “an illusion of those who have lost it.”³⁶

Bildungsroman novels initially appeared in Germany in the last third of the eighteenth century. They were “principally concerned with the spiritual and psychological development of the young protagonist.”³⁷ Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship) was pivotal in the development of the genre in Germany. Dozens of monographs and hundreds of articles deal with the development and meaning of the type of novel that uses Goethe’s work as its model.

Even though Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship* was written as early as 1795, the term *Bildungsroman*, as a literary genre, was not coined until the 1810s by an obscure professor of rhetoric in Dorpat, Karl von Morgenstern.³⁸ According to Fritz Martini’s study, Morgenstern’s coinage of the term *Bildungsroman* was a theoretical response to Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship*.³⁹ The term *Bildungsroman* was first defined as a genre by Morgenstern as follows:

³⁵ Letter of April 18, 1818, Hyder Edward, ed. *The Letters of John Keats*, 2 vols. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958, I, pp.280-281.

³⁶ Jerome Hamilton Buckley, *Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974, p.vii.

³⁷ James Hardin, “An Introduction” to *Reflection and Action: Essays on the Bildungsroman*, James Hardin ed. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991, p.ix.

³⁸ Fritz Martini, “*Bilgunsroman — Term and Theory*” in *Reflection and Action: Essays on the Bildungsroman*, pp. 1-25.

³⁹ Ibid.

It will justly bear the name *Bildungsroman* firstly and primarily on account of its thematic material, because it portrays the Bildung [formation/education/ culture] of the hero in its beginning and growth to a certain stage of completeness; and also secondly because it is by virtue of this portrayal that it furthers the reader's Bildung to a much greater extent than any other kind of novel.⁴⁰

Morgenstern linked the word *Bildung* to both the hero of the story and reader.

Martini further points out that Morgenstern's creation of the term resulted from his defense of "the novel as a moral means of education, as opposed to the conception of the novel as mere entertainment, pleasure, fantasy, and as an escape from reality."⁴¹

Though Morgenstern was the first to introduce the term *Bildungsroman*, this kind of novel was analyzed by the critic Friedrich von Blanckenburg in his "Versuch Über den Roman" (Essay on the Novel) as early as 1774. The source of this work of novel theory lay in Blanckenburg's appreciation of Christoph Martin Wieland's *Agathon* (1767), and "for the way in which it overtly (and thematically) transforms the traditional novel genre by investing it with a new psychological and intellectual seriousness."⁴² For Blanckenburg, Wieland's principal achievement resided in his ability to get inside a character, to portray the complexity of human potential which, in interaction with the outside world, yields the tangible process of human growth and change. Blackenburg

⁴⁰ Quoted in Lothar Kohn, *Entwicklungs- und Bildungsroman*, Stuttgart, 1969, p.5.

⁴¹ Fritz Martini, "Bildungsroman – Term and Theory" in *Reflection and Action: Essays on the Bildungsroman*, p.24.

⁴² Martin Swales, *The German Bildungsroman from Wieland to Hesse*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978, p.13.

came very close to coining the term *Bildungsroman* by developing the theory of the novel of inwardness: the novel should be evaluated “on the basis of the extent to which it portrays the inner soul, the inner history of the person portrayed.”⁴³

Above all, however, it was Wilhelm Dilthey who brought the term *Bildungsroman* into general usage in 1870. Dilthey’s definition derived from his analysis of Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship*:

A regulated development within the life of the individual is observed, each of its stages has its own intrinsic value and is at the same time the basis for a higher stage. The dissonances and conflicts of life appear as the necessary growth points through which the individual must pass on his way to maturity and harmony.⁴⁴

In his “Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung” (Poetry and Experience) of 1906, he defines the genre in greater detail: the theme of the *Bildungsroman* is the history of a young man

who enters into life in a blissful state of ignorance, seeks related souls, experiences friendship and love, struggles with the hard realities of the world and thus armed with a variety of experiences, matures, finds himself and his mission in the world.⁴⁵

⁴³ Fritz Martini, “*Bildungsroman* – Term and Theory” in *Reflection and Action: Essays on the Bildungsroman*, p.21.

⁴⁴ *Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung*, Leipzig and Bern, 1913, p. 394.

⁴⁵ James Hardin, “An Introduction” to *Reflection and Action: Essays on the Bildungsroman*, p.xiv.

Swales has pointed out the limitations of Dilthey's definition. It is questionable whether the "fulfillment and harmony" to which Dilthey refers should be the "necessary goal of the *Bildungsroman*."⁴⁶ Dilthey's definition, despite its narrowness, remains the most frequently cited. Over time, the term *Bildungsroman* has been applied ever more broadly in literary scholarship.

In Germany the *Bildungsroman* soon generated several noticeable subtypes: the *Entwicklungsroman*, or the "novel of development," "a chronicle of a young man's general growth;" the *Erziehungsroman*, or the "pedagogical novel," "with an emphasis on the youth's training and formal education;" and the *Kunstlerroman*, or the "artist novel," "a tale of the development of an artist."⁴⁷

Some scholars are cautious when applying the term *Bildungsroman* and try to distinguish it from the above-mentioned headings. For instance, Melitta Gerhard has attempted to make *Bildungsroman* more precise by categorizing it as a subgenre of the *Entwicklungsroman*. According to Gerhard, the *Entwicklungsroman* is the more general term, embracing those novels that treat the confrontation of the individual with the world and the protagonist's maturation and development. Gerhard suggests that *Bildungsroman* is a specific sort of *Entwicklungsroman* that flourished in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.⁴⁸

Another scholar, Martin Swales, has made it clear that his preference of the term

⁴⁶ Martin Swales, "Introduction" to *The German Bildungsroman from Wieland to Hesse*, p.3.

⁴⁷ Jerome Hamilton Buckley, *Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding*, p.13.

⁴⁸ James Hardin, "An Introduction" to *Reflection and Action: Essays on the Bildungsroman*, p.xvi.

Bildungsroman over *Erziehungsroman* and *Entwicklungsroman* is due to *Bildungsroman*'s cultural and philosophical traits. The *Erziehungsroman* deals with the educational process in a quite specific and limited way: "a certain set of values to be acquired, of lessons to be learned," while the *Bildungsroman*, in a remarkable fusion of theory and practice, is mainly concerned with the growing and evolving process of young protagonists by focusing on their inner life and psychological development. The word *Bildung* contains the cultural "values by which a man lives." Compared with *Bildungsroman*, the term *Entwicklungsroman* is fairly neutral and bears less "emotional and intellectual" flavor than does *Bildungsroman*.⁴⁹

In recent decades, many literary critics and scholars have been very skeptical not only about whether individual novels are *Bildungsroman* but also about whether or not the genre itself is as "important and prevalent" as has been suggested. In his article of "The Apprenticeship of the Reader: The *Bildungsroman* of the "Age of Goethe", Dennis F. Mahoney has enumerated a few scholars' arguments. For example, Jeffrey Sammons concludes that the *Bildungsroman* is a "phantom genre" after examining the nineteenth century German novels. Harmut Steinecke points out that "German novelists and theoreticians tried to find compromises between *Wilhelm Meister* and the Western European novel of society" before Dilthey brought the term *Bildungsroman* into general usage in 1870. Only after 1870 were the novels following the tradition of *Wilhelm*

⁴⁹ Martin Swales, *The German Bildungsroman from Wieland to Hesse*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978, p.14.

Meister viewed as “being typically German.” Furthermore, scholars such as Steinecke and Hans Vaget have suggested new terms such as the “Individualroman” or “novel of socialization” in order to delineate “the contents and objectives of the novels in question and linking them to developments within other European literature.”⁵⁰

In spite of the lack of consensus between scholars on the connotations of the term *Bildungsroman*, they all agree that the interaction of outward experience and inward reflection is the main concern of the *Bildungsroman* as a novelistic genre. In the following paragraphs, I will discuss these two aspects, outwardness and inwardness.

1. Outwardness — Plot and Theme

Jerome Buckley summarizes the principal elements of the plot of the *Bildungsroman*: “childhood, the conflict of generations, provinciality, the larger society, self-education, alienation, ordeal by love, the search for a vocation and a philosophy of life.”⁵¹ The child is “responsive” to these “experiences that might alter the entire direction of his growing mind and eventually influence for better or for worse his [adult personality].”⁵²

Buckley elucidates the role that fatherhood plays in the *Bildungsroman*. He points out that that the growing child, in many nineteenth century English novels, is often “orphaned,” “fatherless” or at least alienated from his father.⁵³ He emphasizes that “the

⁵⁰ Dennis F. Mahoney, “The Apprenticeship of the Reader: The *Bildungsroman* of the “Age of Goethe” in *Reflection and Action: Essays on the Bildungsroman*, p.100.

⁵¹ Jerome Hamilton Buckley, *Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding*, p.18.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p.19.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.19.

loss of the father, either by death or alienation, usually symbolizes or parallels a loss of faith in the hero's home and family and leads inevitably to the search for a substitute parent or creed."⁵⁴ Therefore, "the defection of the father becomes accordingly the principal motive force in the assertion of the youth's independence."⁵⁵

Setting out on a journey is another key element in the plot of the *Bildungsroman*. "The journey from home is in some degree the flight from provinciality" to a larger society, as well as the flight from the bonds of and also the conflict with the parental generation.⁵⁶ The protagonist first enters the city with bewilderment and gullibility. Buckley accentuates the double role the city plays in the young man's life: "it is both the agent of liberation and a source of corruption." And "the city, which seems to promise infinite variety and newness, all too often brings a disenchantment more alarming and decisive than any dissatisfaction with the narrowness of provincial life."⁵⁷

Martin Swales points out that the tension between "potentiality and actuality" is central to the growth of an individual hero in a *Bildungsroman* novel. On the one hand, the *Bildungsroman* explores "the sheer complexity of individual potentiality;" on the other hand, it recognizes that "practical reality – marriage, family, career – is a necessary dimension of the hero's self-realization."⁵⁸

This tension becomes part of the ordeal the youth has to grapple with in order to

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p.19.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 20.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p.20.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p.29.

achieve maturity. At the end of most *Bildungsroman* stories, the young protagonist finds an "accommodation" between the individual and society. This characteristic is especially common in the English novel of adolescence, in which there is always "a certain practical accommodation between the hero and the social world around him."⁵⁹

"Accommodation" does not mean solving the contradiction, but rather "learn[ing] to live with it, and even transform[ing] it into a tool for survival."⁶⁰ In other words, the protagonist "realizes his deepest interiority in the outside world," and recognizes "the discrepancy between the interiority and the world."⁶¹ The protagonist finally makes peace with his reality.

In his article, "The *Bildungsroman* for Nonspecialists," Jeffrey Sammons emphasizes the "evolutionary change within the self" in *Bildungsroman*,

Bildung is not merely the accumulation of experience, not merely maturation in the form of fictional biography. There must be a sense of evolutionary change within the self, a teleology of individuality, even if the novel, as many do, comes to doubt or deny the possibility of achieving a gratifying result.⁶²

The concern of the *Bildungsroman* is the growth process itself, not in any particular goal that adulthood may make possible. Therefore, "it does not matter whether the

⁵⁹ Martin Swales, *The German Bildungsroman from Wieland to Hesse*. p.34.

⁶⁰ Franco Morreti, *The Way of the World*, p.10.

⁶¹ George Lukacs, *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The M.I.T. Press, 1971, p.136.

⁶² Jeffrey L. Sammons, "The *Bildungsroman* for Nonspecialists" in *Reflection and Action*, p.41.

process of *Bildung* succeeds or fails, whether the protagonist achieves an accommodation with life and society or not.”⁶³ In this sense, it allows the novel to preclude any simple sense of finality, of “over and done with.” The *Bildungsroman* is “written for the sake of the journey, and not for the sake of the happy ending toward which that journey points.”⁶⁴ Therefore, many examples of the *Bildungsromane* remain open-ended.

2. Inwardness — Humanism, Human-consciousness, Self-reflective Discursiveness, and Educational Value for the Reader

The *Bildungsroman* is a noticeably subjective genre focusing on the protagonist’s inner life and psychological development. The term *Bildung* “involves a belief in inwardness as the source of human distinction.”⁶⁵ In 1923 Thomas Mann commented on the German reverence for *Bildung*:

The finest characteristic of the typical German, the best-known and also the most flattering to his self-esteem, is his inwardness. It is no accident that it was the Germans who gave to the world the intellectually stimulating and very humane literary form which we call the *Bildungsroman*. Western Europe has its novel of social criticism, to which the Germans regard this other type as their own special counterpart: it is at the same time an autobiography, a confession. The inwardness, the “Bildung” of a German implies introspectiveness; an individualistic cultural conscience;

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Martin Swales, *The German Bildungsroman from Wieland to Hesse*, p.34.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p.151.

consideration for the careful tending, the shaping, deepening and perfecting of one's own personality or, in religious terms, for the salvation and justification of one's own life.⁶⁶

Bildungsroman novels demonstrate "an intense and sustained concern for the growth of an individual in all his experiential complexity and potentiality." And "it is precisely this interest in the inner life and processes of the individual that confers poetic seriousness. . . ."⁶⁷

In their study of the *Bildungsroman*, scholars agree that the *Bildungsroman* was born within the humanistic ideal of late eighteenth-century Germany. "The concept of *Bildung* is intensely bourgeois; it carries with it many assumptions about the autonomy and relative integrity of the self, its potential self-creative energies, its relative range of opinions within material, social, even psychological determinants."⁶⁸ Therefore, the *Bildungsroman* is closely related to "the early bourgeois, humanistic concept of the shaping of the individual self from its innate potentialities through acculturation and social experience to the threshold of maturity."⁶⁹ It is a novel form with "a concern for the whole man unfolding organically in all his complexity and richness. . . . [Its] concern is the expression of a particular kind of bourgeois humanism."⁷⁰

Closely related to the inwardness of the *Bildungsroman* is the intellectual flavor in

⁶⁶ Quoted by Swales, *The German Bildungsroman from Wieland to Hesse*, p.159.

⁶⁷ Martin Swales, *The German Bildungsroman from Wieland to Hesse*, p.19.

⁶⁸ Jeffery L. Sammons, "The *Bildungsroman* for Nonspecialists: An Attempt at a Clarification" in *Reflection and Action: Essays on the Bildungsroman*, p.42.

⁶⁹ Ibid, p.41.

⁷⁰ Martin Swales, *The German Bildungsroman from Wieland to Hesse*, p.14.

this kind of novel. The novels, such as *Wilhelm Meister*, and *David Copperfield*, not only present the growth process of the young protagonists, but also explored the “nature and the limitation of human consciousness,” reveal “the protagonist’s capacity for self-reflection,” which “is part of the whole living process in which he is embedded.”⁷¹ This self-reflective discursiveness, preoccupied with the development of mind and soul, is an important characteristic of the genre.

When discussing this kind of novel, Lukacs emphasizes its educational impact upon the reader by saying:

This form has been called the ‘novel of education’ – rightly, because its action has to be a conscious, controlled process aimed at a certain goal: the development of qualities in men which would never blossom without the active intervention of other men and circumstances; whilst the goal thus attained is in itself formative and encouraging to others – is itself a means of education.⁷²

It is not only essential for the protagonist of the *Bildungsroman* to reflect throughout his ordeals and trials, but also crucial for the reader to reflect.

In order to give reader a better understanding of this literary genre, in the following paragraphs, I will clarify some points that may be easily confused.

⁷¹ Ibid., p.35-36.

⁷² George Lukacs, *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*, p.135.

Even though novels written in the tradition of *Wilhelm Meister* were numerous and important in the history of the German nineteenth-century novel, the *Bildungsroman* was by no means the only kind of novel to come out of Germany in that period of time. Nor should it be regarded as a narrowly German literary practice. We find this style of novel in English, French and other European literature from the late eighteenth to the early twentieth century, in examples such as Roger Gard Stendhal's *The Red and the Black*, Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*, Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* and *David Copperfield*, Somerset Maugham's *Of Human Bondage* and Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain*.

It might be helpful to briefly examine biography, autobiography, memoir and biographical / autobiographical novel in relation to the *Bildungsroman* as fictional tale. M.H. Abrams has tried to distinguish these literary genres by emphasizing the nuances of the contents in his *A Glossary of Literary Terms*:

Late in the seventeenth century, John Dryden defined biography neatly as "the history of particular men's lives." The term now connotes a relatively full account of a particular person's life, involving the attempt to set forth character, temperament, and milieu, as well as the subject's activities and experiences. . . .

Autobiography is a biography written by the subject about himself or herself. It is to be distinguished from the memoir, in which the

emphasis is not on the author's developing self but on the people and events that the author has known or witnessed, and also from the private diary or journal, which is a day-to-day record of the events in one's life, generally written for personal use and satisfaction, with little or no thought of publication.⁷³

It is sometimes difficult to draw a sharp line between autobiography and the autobiographical novel. Buckley has tried to distinguish them from the angle of the narrator. He argues that the autobiographer is typically "the older man, indulging in fond retrospect, often more than a little sentimental in his view of his youth, recalling what it pleases him to remember."⁷⁴ The autobiographer is pretty much limited by his own point of view of his own experience, and has to be very self-conscious "through modesty, through fear of unwanted self-exposure" and fear of being criticized as "egotistical."⁷⁵ Compared with autobiographer, the autobiographical novelist has a perceptible advantage to freely "conceal or reveal what he will of his past by assigning to his hero some of his own acts and feelings and inventing as many others as he chooses to complete a dramatic characterization." In contrast to the relatively senior autobiographer recalling his memorable past, the "autobiographical novelist is usually a younger man, nearer in time to his initiation, self-protectively more ironic, still mindful of the growing pains of adolescence, reproducing as accurately as possible the turbulence of the space between

⁷³ M.H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 7th edition, Toronto: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1999, p.22.

⁷⁴ Jerome Hamilton Buckley, *Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding*, pp.25-26.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

childhood and early manhood.”⁷⁶ Meanwhile, he needs to maintain the independence of the fiction from himself as an author.⁷⁷

From the above review we can see that biography, autobiography, memoir, diary, and biographical/autobiographical novels, more or less, share common thematic concerns with the *Bildungsroman* as fictional tale. They can be labeled as *Bildungsroman* when they are profoundly engaged in the exploration of values and ideas, the hero's growth process, inwardness, subjectivity, and philosophical traits.

There are a number of novels that deal with a woman's search for self-identity and values. During the process of the heroine's quest for “self-knowledge and self-realization,” not only does she encounter outward difficulties such as “an uncomprehending husband, economic dependence,” but she also struggles with “the elusiveness of the total self” and “human cognition.”⁷⁸ These stories recall the *Bildungsroman*.

Bildungsroman has attracted the attention of the feminist writers and critics in the twentieth century. This literary genre is named “the most salient form for literature influenced by neo-feminism”⁷⁹ and “the most popular form of feminist fiction.”⁸⁰ *The Voyage In* is a collection of essays on “fiction of female development” compiled in 1983.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Martin Swales, *The German Bildungsroman from Wieland to Hesse*, p.165.

⁷⁹ Ellen Morgan, “Humanbecoming: Form and Focus in the Neo-Feminist Novel,” in *Image of Women in Fiction: Feminist Perspectives*, ed. Susan Koppelman Cornillon, Bowling Green: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1972, pp.183-85.

⁸⁰ Barbara A. White, *Growing Up Female: Adolescent Girlhood in American Fiction*, Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1985, p.195.

Dilthey's definition of the *Bildungsroman* is accused of being sexist because women are not afforded the same opportunities as men, such as leaving countryside for the city, severing family ties, or playing an active role in society. The authors in *The Voyage In* set forth definition of "the fiction of female development," "tak[ing] into consideration specifically female psychological and sociological theories" and citing a number of English and American novels of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁸¹ James Hardin concludes that "in effect, a form of female *Bildungsroman* is constructed that roughly parallels the general thematics and structure of the 'male' variety."⁸²

The above is a brief review of *Bildungsroman* as a literary genre. When reading the Chinese *Bildungsroman* of Su Tong and Yu Hua, I will use the above points as criteria to examine how these two Chinese writers explore the inner world of young Chinese people in a time of trouble. Since each of the fictional works achieves its own strength and integrity in spite of what it has borrowed from literary antecedents, I have chosen to approach each work separately, as an object to be measured in itself, instead of arranging my materials thematically.

⁸¹ James Hardin, "An Introduction" to *Reflection and Action: Essays on the Bildungsroman*, p.xvii.

⁸² Ibid.

Chapter 2

The Changing Patterns of the *Bildungsroman* in Modern Chinese Literature

In this chapter, I will examine the changing patterns of the *Bildungsroman* in modern Chinese literature in order to demonstrate that these changing narrative patterns follow the reflections of Chinese intellectuals on China's social and political vacillation during the past century.

Traits of the *Bildungsroman* in Pre-modern Chinese Literature

As we can see from the previous chapter, the *Bildungsroman*, as a literary genre, is of western literary tradition. When we look back into Chinese literary tradition, we cannot find this novelistic form until early in the twentieth century. Certain traits of *Bildungsroman*, however, such as inwardness, humanity, discursiveness, self-consciousness including self-reflection and self-examination, and didactic function are prominent in many traditional Chinese literary genres such as poetry, prose, personal correspondence, and the novel. Poetry (*shi*), the dominant literary genre in pre-modern China, is one source of this self-consciousness, seen, for example, in many Tang (618-907) Buddhist poems. Later, the Northern Song (960-1127) poetry introduced philosophical and intellectual qualities. Ou-yang Xiu (1007-1072), Wang Anshi (1021-1086) and other early Northern Song Dynasty poets composed in a narrative or prosaic

manner to accommodate philosophical issues; later Su Shi (1037-1101) and Huang Tingjian (1045-1105) made self-reflective intellectualism one of the dominant features in their writing.

In pre-modern China, the literary forms closest to the *Bildungsroman* are biography and autobiography. In *Confucian's Progress: Autobiographical Writings in Traditional China*, a path-breaking study of autobiographical writings in traditional China, Pei-yi Wu examines the ecology of biography and autobiography in pre-modern China. Wu emphasizes Chinese biography's subservience to historiography. What we would recognize as biography today used to be under a variety of names: *zhuan* (biography), *xu* (preface), *muzhiming* (tomb notice and inscription), *ji* (record), *zhi* (notice), *lei* (dirge), *nianpu* (annalistic biography), and so forth. Among these, *zhuan* most resembles modern biography. This style was first used by Sima Qian (145-86 BC) to record the biographies in *Shiji* (*Records of the Historian*), the first comprehensive history of China from the time of the mythical Yellow Emperor (*Huangdi*) to the West Han dynasty (202 B.C – 8 A.D) of his own day.⁸³ The *zhuan* form was adopted by subsequent historians to compile dynastic histories. From the very beginning, *zhuan* was closely associated with historiography, according to Pei-yi Wu, it was the “main vehicle of historiography” with

⁸³ *Shiji*, the broad ranging work extended over 130 chapters not in historical sequence but divided into particular subjects, including annals, chronicles, treatises - on music, ceremonies, calendars, religion, economics - and extended biographies. In this way, the *Shiji*, or *Records of the Historian*, covers the period from the five sages of prehistoric times, through the Xia, Shang, Zhou, and Qin dynasties to the Han Dynasty of Sima Qian's own time. The Zhou Dynasty, probably founded just before 1000BC, represents the beginning of the historic period and has provided archeological evidence that confirms some of Sima Qian's history.

the “didactic function of the world.”⁸⁴ The *zhuan* historiographer usually shunned personal observation and first-hand knowledge. Despite writing about subjects with which he was familiar, for the most part he relied heavily on archival materials and the reports of others. Any information based on his personal observation and knowledge would be included as an appendix to the *zhuan* with a heading such as “historians generally say” or “in appraisal we say.” Biographers in pre-modern China tended to maintain the “convention of the impartial, invisible, and unobtrusive narrator.”⁸⁵

According to Wu’s study, the *zhuan* was considered a branch of history, not literature. Before the Song dynasty (960-1279), it was excluded from the works of literary critics and anthologists. For instance, Lu Zhi (261-303) made no reference to the *zhuan* in his pioneer treatise “Wenfu” (Rhyme Prose on Literature); nor did Xiao Tong (501-531) include the *zhuan* among the thirty-seven genres he listed in *Wenxuan* (Anthology of literature), the earliest extant multi-genre anthology of Chinese literature.⁸⁶

The *Zhuan* typically focuses upon the historical aspects of someone’s life, the documented features of a career, rather than the inner and reflective aspects of a person’s life. In so doing, the *zhuan* establishes the outer history of an individual, but not the ongoing intellectual and spiritual unfolding of their character.

According to Wu, the difference between autobiography and biography in pre-

⁸⁴ Pei-Yi Wu, *The Confucian’s Progress: Autobiographical Writings in Traditional China*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990, p.4.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p.5.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

modern Chinese literature had long been neglected. The major subgenres of Chinese autobiography for the most part imitate the counterparts of biography by adding *zi* (self) to a title of the biographical subgenre. Wu identifies Tao Qian's (362-427) "Biography of Master Five Willows" as the first "self-written biography."⁸⁷ Before the end of thirteenth century, the autobiographical authors strictly followed the convention of the "impartial, invisible and unobtrusive narrator" of biography and "recorded the external events, usually public and official, but seldom tried to probe inner stirrings or disclose complex motives."⁸⁸ The autobiography's subservience to history provided the author no adequate vehicle for self-expression.

Since the end of the thirteenth century, however, the constraints of biography on autobiography loosened. Breakthroughs were made toward introspective and confessional accounts. Zen Buddhist accounts of enlightenment constitute the real beginning of autobiographical expression; a new spiritual fervor was added to the self-written narratives in which the author recited his long and arduous search for fundamental personal change. The next three centuries, from the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) through the early Qing dynasty (1644-1912), witnessed the emergence of many Neo-Confucian autobiographical writings, in which readers found the full expression of an individual in search of himself, examining and reflecting upon the nature of his life and cultivation of his learning. Some of these writings are in the form of the travel

⁸⁷ Ibid., p.15.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p.xi.

journal, in which the author not only depicts the external landscapes through which he wanders, but also explores his own nature. Here, travel is a metaphor for self-reflection, a journey inward and a peregrination of the soul.

Wu posits the influence of the Wang Yangming school of Neo Confucianism as the main cause for the rise of interest in self-reflection, self-examination, and most importantly, humanity. Certain Neo-Confucians “examined their consciences and confessed their misdeeds with a depth of anguish and remorse unthinkable in classical Confucianism.”⁸⁹ Wu labels the autobiographical writings in this period “spiritual autobiography.”⁹⁰ Examples can be found in the writings of some Neo-Confucians and Buddhist thinkers. Deng Huoqu’s “Nanxun lu” records his frantic and ultimately vain wanderings, both physically and spiritually, in search of enlightenment;⁹¹ Hu Zhi’s “Kunxue ji” records his gradual awakening to the full significance of the concept of the innate knowledge of good (*liangzhi*).⁹² Deqing, one of the prominent Buddhist thinkers in the late Ming dynasty, in *nianpu* (annalistic biography) form, makes interesting accounts of his childhood and his path to enlightenment.⁹³

The influence of Wang Yangming school cannot fully explain, however, the general intellectual climate of self-consciousness which was not only revealed in

⁸⁹ Ibid., p.xii.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p.127.

⁹¹ Deng Huoqu 邓豁渠 (1498-1570). “Nanxun lu” 南询录 (The record of a quest in the south). 1599.

⁹² Hu Zhi 胡直 (1517-1585). “Kunxue ji” 困学记 (A Record of learning through difficulties), in *Mingru xuean* 明儒学案, pp.221-24.

⁹³ Deqing 德清 (1546-1623). *Zuben Hanshan dashi nianpu shuzhu* 足本憨山大师年谱疏注 (Unabridged and annotated annalistic biography of Master Hanshan). Edited by Fu Zheng 福徵, Suzhou: Honghua she, 1934.

autobiographical writings, but also in fiction, drama and other literary genres. Some scholars suggest that the economic and social conditions of the late Ming dynasty had a powerful impact on the new perception of self. Cynthia Brokaw is one of these scholars.

She says:

The commercial boom of the late sixteenth century created new economic opportunities and encouraged social mobility, providing a natural context for a reevaluation of the powers of the individual and his or her role within society. The increased participation of peasants in handicraft industries, the rise of merchants to positions of social prestige and political influence, the opening of new educational opportunities through the publication of popular educational literature – these changes might well have led thoughtful observers to reflect on both the greater effectiveness and the heavier responsibility now attached to individual effort. Great opportunities for advancement increased the individual's sense of control over destiny, but also intensified personal pressures to succeed in a context where of course not everyone could succeed.⁹⁴

Brokaw proposes that the proliferation of autobiography in the late Ming dynasty might be seen in part as a response to the new economic, social, and intellectual demands placed on the individual to demonstrate the individual's worth in a time of intense change.⁹⁵

In seventeenth century, further progress was made in the writing of autobiography. A few autobiographers, "responding to the contemporary fascination with the fantastic and the occult, borrowed from fiction both devices and episodes."⁹⁶ Wu describes this kind of autobiographical writing as "self-invented," an imaginative portrayal of the

⁹⁴ Cynthia Brokaw, "Review on *The Confucian's Progress: Autobiographical Writings in Traditional China*" in *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Vol.53, No.1 (Jun., 1993), 182-183.

⁹⁵ Cynthia Brokaw, "Review of *The Confucian's Progress: Autobiographical Writings in Traditional China*" in *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, p.183.

⁹⁶ Pei-Yi Wu, *The Confucian's Progress: Autobiographical Writings in Traditional China*, p.xii.

individual. For example, the autobiographical writings of Wang Jie⁹⁷ and Mao Qiling⁹⁸ were no longer in imitation of the earlier historiographical models, but heavily influenced by popular Ming fiction.

After 1680, in the Qing dynasty, experimentation with form in the genre of autobiography ceased. Autobiographical writings reverted to the historiographical conventions. Wu attributes this retreat to the fading of the Wang Yangming School which he regards as the force encouraging personal, self-searching, and self-revealing narratives. This may be part of the reason, but it cannot be the only reason. By the early Qing dynasty, writers already had more literary genres at their disposal for self-expression, especially popular literary forms, such as vernacular fiction and dramas; they were not limited to the form of autobiography. Yet, it was not until the early twentieth century that autobiography of a different kind, one influenced by Western models, was written.

From Wu's review of autobiographical writings in pre-modern China, we can see that the form of autobiography shifts from historiography to self-expression. By the early Qing dynasty, autobiography had already attained some features found in the modern *Bildungsroman*. The *Bildungsroman* specifically deals with the protagonist's transitional period from childhood to adulthood, while biography and autobiography in general purport to be factual accounts of a person's complete life story. The "spiritual"

⁹⁷ Wang Jie 汪价 (1603? – 1682?). "Sanrong zhui ren guang zixu" 三农赘人广自序 (Expanded self-account of the Useless Man Sannong) in *Lidai Zixu zhuan wenchao* 历代自叙传文钞, 1:32-67.

⁹⁸ Mao Qiling 毛奇龄 (1623-1716). "Ziwei muzhiming" 自为墓誌铭 (Self-written tomb notice and inscription) in *Mao Xihe xiansheng quanji* 毛西河先生全集 (Complete works of Master Mao Xihe), 35: II : 1a – 20b. 1761.

autobiographical writings in the Ming dynasty, however, as in the *Bildungsroman*, only record the protagonist's path to enlightenment, though not necessarily during the period of youth. Such autobiographies as the travel journals written by the Neo-Confucians, and *nianpu* written by the Buddhist thinkers provide full narratives both of events and inner spiritual developments. The inwardness and the intellectual flavor of these autobiographical writings form the foundation for those who later find such fascination with the exploration of self-expression in early twentieth-century China.

***Bildungsroman* in Modern Chinese Literature**

When we examine twentieth-century Chinese literature, we first encounter its most prominent linguistic feature — the use of *baihua* (plain language) in writing. Even though it is well known that *baihua* was not widely used in writing until 1917 when Hu Shi called for the New Culture Movement, the vernacular had already expanded its usage several decades before. “The written form of northern *baihua* [白话], called *baihuawen* [白话文], had become a well-established and sophisticated language by the middle of the [nineteenth] century, principally because it was used in novels, drama, and storytellers’ written narratives,” “challenging the previous ‘monopoly’ of *wenyan*” (classical Chinese) 文言.⁹⁹ Written forms of *baihua* were adopted in journalism since the 1870s and later were applied in revolutionary press and journals for women.¹⁰⁰ It was Hu Shi, however,

⁹⁹ Milena Dolezelova-Velingerova, “The Origin of Modern Chinese Literature” in *Modern Chinese Literature in the May Fourth Era*. Merle Goldman ed. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977, pp.19-20.

¹⁰⁰ For detail see Milena Dolezelova – Velingerova’s article “The Origin of Modern Chinese Literature” in *Modern Chinese Literature in the May Fourth Era*, Merle Goldman ed. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977, pp17-35.

who started to seriously promote the use of plain language among the intellectuals in 1917, with the belief that the use of vernacular was instrumental in disseminating the new thoughts and ideas to the common people. Since then, the utilization of plain language in creative writing has become the most prominent linguistic feature in modern Chinese literature.

In the following paragraphs, I will examine the Chinese *Chengzhang xiaoshuo* / *Bildungsroman* in the different historical periods of the twentieth century: the May Fourth era, the 1930s and 1940s, the seventeen years after the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC), the 1980s and 1990s.

The early twentieth century was a transitional period in China: politically, the imperial dynasty met its demise and the Republic was established; culturally, under the influence of modern Western ideas, Chinese intellectuals started to rethink traditional Chinese values and customs; psychologically, Chinese intellectuals were more concerned with their value as independent individuals. The May Fourth Movement in 1919 inaugurated a period of social, political and literary reform.¹⁰¹ Individualism, anti-traditionalism, and nationalism captured the young intellectuals' imagination. They tried to throw off the weight of China's Confucian tradition and absorb Western culture. Their

In this article, Dolezelova-Velingerova traces the development of the use of vernacular in Chinese literature from the late Qing to May Fourth era.

¹⁰¹ The May Fourth incident of 1919 was a student demonstration against the Peking government which had complied with the decision of the Western power at Versailles to cede Shandong province to Japan. May Fourth movement was more than an opening attack on domestic weakness and foreign imperialism. It stimulated a broader cultural and intellectual revolution, and helped cause unprecedented social and political changes in modern China.

anti-traditionalism was not complete, however. As Lin Yusheng repeatedly points out in *The crisis of Chinese consciousness: radical antitraditionalism in the May Fourth era*, Chinese intellectuals were often rebelling against their Confucian heritage, but they were also part of it. In this social and political environment, the *Bildungsroman* in this period was mainly written in the form of diary and autobiography and focused on the awakening of self-consciousness combined with cultural anti-traditionalism and political nationalism.

The May Fourth era was a time of the awakening of the individual. The "I" of the May Fourth youth was identified by an intense awareness of the significance of one's existence, role, and responsibility in society. During this period, the western influence upon China cannot be underestimated. The May Fourth intellectuals were curious and enthusiastic about learning from the West, Japan, and Russia. Numerous philosophical and literary books were either translated from Japanese into Chinese or directly from English and European languages, such as the books and novels of European Realism, Romanticism, Expressionism, Freud and Jung's psychoanalytical theories, Marxism, and Nietzsche's philosophy, and so on and so forth.

The trend of subjective sentiment in modern Chinese literature is partially of Chinese origin; the inspiration for its modern quality, however, is derived from the West. European Romanticism, Expressionism, Japanese Naturalism and I-novels are often associated with the highly sentimental, humane, subjective, and confessional tone of early May Fourth writing. Michael Duke concludes:

The concept of literature as spontaneous self-expression — consonant as it seemed with the venerable Chinese concept of *shi yan zhi* — led to an outpouring of autobiographical and confessional literature notable for its stress on spontaneity, intensity, subjectivity of personal emotions, and celebration of the individual. Both the individual psyche and the world of nature were explored as aspects of a passionate search for Truth, Goodness, and Beauty which were believed to culminate in the spiritual ecstasy of romantic love extolled as the height of joy and suffering, honesty and sincerity, defiance of philistine conventions, emancipation and self-consciousness.¹⁰²

In his study of Chinese Romanticism in the first half of the twentieth century, Leo Ou-fan Lee points out that many aspects of European Romanticism were transformed in China. Lee observes that, on the Chinese literary scene, there were two dominant modes influenced by the Western romantic legacy: Wertherian (passive-sentimental) and Promethean (dynamic-heroic). The Wertherian man is full of tender emotions: “gentle and tearful love, nostalgia, and a pervasive melancholy,” and attains his strength from his inner life: “the nuances of his emotion, the mysteries of his unconscious self, or the subjective world of imaginary passion.”¹⁰³ Therefore he is also called a passive

¹⁰² Michael S. Duke, *Blooming and Contending*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985, p.183.

¹⁰³ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *The Romantic Generation of Modern Chinese Writers*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973, p.280.

romanticist. In contrast, the Promethean man is enthusiastic, passionate and dominant. He actively embraces life instead of escaping from it. He attains his strength from outside life and society instead of his inner life. However, it doesn't necessarily mean he is less emotional and less sensitive.¹⁰⁴

Lee emphasizes that the dynamism, the legacy of the nineteenth-century European Romanticism, helps to "distinguish the [May Fourth era] romantic tendency inspired by the West from the sentimental strains in traditional Chinese literature." The romantic trend in early twentieth-century China "enveloped the youth of the entire country" in spite of the fact that "there is not a conscious Romantic Movement" during that period.¹⁰⁵

Romanticism provided the May Fourth generation an autonomous model of self with which to launch an assault on tradition. The values of individualism and subjectivism were appropriated primarily for iconoclastic purposes.

Japan had contributed a great deal to modern Chinese literature by serving as a channel for Western influence and exerting the influence of naturalism upon modern Chinese writers. Because of its humiliating defeat in the Sino-Japanese War (1894 – 1895), China was forced to accept the fact that Japan was no longer its faithful cultural disciple, and had become an advanced country since the Meiji Restoration in 1868. Especially after the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905), many Chinese were genuinely impressed with Japan's remarkable modernization. Beginning in 1896, many Chinese

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p.294.

students were sent by the Qing government to study in Japan with the hope that China could modernize itself by following the Japan's path.

Many May Fourth writers were deeply influenced by Japanese naturalism, which was "the most important pivot in the history of modern Japanese fiction" and was "the conclusion to Meiji (1868-1912) literature," and had "served as the foundation of Japanese literature since the Taisho era [1912-1926]."¹⁰⁶ Japanese naturalism was at first directly influenced by French naturalism. Around 1900, Zola's voluminous novels were widely circulated among young Japanese literary aspirants. In assimilating French naturalism, however, the Japanese writers altered the meaning of the word "nature." For them it became "the principle of inward reflection and the subjective expression of human nature in isolation from objective realities. Included in this subjective vision of reality were the Japanese romantic traits of self-confession and lyrical expression. What resulted was a unique form of Japanese naturalism."¹⁰⁷

The most famous type of the Japanese naturalism was *watakushi-shosetsu* or the I-novel, which is characterized by "a Rousseauesque morality of unrestrained self-revelation, intensive lyricism, and occasional self-pity, and by a sentimental search for the so-called *kindai jiga* (modern self)."¹⁰⁸

The I-novel was initiated with the publication of Shimazaki Toson's (1872-1943)

¹⁰⁶ Nakamura Mitsuo, *Meiji bungakushi* (A History of Meiji Literature) (Tokyo, 1963), p.184.

¹⁰⁷ Ching-mao Cheng, "The Impact of Japanese Literary Trends on Modern Chinese Writers" in *Modern Chinese Literature in the May Fourth Era*. p. 78.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

“Hakai” (Broken Commandment) in 1906 and prevailed through the next two decades. This period coincided with the peak of Chinese students studying in Japan. This literary trend definitely exerted noticeable influence upon Chinese writers then in Japan. Many of them later became members of the Literature Association and the Creation Society. The most famous was Yu Dafu with his story “Chenlun” (Sinking, 1921). Meanwhile, many Chinese writers and scholars started to translate Japanese naturalistic theories and novels and introduced them to Chinese readers. Even Lu Xun translated a study of Japanese naturalism by Katayama Koson (1878-1933).¹⁰⁹

Under the influences of European romanticism and the Japanese I-novel, various forms of literary writing with attention to the “internal self (*neixin* 内心)” as well as a flavor of iconoclasm and nationalism proliferated in this period. Merle Goldman has offered a general characterization of the stories written in this period:

Many works are stories of youth trapped in and rebelling against traditional society. Some of them may have been autobiographical, but they are also biographies of their generation. The frustrations and dreams are also the frustrations and dreams of an entire generation’s search for meaning and purpose in a China these writers described as prostrate, morally bankrupt, politically disjointed, oppressed by warlords and bureaucrats, and humiliated by foreign powers. . . They are filled with their excitement and

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p.79. For more information about Japanese I-novel’s influence upon modern Chinese literature, see Christopher Keaveney’s book *Subversive Self in Modern Chinese Literature*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

enthusiasm for revolution and subsequent disillusionment when it was not realized, their vacillation in time of violent struggle, their desperate pursuit of personal happiness, and their emotional and mental agitation as they broke from Confucian morality. Theirs was a mixed and contradictory picture, but a true picture of their times and of the circles in which they lived.¹¹⁰

The emergence of works such as the stories written by Ding Ling (1904-1986), Yu Dafu (1896-1945), Lu Yin (1898-1934) and Bingxin (1900-1999), can be regarded as the beginning of the Chinese *Bildungsroman*. The *Bildungsroman* in the May Fourth era is noted for a predominance of female writers, exploration of selfhood, self-confessional and decadent sentiment, iconoclastic and nationalistic spirit, and self-narrative form.

Both Yu Dafu's "Sinking" and Ding Ling's "Miss Sophie's Diary" can be taken as representatives of the *Bildungsroman* in the May Fourth era. Both authors revealed the sensibilities of their generation, and both were obsessed with the uncertainties and search for self-definition that characterize youth's first encounters with the world. In this process, they have to first face up to who they are themselves.

"Sinking," an autobiographical story in third-person narrative, was first published in 1921. The protagonist, a poor, lonely and frustrated Chinese student in Japan, is caught between nightly masturbation and daily self-blaming, between patriotism and self-pity,

¹¹⁰ Merle Goldman, ed., *Modern Chinese Literature in the May Fourth Era*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970, p.4.

and finally drowns himself in the sea. "Miss Sophie's Diary" was first published in 1928 in the prominent journal *Xiaoshuo yuebao* (Short Stories Monthly). The first-person protagonist is a sick, bed-ridden female student who has left her South China hometown and sojourns in Beijing to search for love and self-identity. Both stories received enthusiastic reviews at the time and have since become the two most frequently analyzed and anthologized works of May Fourth fiction.

Both Yu Dafu and Ding Ling could be linked to what Leo Ou-fan Lee has called the "romantic generation of modern Chinese writers."¹¹¹ Their stories have obvious autobiographical allusions with a focus on love and sex. The protagonists in their stories are all alienated and sensitive young men and women. In some important ways, however, Yu and Ding stand apart from other writers, such as the tough moral self-questioning of their characters, and their search for self-identity and the feeling of being caught in contradictory situations. Such traits qualify these stories as *Bildungsromans* and resonate with their counterparts in European literature more than one hundred years previously. These young Chinese intellectuals' anti-traditionalism and nationalism added a fresh flavor to the *Bildungsroman*.

In her provocative analysis of Ding Ling's "Miss Sophie's Diary" in *Ding Ling's Fiction: Ideology and Narrative in Modern Chinese Literature*, Yi-tsi Mei Feuerwerker emphasizes Sophie's intense self-examination which is made possible by the

¹¹¹ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *The Romantic Generation of Modern Chinese Writers*, pp.81-110.

protagonist's sensitive personality, intellectual identity, vulnerable physical condition, contradictory experiences, and sexual anxiety. The diary form facilitates the revelation of the protagonist's self-questioning. Two main issues dominate Sophie's life — "sexuality and tuberculosis," which are two "powerfully destructive forces, deeply subversive of physical and mental well-being, and both can lead to annihilation. . . Finding herself in double jeopardy, Sophie must struggle to define and preserve some sense of self. The writing of the diary is the externalized form of that struggle."¹¹² Tuberculosis prevents Sophie from living a normal life, and isolates her from the others, though she has some friends to visit her regularly. This isolation gives her more time and space to ponder. Feuerwerker emphasizes that Sophie feels herself to be caught in constant contradictions which cause the uncertainty inside her: "wholesome milk and ruinous wine, health and illness, laughter and tears, life and death, truth and deception, friendship and loneliness, regard and disgust for herself."¹¹³

The sense of uncertainty and isolation are further accentuated by her breaking "away from the traditional social structure and conventional codes of behavior, away from the institutionalized restrictions of marriage, a regular job, or school."¹¹⁴ In this sense, Sophie can be regarded as the representative of the "new woman" in May Fourth era.

¹¹² Yi-tsi Mei Feuerwerker, *Ding Ling's Fiction: Ideology and Narrative in Modern Chinese Literature*, Cambridge: Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982, p.45.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p.28.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

The restless turmoil is intensified by the contradiction of being in love with a man she despises. If we say that isolation from the outside world and family provide her time and space, and that the sense of uncertainty caused by contradictory experiences provide her drive for self-examination, then her love experience and ambivalence toward sexuality provide her concrete material for her ruminations. She indulges in the daily struggle of to love or not to love. Feuerwerker explains that,

Sophie's ambivalence toward sexuality is also characteristic of the particular limbo in which the quasi-liberated young woman found herself during the 1920s and 1930s, when she was only partially freed from the traditional institutionalized modes of womanly behavior. Sophie defiantly proclaims her passionate desires, yet does not feel free to indulge them. Her predicament is due to particular sociohistorical conditions. The stylistic as well as psychological agitations throughout the story are the manifestation of a sexuality that had been liberated and aroused but had no socially legitimate means of fulfillment.¹¹⁵

Feuerwerker further points out that Sophie's "love experience is not so much an excuse for subjective effusions as an occasion for tough moral self-questioning."¹¹⁶ "In the end the self-scrutiny this experience provokes drives her to near-suicidal despair."¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p.44.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p.19.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p.43.

Like Sophie, the protagonist in Yu Dafu's "Sinking" is also away from home, with few or attenuated family connections. Caught in poverty and excessive guilt towards his sexuality, he feels insecure and isolated. His feeling of insecurity and isolation is intensified by the fact that he is in a foreign country where people regard him as a member of an inferior race. Hence, this poor young student's constant confessions and profound self-scrutiny are tainted with a shade of nationalism.

Yu himself explains: "'Sinking' describes the psychology of a sick youth. It can be called an anatomy of hypochondria. It also describes as a broad theme the suffering of modern man — that is, sexual need and the clash between soul and flesh . . . In several places I have also mentioned the discrimination of Japanese nationalism against our Chinese students there. But for fear of it being regarded as propaganda, when writing I did not dare to exert my efforts and merely put in a few sketchy touches."¹¹⁸

C. T. Hsia tried to explain the protagonist's excessive guilt of sexuality in the framework of the Confucian ethics which had conditioned his upbringing, saying, "even when engaged in casual amorous pursuits, Yu Dafu or his fictional alter ego always suffers from the acute awareness of his truancy as son, husband, and father."¹¹⁹ The Japanese scholar Ito Toramaru links Yu's feeling of sexual guilt to "national and racial humiliation."¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *The Romantic Generation of Modern Chinese Writers*, p.111.

¹¹⁹ C.T Hsia, *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction 1917-1957*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961, p.109.

¹²⁰ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *The Romantic Generation of Modern Chinese Writers*, p.111.

Both Sophie in the "Diary" and the young man in "Sinking" set out on a journey, and enter the city, which plays a double role in their lives: it is both the agent of liberation and a source of corruption. The city seems to promise infinite variety and newness. Early twentieth-century China was experiencing fundamental social, cultural and political changes, and the protagonists, like other Chinese intellectuals of their day, were caught in a dilemma. On the one hand, traditional Chinese ethical codes conditioned their growth; meanwhile, Western knowledge, thoughts and values affected their life and thinking. The big city becomes highly symbolic and all too often brings a disenchantment more alarming and decisive than any dissatisfaction with the narrowness of provincial life. Eventually neither of the protagonists achieves reconciliation with life and society. Their self-scrutiny only leads them to despair, or even self-annihilation.

In the 1920s and 1930s political disruptions between the Guomindang (GMD) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) galvanized writers of the May Fourth generation to approach their writing from a more political angle. Chiang Kai-shek's bloody coup against the CCP in Shanghai in 1927 forced the CCP underground and split the GMD into the left wing in Wuhan and the right wing in Shanghai. In addition, GMD's passive response to Japanese intrusion in Northeast China in the early 1930s disappointed many May Fourth writers. Many of them became the CCP members or CCP sympathizers under their acknowledged leader Lu Xun. The focus of their writings were not "their own personal experience and individual vision" anymore; they were more concerned with

“ideological and programmatic themes.”¹²¹ Edward Gunn notes that their “subjective emotionalism takes a left turn.”¹²² Merle Goldman further explains this turn as “from stories of individuals and individual consciousness to panoramic treatments of class consciousness and great social and economic forces. Portrayals of contradictions within the individual were replaced by portrayals of contradictions within society.”¹²³

This turn is often called by literary historians a shift from Literary Revolution to Revolutionary Literature. Leo Ou-fan Lee explains this shift in the romantic framework. He concludes that the “shift from Literary Revolution to Revolutionary Literature is epitomized by the dynamizing view of Byron — a progression from sentiment to force, from love to revolution, from Werther to Prometheus.”¹²⁴

During the decade following 1928, young people setting out on a revolutionary journey becomes the main theme of the Chinese *Bildungsroman*. If we say that the May Fourth era was a time of pursuing individual liberation, then the decade following the split of the GMD and the CCP became an era of pursuing social liberation. The concerns of Chinese intellectuals switched from the value of the individual to the exploration of the whole society’s future. Writers, especially left-wing writers, automatically sought the point of intersection between the individual and society. The previous May Fourth writers

¹²¹ Merle Goldman, ed. *Modern Chinese Literature in the May Fourth Era*. pp.2-3.

¹²² Edward M. Gunn, *Unwelcome Muse*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1980, p.57.

¹²³ Merle Goldman, ed. *Modern Chinese Literature in the May Fourth Era*. pp.2-3.

¹²⁴ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *The Romantic Generation of Modern Chinese Writers*, p.292.

had created hesitating and frustrated young characters who broke the binds of traditional culture in the May Fourth era, whereas now their characters turned to social reformation and revolution. Protagonists sprung up to embody these new ambitions, such as in Ye Shengtao's 叶圣陶 *Ni Huanzhi* 《倪焕之》 (*Ni Huanzhi*), Mao Dun's 茅盾 "Hong" <虹> ("Rainbow"), Ding Ling's "Wei hu" <韦护> ("Wei hu") and "Yijiu sanling nian chun shanghai" <一九三〇年春上海> ("Shanghai in the Spring of 1930"), Ba Jin's 巴金 *Jia* 《家》 (*Family*), and Wang Xiyi's 王西彦 "Shu" <曙> ("Dawn").

The protagonists of the new *Bildungsroman* are students or young workers. Even though the stories have complex themes, reflecting on social corruption, political darkness, and labor-capital conflict, in terms of literary merits, these works are mediocre, and fall into the "revolution plus love" formula. Stories focus on how the young protagonists find a meaningful path for their future, devoting themselves to the revolution.

Ye Shengtao's *Ni Huanzhi* narrates the path of a young Chinese intellectual, Ni Huanzhi, who has two ideals: one is establishing a school in his hometown to enhance people's quality of life through education; the other is having an ideal family in which his wife is both his lover and comrade. Unfortunately, harsh reality shatters both his ideals. Feeling depressed and dispirited, he flies from his hometown to Shanghai where revolutionary movements are at high tide. Swept up in the mighty torrent of revolution, Ni Huanzhi overcomes his depression and melds his personal ideals to the collective goals. He finally recognizes that only through revolution can an individual ideal be

realized. Ni Huanzhi represents a typical bourgeois intellectual who has attended the new Western-style school, enlightened by the May Fourth spirit, experienced the dissolution of the ideal, and finally found the goal of his life in revolution. The growing path of Ni Huanzhi becomes a model of revolutionary youth in later revolutionary realistic writings.¹²⁵

The two protagonists, Lijia and Weihu, in Ding Ling's story "Weihu" were modeled on her close friend Wang Jianhong and her husband Qu Qiubai. The revolutionist Weihu falls in love with a female student Lijia and they live together in Shanghai. Weihu indulges in love, neglects his revolutionary career, and is discriminated against by his comrades. Then Weihu wakes up from the dream of his romance, leaves his lover, and follows the Party's command to go to Guangdong to continue his revolutionary career. Meanwhile, Lijia also realizes that she should have a more sublime pursuit — revolution. This is a typical "revolution plus love" story in which the characters' personal happiness, and emotional and mental agitation give way to the responsibility of saving society as a whole. The intense awareness of the significance of one's existence advocated in the May Fourth era yields to class-consciousness and a sense of collectivity.

In her study of the theme of coming of age in 1930's Left-wing, urban stories, Li Mei points out that these stories emphasize the transformation and fusion of intellectual and proletarian identities. She reveals two patterns of transformation: on the one hand,

¹²⁵ Sun Jing, "A Study on Chinese Modern "Growing-up Novel" by Recounting Theory," M.A. Thesis, Qingdao University, April 15, 2002, pp.15-17.

the subject of the transformation is the worker, who, with the initiation, education, and guidance of the intellectuals, gradually masters revolutionary knowledge and heightens his or her political consciousness, such as Jin Xiaomei in "Dawn"; on the other hand, the subject of the transformation is the intellectual, who, under the guidance of his or her "worker mentor," becomes a member of proletariat, such as Meilin in "Shanghai in the Spring of 1930." These two patterns bring to light that the awakening youth has to experience transformation of identity in the path of growth: intellectuals are proletarianized while workers and peasants are intellectualized.¹²⁶

In the 1930s, while many May Fourth writers took a left turn in their writing, others began to explore other literary styles and themes. Under the influence of Western modernism and the Japanese New Perception School, writers such as Shi Zhecun 施蛰存, Liu Na'ou 刘呐鸥, Mu Shiyong 穆时英, and Du Heng 杜衡 brought psychological analysis into their stories to explore their urban experiences. In contrast with these writers' enthusiasm for urban life, another group of writers was more concerned with the gradual disappearance of conventional Chinese rural society and traditional Chinese values, and hence wrote stories about their native land. They were called the Native Soil School by the literary critics. Shen Congwen, who calls himself a countryman, was the most eminent representative of this school. In his lyrical narratives, he presented to readers the life of west Hunan that was "elegant, healthy, natural and in tune with

¹²⁶ Li Mei, "On the theme of Growth in 1930s' Left-wing Urban Stories," in *Yancheng shifan xueyuan xuebao* (Yancheng Normal College Journal), 1994. 4, pp.47-49.

humanity,” as opposed to the chaotic, decadent city life.¹²⁷ His autobiography “Congwen zizhuan” <从文自传> (“Congwen’s Autobiography”) and short story “Xiaoxiao” <萧萧> (“Xiaoxiao”) can also be read as *Bildungsroman* even though they deviate from the *Bildungsroman* stories written by contemporary left-wing writers. Consistent with his loyalty to traditional Chinese values and appreciation of life in traditional agricultural society, Shen Congwen’s ultimate goal is to manifest the “power of innocence and spontaneity,”¹²⁸ and demonstrate that “the moral codes of a community should not be predicated on pre-established grounds but should evolve as a result of the harmonious association of things in their phenomenal state.”¹²⁹

The Lugouqiao Emergency (also called July Seventh Incident) in July 7, 1937 triggered the whole-scale Sino-Japanese War and turned a new page in modern Chinese history. In the wake of the unconditional surrender of the Japanese army on 15 August 1945, the civil war between the GMD and the CCP eventually broke out and lasted until 1949 when Chiang Kai-Shek (1887-1975) withdrew to the island of Taiwan. As many scholars have observed, “during the Anti-Japanese war, romanticism died a natural death in the occupied area and was replaced by the resurgence of more traditionally influenced drama, essay, and anti-romantic narrative literature.”¹³⁰ However, for left-wing writers, literature shouldered the responsibility of rescuing the country. The theme of

¹²⁷ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *The Romantic Generation of Modern Chinese Writers*, p.207.

¹²⁸ C.T Hsia, *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction 1917-1957*, p.201.

¹²⁹ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *The Romantic Generation of Modern Chinese Writers*, p.244.

¹³⁰ Michael S. Duke, *Blooming and Contending: Chinese Literature in the Post-Mao Era*, p.184.

enlightenment inherited from the May Fourth era completely gave way to the theme of saving the country from Japanese invasion. Intellectuals were inevitably involved in the war, and were concerned with the survival of the nation. Under such sociohistorical circumstances, stories dealing with the growth and maturity of young people became scarce. Still, *Bildungsromans* of excellent quality were written, such as Lu Ling's 路翎 *Caizhu de ernümen* 《财主底儿女们》 (*The Sons and Daughters of a Wealthy Man*).

The Sons and Daughters of a Wealthy Man is a full-length novel written in 1945 and records the different fates of sons and daughters in a rich family. Unlike other left-wing writers during that period, who emphasize the dramatic transformation of the protagonist from a bourgeois intellectual to a revolutionist, Lu Ling turns inward to disclose the rich inner life of dejected young intellectuals in a chaotic society. The story is animated by a concern for the whole man unfolding organically in all his complexity and richness. Its concern is the expression of a particular kind of humanism.¹³¹

The protagonist Jiang Chunzu was born in a declining wealthy and traditional family. Conflict within the family leads to chaos and war leads to perdition. The young Chunzu is forced to leave home alone and he sets out on an uncertain journey as a refugee. On this lonely expedition he sees the world outside of his family and he witnesses great human suffering during the war. Through acquaintance with people from

¹³¹ Sun Jing, "A Study on 'Growing-up Novel' by Recounting Theory," pp. 19-22. Sun has made a detailed analysis of this novel in her thesis.

all walks of life, especially soldiers, he witnesses bloody slaughter and brutal persecution, but also experiences warm friendship. With these bitter but valuable experiences, he returns to his hometown. So far, the story fits the traditional pattern of *Bildungsroman* very well. A young man sets out on a lonely journey; after experiencing the outside world, with a certain set of values to be acquired, and lessons to be learned, he grows, evolves, and finally returns home. It seems that a circle is completed. However, Lu Ling doesn't stop there. He goes much further with the tension between potentiality and actuality.

After Chunzu returns to his hometown, located at the rear of the war-zone, he devotes himself to anti-Japanese propaganda and mobilization work with his musical talent. Clique struggles and the failure of a love affair, however, push him again into the mire of disillusion and depression.

He further withdraws to the countryside, searching for salvation. He accepts a teaching position at his friend's school. The simple life in the countryside doesn't help to relieve his depression, however. The suffocating air in the school, misunderstanding from his friend and bitterness from his love affair force him to flee back to his hometown. The painful struggle of his soul induces the severe health problems, and eventually leads to his death.

This novel is one of the best *Bildungsroman* stories written by a left-wing writer since 1927 in terms of both artistic value and intellectual depth. Hu Feng wrote a preface for this novel extolling Lu Ling's concern of the inwardness of the protagonist by

pointing out that Lu Ling does not simply record historical events but reveals the disturbance of the individual soul under certain historical circumstances.¹³²

Chunzu has experienced all the hardships which the protagonist of a typical *Bildungsroman* story has to experience: childhood, the conflict of generations, provinciality, finding one's place in society, self-education, alienation, ordeal by love, and the search for a vocation. Facing a family and society torn by the gunpowder of the war, however, his experiences undermine the development of a mature character. He cannot attain strength and integrity through this self-examination. Eventually he fails to reconcile himself with society.

From the founding of the People's Republic of China to the breakout of the Cultural Revolution, Chinese literature in mainland China was highly politically oriented. Literature was shaped to meet the CCP's political needs; the writing style was socialist realism, developed into a combination of revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism; the central figure of a literary work was expected to be a model figure in a typical circumstance, the new image of the hero. The dominant conflict was class conflict, and contradiction between public and individual benefits.¹³³ Workers, peasants, and soldiers became the masters of the history, the protagonists of most of the stories; intellectual topics were marginalized in the narrative. The quantity of the *Bildungsroman*

¹³² Hu Feng, preface to Lu Ling's *Caizhu de enümen*, Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe: Xin hua shu dian Beijing faxing suo faxing, 1985.

¹³³ For detail, see Hong Zicheng 洪子城, *Dangdai zhongguo wenxue gaiguan* 《当代中国文学概观》 (*General Review of Contemporary Chinese Literature*), Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1998.

declined. Yang Mo's *The Song of Youth*, published in 1958, can be counted as the best during this period.¹³⁴ Even though this story fully deals with the growing path of a female intellectual born into a landlord family, it is still published, reprinted and highly rated because the author skilfully fuses the individual growth and maturity of her protagonist into the collective struggle.¹³⁵ Another reason for its popularity at that time is that the theme of the story is in compliance with the contemporary literary criteria: revolutionary realism plus revolutionary romance; the ultimate goal of the protagonist is to become a determined revolutionist.

The Song of Youth presents the image of a typical female revolutionary intellectual named Lin Daojing in the 1930s. The plot of this story contains all the main elements of a typical *Bildungsroman* — childhood, conflict with one's parents' generation, alienation, flight from provinciality, entering into society, education, the ordeal of love, enlightenment, and finally finding one's place within society. In many Western *Bildungsroman*, the father is absent. In this story, the relationship between Daojing and her father is problematic. She has double class identities. She has half of her genes from the exploiting class of her father, a landlord —and half from the exploited class of her mother, a maiden in the landlord's house. Being the daughter of the proletarian mother, and living in the exploiting family, is the source of her suffering and finally leads her to flee from the family. Daojing, the innocent and helpless young girl, has made the first

¹³⁴ Yang Mo, *Qingchun zhi ge* 《青春之歌》 (*The Song of Youth*), Beijing: Zuoja chubanshe, 1958.

¹³⁵ Sun Jing, "A Study on 'Growing-up Novel' by Recounting Theory," pp.23-24.

step towards maturity by herself. Her journey from home, in some degree, is a flight from provinciality. Now she starts to face a broader world in which she will experience all kinds of ordeals and finally achieve her salvation or her self-realization.

Swales has repeatedly emphasized "when portraying the hero, the *Bildungsroman* operates with a tension between a concern for the sheer complexity of individual potentiality on the one hand and a recognition on the other that practical reality — marriage, family, career — is a necessary dimension of the hero's self-realization."¹³⁶ In *The Song of Youth*, the development of Daojing's individual potentiality is accompanied by the realization of her practical reality — love, family, and career. Every single evolutionary change, however, takes place with the help of a man. Yu Yongze, a typical May Fourth young intellectual, nurtured by both traditional Chinese and western literature and thoughts, opens a window for Daojing to the outside world. His erudition quenches Daojing's thirst for knowledge; his advocacy of individual value, freedom, and happiness awakens Daojing as an independent human being; his romantic love transforms Daojing from a girl into a woman. This symbolizes the first stage of her self-realization as an individual. Then, Yu Yongze takes her to Beijing, the centre of new culture and thought. To this point, Yu Yongze has fulfilled his mission. Another man will take over the duty to further guide Daojing toward the goal of mental maturity. The city seems to promise infinite variety and newness. For Daojing, it brings her into another

¹³⁶ Martin Swales, *The German Bildungsroman from Wieland to Hesse*, p.29.

new world where she is acquainted with revolutionaries, and Communist Party member Lu Jiachuan. Under Lu Jiachuan's guidance, Daojing reads progressive books, mainly Marxist theory, and actively involves herself in the students' movement. She gradually realizes what revolution is and why it is necessary to change society. Her first savior, Yu Yongze, however, still indulges in family happiness and the appreciation of traditional Chinese culture and is quite indifferent to the students' movement. From Daojing's new perspective, Yu Yongze is out of date and has become the barrier on her progressive path. Meanwhile, her love for him gradually and secretly shifts to Lu Jiachuan, a real revolutionary. If we say Yu Yongse helps Daojing make self-realization as an individual human being, then Lu Jiachuan is encouraging her to transcend individuality and pursue revolution. To this stage, Lu Jiachuan's mission is fulfilled successfully.

Another man named Jianghua arrives at this stage of Daojing's life. His guidance leads Daojing to find a perfect accommodation with both life and society. Her individual potentiality is fully developed. She becomes a self-confident, independent, charming, and mature woman. In practical reality, Daojing finds her haven in Jianghua's love, and the two become a revolutionary couple; in terms of career, Daojing has developed into a determined revolutionist and becomes a leader of student movement. At this final stage, Daojing has fused her individuality completely into the revolutionary collectivity. In other words, she gives up her identity as an individual. The romanticism completely

withdraws from her life. The salvation and justification of her own life are achieved.¹³⁷

China during the chaos of the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976 leaves literature an empty page. In 1976, China woke up from the nightmare, and Chinese intellectuals started to reflect on this short but disastrous and traumatizing history by writing memoirs and fiction. They recalled their catastrophic and devastating experiences during the period of the Cultural Revolution. These works were labeled "Scar Literature" and "Reflective Literature." Examples are Lu Xinhua's 卢新华 "Scar 伤痕," Dai Houying's 戴厚英 *Ren a ren* 《人,啊,人》 (*Oh, Human Being*), Zhang Xianliang's *Ling yu rou* 《灵与肉》 (*Soul and Body*) and Yu Luojin's 遇罗锦 "Dongtian li de tonghua" <冬天里的童话> ("Fairy Tale in the Winter"). Even though these stories touched upon the theme of growth, their main concern is to present the disastrous effects of the Cultural Revolution upon Chinese people, and make intellectual reflections. Therefore, I do not count these stories as belonging to the category of *Bildungsroman*.

Since the mid-1980s, some young Chinese writers have started to write stories to seriously explore the theme of young people's socialization either in the period of Cultural Revolution or in the contemporary reform period, such as Yu Hua's novel *Cries in the Drizzle*, his short stories "Timid as a Mouse," "The April Third Incident," and "Summer Typhoon," Su Tong's *North Side Story* and "Toon Street Series," and Liu Suola's "Variations without a Theme." Even though these three writers were all labeled

¹³⁷ For more detail thematic analysis of this novel, see Li Yang 李扬, *Kangzheng suming zhilu* 《抗争宿命之路》 (*Up Against Predestination*), Changchun: Shidai wenyi chubanshe 时代文艺出版社, 1993.

as “Avant-garde” by critics in the 1980s, and even though many of their early works applied innovative diction and literary techniques under the influence of foreign writers such as Franz Kafka (1883-1924) and Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986), the works mentioned above can be labeled as *Bildungsroman*. The significance of these stories lies in the fact that these writers reflect on the growth and future of young Chinese in ways that deviate from the utopian vision perpetuated by Mao Zedong’s version of “the socialist new men.” In terms of narrative, they completely reject the model of “revolutionary realism plus revolutionary romance” which had been popularized since the early 1930s among the left-wing writers, and reached its summit in Mao’s era.

Su Tong and Yu Hua’s *Bildungsroman* stories show an essentially pessimistic view of the future for these Chinese who grew up in the 1970s. In both Su Tong’s “Toon Street Series” and Yu Hua’s *Cries in the Drizzle*, with the Cultural Revolution as their historical background, the teenagers, representing the hope of society, grow up in a morally degenerate and politically suppressed society, dissatisfied, restless, and unable to find meaning in their lives. Though confronted with different kinds of trials and ordeals, their life goals remain unclear and without direction — worse yet: meaningless.

In 1990s, Chinese writers expressed a range of intellectual concerns in their work. The examination of the growth and maturation of the individual was one of them. Numerous stories related to the theme of young people’s coming of age emerged. *Bildungsroman* stories, however, were mainly written by women, such as Lin Bai’s

Yigeren de zhanzheng 《一个人的战争》 (*One Person's War*) and Chen Ran's *Siren shenghuo* 《私人生活》 (*Private Life*). Unlike women writers in the May Fourth era in whose stories the female protagonists were struggling against patriarchal suppression, women writers in the 1990s are more interested in revealing their personal feelings as women. In their stories, men, such as fathers, brothers, husbands or lovers, are often absent or insignificant.

In *One Woman's War*, Lin Bai emphasizes the loneliness and isolation of a girl as an individual. The growth of Duomi, the protagonist, is a process of self-seeking. Duomi is a sensitive girl with literary talent. Her father is absent. Her connection with her mother is tenuous. She is destined to be an orphan and lives on her own. Her room is full of mirrors through which she substantiates her self-existence.

When she is a small girl, she still has some attachment to her mother. After her first experience of self-gratification at the age of eight, she becomes aware of her identity as a woman, and starts to explore the outside world. She cuts loose from her mother. In her own words, she starts to "randomly pick up scenes 随意挑选风景."¹³⁸ When she becomes bit older, thanks to her literary talent, she has a chance to flee from her hometown and moves to the city. In the process of seeking a vocation, her world becomes larger and larger. She is a poet, an editor, a screenwriter. She also experiences the ordeal of love which is a necessary part of her growth. After all these experiences, Duomi

¹³⁸ Lin Bai, *Yigeren de zhanzheng*, Beijing: Beijing shiyue wenyi chubanshe, 2004, p.53.

chooses to withdraw into her own private world. It seems her journey of youth, her search for love and vocation, serves to legitimate her loneliness. In this process, however, she affirms her value as an independent entity. Duomi calls herself an “escapist 逃跑主义者.” Her life philosophy is to “run off” when facing a problem. This is a positive running off which shows her confidence in her own existence, her “don’t-care attitude” 不在乎 about the outside world. At the end of the story, she obtains inner peace by living on her own — this is Duomi’s way of achieving accommodation with life and society.

In the late 1990s, some 1970s born women writers began to publish stories about contemporary young people’s lives. Many of these stories were modeled on their own experiences and became best-sellers, such as Wei Hui’s *Shanghai Baobei* 《上海宝贝》 (*Shanghai Darling*), Mianmian’s *Tang* 《糖》 (*Sugar*), and Bi’an hua 《彼岸花》 (*Flower at the Other side of the Bank*) by the so-called internet writer Anny Baby. In spite of the fact that these stories are closely related to contemporary urban young people’s lives, I do not call them *Bildungsroman*. These women writers are more interested in disclosing the state of their lives than exploring the process of growing up. As literary critics have repeatedly pointed out “*Bildung* is not merely the accumulation of experience, not merely maturation in the form of fictional biography.” It does not matter whether the process of *Bildung* succeeds or fails, whether the protagonist achieves reconciliation with life and society or not; but “there must be a sense of evolutionary

change within the self.”¹³⁹ In these young women writers’ stories, readers cannot find any intellectual concern for the process of growth. Therefore, I prefer to treat these works as a social and cultural phenomenon instead of *Bildungsroman* stories.

After reviewing the themes of the *Bildungsroman* stories in twentieth-century Chinese literature, we can see that the different concerns of *Bildungsroman* stories in different historical periods disclose Chinese intellectuals’ response to and reflection on China’s social and political vicissitudes.

Among modern and contemporary Chinese *Bildungsroman* stories I refers to in this chapter, I choose to give special attention to coming-of-age stories written by Su Tong and Yu Hua by analyzing their works in next two chapters respectively. There are two major reasons for doing so. First, as I indicate in the Introduction to this dissertation, coming-of-age stories are an important component of the works by these two writers, but these stories have not been systematically and comprehensively studied by literary critics. Second, and more significant, Su Tong and Yu Hua’s coming-of-age stories, with the temporal background from 1966 to 1976, are a substantial contribution to the study of history of the Chinese Cultural Revolution.

The unprecedented upheavals in modern Chinese history began in June 1966 with the explosion of Red Guard Movement which is known for the students’ extremist actions

¹³⁹ Jeffrey J. Sammons, *Reflection and Action: Essays on the Bildungsroman*, James Hardin ed. p. 41

of destroying the Four Olds and armed factional struggles. The radical movement lasted about two years, and was followed by “harsh military repression and campaigns of political persecution.”¹⁴⁰ This is the first and most dramatic phrase of the Cultural Revolution. The period from the formation of the revolutionary committees in 1968 to the death of Lin Biao in 1971 sees the middle phrase of the Cultural Revolution, which involved more mass violence and fierce factional struggles among the CCP’s high rank officials.¹⁴¹ During the period after Lin’s mysterious plane crash and before Mao Zedong’s death in the autumn of 1976, Mao had established his absolute authority over the CCP, and relied on his “Gang of Four” to further strengthen his power.¹⁴²

While scholars have paid a lot of attention to the Red Guard movement and the political struggles of the Cultural Revolution, no much has been written about the kinds of social issues that are reflected in the fiction by Su Tong and Yu Hua. While a lot of literary stories about the Culture Revolution written in the 1980s and 1990s, such as “Scar Literature,” and the “Sent-down Youth Literature,” focus “on the most visible protagonist: student red guards, [sent-down youth], worker rebels, and mass organizations engaged in factional struggles,”¹⁴³ the characters in Su and Yu’s stories do

¹⁴⁰ Joseph W. Esherick, Paul G. Pickowicz, and Andrew G. Walder eds, *The Chinese Cultural Revolution as History*, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2006, p. 1.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 21. See detail of mass killing in Yang Su’ “Mass Killing in the Cultural Revolution: A Study of Three Provinces” and Jiangsui He’s “The Death of a Landlord: Moral Predicament in Rural China, 1968-1969” in *The Chinese Cultural Revolution as History*, pp. 96-152.

¹⁴² For the detail see Roderick Mafarquhar and Michael Schoenhals’s *Mao’s Last Revolution*, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006. In the book, the authors chronicles China’s Cultural Revolution.

¹⁴³ Joseph W. Esherick, eds, *The Chinese Cultural Revolution as History*, p. 3.

not noticeably involve in the Red Guard movement and drastic political struggles either because of their tender age, marginalized or low social status. By downplaying drastic political theatrics in favor of characters' private lives, Su Tong and Yu Hua, I believe, intend to reveal the suffering of marginalized people or people from the bottom of society, especially one of the most vulnerable groups — teenagers, in a time of trouble, and explore more specific and deep rooted social issues caused by the social and political chaos, such as dysfunction of schools, abnormal psychological and mental development of adolescents, troubled relations between parents and children, juvenile delinquency, and other problems related to youth culture in China in the 1970s. These stories also make us wonder, as Joseph W. Esherick says:

whether the decade-long interruption of cultural transmission in schools and public rituals, the drastic thinning of ranks of cultural elites through death and political persecution, so attenuated the vitality of the living tradition that it had little ability to resist the hedonism and nihilism of the present era.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p.27.

Chapter 3

A Solitary Hero

The writer Su Tong was born into a poor family in the city of Suzhou on January 23, 1963. His father, a clerk in a governmental office, and his mother, a worker in a cement plant, named their child Tong Zhonggui 童中贵 — “golden mean” and “honor” — the wishes of traditional Chinese parents for their child’s life.

In his essay “Casual Talks on the Past,” Su Tong writes that whenever he thinks of the past, the first thing that comes to his mind is the hundred year-old street in the northern part of Suzhou city where his home was located. The long and narrow slab stone street was a light rusty-red in the scorching heat of July and ash grey in the freezing January winters. It would take about ten minutes to walk down the street from the south to the north end. There were two elevated bridges on either end of the street, and an overhead railway spanned the middle. The shabby houses, shops, schools and factories were packed, and the people spent their days in the spaces between these bridges.¹⁴⁵

Su Tong’s family lived across from a chemical plant. According to Su Tong, he always stood in front of his house and watched the employees of the plant going to and from work because he had nothing else to do.¹⁴⁶ Later, this chemical plant, its obnoxious odor, and its tall chimneys become part of the adult Su Tong’s nostalgia and repeatedly appear in his coming-of-age stories.

¹⁴⁵ Su Tong, “Guoqu suitan” <过去随谈> (“Casual Talk on the Past”) in *Zhishang meinu* 《纸上美女》 (*Beauty on Paper*), Taiwan: Maitian chuban gufen youxian gongsi, 2000, p.42.

¹⁴⁶ Su Tong, “Tongnian de yixie shi” <童年的一些事> (“Some anecdotes of my childhood”) in *Beauty on Paper*, p.37.

Su Tong described his childhood as “a little bit lonely, and laden with anxiety” 心事重重. He couldn’t recall such things as fairy tales, candies, games or loving attention from his parents. What he remembers are poverty and hardship. His parents had almost nothing to their names except four children. Everyday, his father rode a dilapidated bicycle to work. His mother walked to the nearby cement plant with a basket in her hand containing a lunch of leftovers from the previous night or just plain rice, as well as unfinished cotton shoes that she was sewing for her children. Her household obligations were so onerous that she had to use her tea break at work to make shoes and do sewing for her family. Her beautiful face was always strained as a result of overtiredness and illness. The family lived on a total of eighty *yuan* per month. The family would sit around the table with a pot of cabbage pork soup as their main dish. A dim bulb shone over the damp brick floor and mouldy furniture. Su Tong recalls one time his mother lost five *yuan* on her way to buy groceries, and desperately burst into tears after fruitless searching. The sensible son, at the age of seven or eight, comforted his mom and told her: “Don’t cry. I will make one hundred *yuan* for you when I grow up.” 别哭了，等我长大了挣一百块钱给你。¹⁴⁷

As a precocious but introverted boy, Su Tong seldom participated in his friends’ games. On countless dusks, he stood under the eaves and gawked at the busy street and hasty pedestrians. At this moment, normally his parents were arguing in the house and his sisters weeping behind the door. His heart was full of bitterness. He could not figure out why his parents always quarreled while his neighbours seemed always at peace.

¹⁴⁷ Su Tong, “Casual Talk on the Past,” in *Beauty on Paper*, p.43.

Su Tong's childhood was darkened by the notorious Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). He has described his impression of the movement:

My impression of *wudou* (factional fighting 武斗) is of a barrage of gunfire . . . at night people fired their guns from the tops of kilns, and bullets pierced through our back door . . . at mid-night, my mom wrapped me in a cotton quilt and brought me to my grandma's room where it was safer.

我对武斗的印象一阵枪声 . . . 夜里有人在高高的窑顶打枪, 子弹穿透了我家后门的门板 . . . 母亲深更半夜用棉被包住我, 把我转移到相对安全的外婆房间里去睡。¹⁴⁸

Su Tong said that he obtained his preschool education on the streets. There he learned his first complete sentence. The walls were full of posters and slogans that every single child could recite. Even the most dim-witted child could write *wansui* (long live 万岁) and *dadao* (down with 打倒).¹⁴⁹ The ink on these posters lasted years. Ironically, those who had been overthrown became prestigious officials again several years later. Su Tong recalled:

[During the Cultural Revolution,] a skinny middle-aged woman often walked around with a paper board hanging on her neck. Now when I visit my hometown, I still encounter her once in a while, and the heavy word 'History' immediately flashes through my mind.

¹⁴⁸ Su Tong, "Nian fu yi nian" <年复一年> ("One Year after Another") in *Shi yi ji* 《十一击》 (*Eleven Beats*), Taipei: Maitian chuban youxian gongsi, 1994, p.175.

¹⁴⁹ Su Tong, "Casual Talk on the Past," in *Beauty on Paper*, p.45.

一个干瘦的中年女人经常挂着纸牌在街上走来走去。现在我回家偶尔还看见她，脑海里立刻闪过‘历史’这个沉重的字眼。¹⁵⁰

At the age of six, Su enrolled at an elementary school that occupied the grounds of a former Christian church. Its chapel was converted to the school auditorium where all kinds of criticism sessions and orientations were held. The European-style building with its colorfully decorated arch windows was still the most beautiful on the street. Su Tong's first teacher was a gentle lady with grey hair who taught him for three years. Su Tong said she was the most admirable teacher because she always wore a kind smile, which was rare in that chaotic time.¹⁵¹

In second grade, Su Tong contracted nephritis and a blood disease that put him in critical condition. He recalled that during his illness his mother always cried, and his father regularly carried him on his bicycle to see a traditional Chinese medical doctor. For about half a year, he lay on a bamboo bed and boiled herb medicine for himself. The neighbours all praised him as a well-behaved child, but Su Tong explained his obedience as a result of the threat of death. During that period of time, his only diversion was reading stories borrowed from a library by his sister. Su Tong said these stories could be counted as his earliest literary enlightenment.¹⁵² The illness and temporary withdrawal from school made young Su Tong feel lost. He dreamed of his school, classroom, sports field and classmates. All his classmates were children living on the same street. Every one knew each other's family and stories. Su Tong never concealed the fact that the

¹⁵⁰ Su Tong, "One Year after Another," in *Eleven Beats*, p.175.

¹⁵¹ Su Tong, "Casual Talk on the Past," in *Beauty on Paper*, p.45.

¹⁵² Su Tong, "One Year after Another" in *Eleven Beats*, p.176.

southern youngsters in his coming of age stories are all modeled on these childhood friends and classmates.¹⁵³

The year 1980 was a turning point in Su Tong's life. At seventeen, he traveled to Beijing to attend university. Before that time, the farthest place he had ever been was Nanjing. With a light but empty heart, he looked out the window of the train and saw a kite and a flock of birds flying in the sky above unknown villages, open fields and an expanse of woods. Su Tong has stated on several occasions that his four years (1980-1984) at Beijing Normal University were significant to his later writing because they exposed him to a larger world.¹⁵⁴

Many years later when Su Tong recalled his early twenties, he compared himself to a crooked piece of wood. At that time he could not tell what kind of tree he would grow into because he was so easily caught up in various pursuits: romance, politics, and culture, etc. The frustrated young man was eager to present himself as a loner. He roamed around campus or the Beitaipingzhuang 北太平庄 area where the school was located trying to come up with abstract and sophisticated questions. He even secretly admired fellow students who had a suicide complex. When looking back on those days, Su Tong admitted that he was not really a "sophisticated" person; therefore, his loner image didn't last long, and he took up a simple physical activity instead — playing basketball. Su Tong mentioned another pretentious incident in his memoir. On one occasion in order to test his willpower, he decided to stay on campus during the summer vacation instead of going back to his hometown. His environment got the better of him,

¹⁵³ Su Tong, "Casual Talk on the Past," in *Beauty on the Pape*, p.46.

¹⁵⁴ In an interview by the TV program "Dongfang shikong" <东方时空>("Oriental Time") of CCTV, Su Tong talked about his university time in Beijing. This interview was recorded by Wang Haiyan 王海燕 in "On Su Tong 苏童论," in *Anqing Normal School Journal* 安庆师范学院学报, Vol.4, 1994, pp. 80-85.

however. The incessant chirping of cicadas accentuated the stillness and bareness of the campus, and the unpalatable cafeteria food reminded him of delicious dishes his mom cooked at home. Finally one day, facing a bowl of instant noodles, he rushed to the railway station and bought a ticket back home. He said from then on, he understood what it meant to “suffer from one’s own actions” 自作自受. Nevertheless, this period of life was bursting with youthful vigor, the memory of which Su Tong has always cherished.¹⁵⁵

In spite of those conceited performances, Su Tong admitted that he benefited greatly from the school’s strict curriculum. He used most of his spare time reading fiction and literary magazines, and sometimes tried his hand at creative writing. By the time of his graduation in 1984, he had published five stories in some obscure literary journals. His maiden work was a short story entitled “The Eighth is a Bronze Statue” 第八个是铜像, which, in his own words, “followed the formula writing of the time: ‘reform plus romance.’” 遵循当时流行的小说套路, 改革加爱情.¹⁵⁶ The story describes how a young man returning home from his re-education in the countryside reforms and saves the factory where he works from bankruptcy. Even though Su Tong feels ashamed to include these five early stories in any of his collections, he cherishes them still. These early publications gave him confidence and courage to continue his writing career.¹⁵⁷

At the age of twenty-two, Su Tong left Beijing for Nanjing with a Bachelor of Arts. He was assigned to work as a counsellor in an art academy where, according to Su Tong, most of the students were older than he was. He was bored with the daily rituals: distributing stipends to students and organizing the regular cleaning of the school by the

¹⁵⁵ Su Tong, “One Year after Another” in *Eleven Beats*, pp.179-180.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.179.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.179.

students. The only business trip he made was to help the school investigate a female student's indiscreet private life.

In contrast to his tedious routine at the office, his life after work was exhilarating. He made friends in literary circles: amateur writers and editors. He was excited over these connections with literary circles. He told himself: "Oh, they will appreciate me soon . . . they have started to talk about my works." 他们快要赏识我了 . . . 他们在谈论我的小说了.¹⁵⁸ He devoted most of his spare time to writing stories while smoking inferior tobacco in his dorm. He wrote a bunch of stories and sent them to different editors with the hope of being appreciated. He compared himself to a *tougao jiqi* (manuscript submission machine 投稿机器) that runs without stop. He also compared himself to Martin Eden, the protagonist in the autobiographical fiction of Jack London (the pen name of John Griffith, 1876-1916), and said he was even more keen to become a recognized writer.

One fall afternoon in 1984, Su Tong wrote a short story, "Sangyuan liunian" <桑园留念> "Memories of Mulberry Garden," more than four thousand characters long, but it was not published in the journal *Beijing Literature* until 1987. Su Tong always refers back to this story, not because it was a success, but because it was a significant step on his path of creative writing. He regarded it as his first story in the real sense of literature. This story carried within it the veins and arteries which would be found in his later short stories, such as a narrow and old street in southern China (later Su Tong named it Toon Street 香椿树街), a crowd of restless southern adolescents, agitated

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., p.182.

sentiment, presentiment of impending bloody odor on the dark street, young lives conceived and festering in damp air, twisted souls hesitating on a slab stone road, etc. With "Memories of Mulberry Garden" as a starting point, Su Tong recorded the stories of his childhood acquaintances and their vacillating state of life.¹⁵⁹

In 1985, Su Tong left the art academy and began work as an editor for the influential literary journal *Zhong Mountain* 《钟山》. He described his work and life there as full of sunshine. The people he met every day were all involved in literary pursuits. The stories he wrote, however, were still "like domesticated pigeons that always flew back to his desk." 象放养的家鸽飞回案头.¹⁶⁰ This depressed the young writer. The situation lasted until the second half of 1986 when one of his short stories was published by *October* 《十月》, one of the most prestigious literary journals in China. Two months later, another story was published by *Harvest* 《收获》, another prominent literary journal. He became more ambitious and felt that he was narrowly passing the gate of luck.¹⁶¹

February 1987 was a lucky month for Su Tong. Three literary journals, *Shanghai Literature* 《上海文学》, *Beijing Literature* 《北京文学》 and *PLA Literature and Art* 《解放军文艺》 simultaneously published his stories in their February issues. From then on, those touring stories all found their destinations in different literary journals. In

¹⁵⁹ Su Tong, "Self-Preface to *Young Blood*" in *Beauty on Paper*, p.144.

¹⁶⁰ Su Tong, "One Year after Another" in *Eleven Beats*, p.182.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.183.

Su Tong's words, God started to bless him, "this miserable boy tortured by literature." 这个被文学所折磨的苦孩子。¹⁶²

In the same year, his first novella, "Yijiu sansi nian de taowang" <一九三四年的逃亡> ("Nineteen Thirty-four Escapes") was published in *Harvest*. Since then, this journal has devoted many pages to Su Tong's stories.

Exactly like that fictional Martin whose old, unappreciated works were published after he became famous, many of Su Tong's stories were printed in 1988, though most of them were written before 1986. Literary critics started to pay attention. Su Tong describes his complex feeling when reading critics' comments and reviews:

I secretly read these criticisms with bated breath, but I tell my friends that I never read critics' articles. I have my own business, and they have theirs. 我偷偷地屏住气看那些评论, 然后对朋友说, 我不看评论家的东西, 他评他的, 我写我的。¹⁶³

Since 1988, Su Tong's writing and publishing have gone smoothly. He is hardworking and prolific, and has always explored diversified themes and styles. Su Tong doesn't think it good for a writer to stick to one writing style because it will cause a crisis in his writing. The writer will be trapped in a particular style or formula, and it will become his immediate mission to figure out how to get out of this trap, how to develop and enrich his writing. Su Tong suggests that a writer should have the courage to constantly say goodbye to his old works and surpass his old styles. A writer should have

¹⁶² Ibid., p.184.

¹⁶³ Ibid,

the courage to enter every single door and explore every single dark place in the labyrinth of fiction.¹⁶⁴

By 2005, Su Tong had published five full-length novels: *Mi* 《米》 (*Rice*), *Wo de diwang shengya* 《我的帝王生涯》 (*My Life as Emperor*), *Wu Zetian* 《武则天》 (*Empress Dowager Wu Zetian*), *Chengbei didai* 《城北地带》 (*North Side Story*), and *She weishenme hui fei* 《蛇为什么会飞》 (*Why Would the Snake Fly*), as well as several dozen collections of novelettes and short stories in mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. In recent years, two collections of his essays were also published in both mainland China and Taiwan. These stories can be grouped into four categories: historical stories, stories examining the lives of women, coming-of-age stories, and stories about modern Chinese urbanites.¹⁶⁵

Historical stories include two full-length novels *My Life as Emperor* and *Empress Dowager Wu Zetian*, and the Maple Village Stories 枫杨树系列. Su Tong has compared the first two novels to two palaces; they represent two kinds of history. *My Life as Emperor* is a palace built as the architect pleases, a historical story “blended with his own recipe.”¹⁶⁶ The time of the story is not clear; the characters are visionary. An unlikely boy becomes an emperor, then that emperor becomes a vaudeville street performer. Su Tong is obsessed with the tortuous fate of his character, reflecting his continual shock at the

¹⁶⁴ Su Tong, “Xunzhao dengsheng” <寻找灯绳> (“Groping for the Lamp Switch”) in *Beauty on Paper*, p.142.

¹⁶⁵ Chinese critics have discussed these categories in their writings, such as Wang Haiyan 王海燕 in “On Su Tong 苏童论,” in *Anqing Normal School Journal* 安庆师范学院学报, issue 4, 1994, pp.80-85; Zhang Yingzhong 张应中, “A Review at the end of the Century 世纪末的回眸,” in *Modern Literary Magazine*, Vol.5, 1994, pp.30-33; Huang Jinfu 黄金夫, “Leaving and Returning – A Brief Discussion of Su Tong’s Stories 出走与返回:苏童小说简论,” in *Zhejiang Normal University Journal* 浙江师大学报, Vol.3, 1994, pp.45-47.

¹⁶⁶ Su Tong, “Zixu qingzhong” <自序七种> (“Seven of my Author’s Prefaces”), in *Beauty on Paper*, pp.149-150.

impermanence of life and the mercilessness of history. In contrast, *Empress Dowager Wu Zetian* is a conventional historical story in which Su Tong narrates the life of the real-life of Empress Dowager Wu Zetian without exaggerating her desires and ambitions both as a woman and a power holder. According to Su, this story doesn't go beyond reader expectations or overstep historical records.¹⁶⁷

The Maple Village stories can also be regarded as historical stories. Su Tong invented the village of Maple Village to represent his hometown and describe his great grandparents' life in the Republican era in stories such as "Nineteen Thirty-four Escapes," "Feiyue fengyangshu" <飞越枫杨树> ("Flying over Maple Village"), "Yingsu zhijia" <樱粟之家> ("Opium Family") and *Rice*. Literary critics regard this series as a revelation of Su Tong's nostalgia and a spiritual journey back to his hometown. The author himself agrees. He also admits that by using the same fictional village — Maple Village — as the setting for different stories, he is imitating William Faulkner's (1897-1962) treatment of Yoknapatawpha as a symbolic hometown. In Maple Village, Su Tong tries to capture the shadows of his ancestors and assemble the fragments of their stories. Su Tong says that he enjoys the process of "taking the pulse of his ancestors and hometown" 我触摸了祖先和故乡的脉搏, by which he has seen where he comes from and where he will go. He agrees that these stories are his "spiritual return home" 精神的还乡.¹⁶⁸

In his stories about Chinese women, Su Tong creates diverse images of women, such as a wealthy polygamous household's wives and concubines in "Raise the Red

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., p.150.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., p.145.

Lantern” 妻妾成群, spinsters in “Embroidery” 刺绣, and prostitutes in “The Red and the Pink” 红粉. “Raise the Red Lantern” is a significant work which brought Su Tong national fame after it was made into a movie by the talented Chinese director, Zhang Yimou 张艺谋. Su Tong’s initial motivation to write this story was to try something new. He wanted to write a more conventional, classical, Chinese-flavored story in order to test his writing ability. He chose a clichéd topic in classical Chinese stories: the tragic fates of concubines in a rich traditional Chinese family. He never denies that his success derives from the influence of such classics as *Honglou meng* 《红楼梦》 (*Dream of the Red Chamber*), *Jin ping mei* 《金瓶梅》 (*The Golden Lotus*), and modern ones like *Jia* 《家》 (*Family*), *Chun* 《春》 (*Spring*) and *Qiu* 《秋》 (*Autumn*). Su Tong calls this story pure fiction because he has never known anyone like Songlian 颂莲 or Chen Zuoqian 陈佐仟—the protagonists in “Raise the Red Lantern.” What he has is an unusual passion for the past.¹⁶⁹ After “Raise the Red Lanterns,” he wrote other stories about women, such as “Embroidery,” “The Red and the Pink,” “Ling yizhong funü shenghuo” <另一种妇女生活> (“Another Kind of Women’s Existence”), so on and so forth.

In Su Tong’s coming-of-age stories, he reproduces his own and his teenage friends’ childhood adventures against the backdrop of the fictional Toon Street. Critics call these stories the Toon Street Series 香椿树街系列. The series includes a full-length novel *North Side Story*, and more than ten short stories, compiled in the collection, *Shaonian xue* 《少年血》 (*Young Blood*). The writing of these stories in *Young Blood* took Su Tong eight years (1984-1992), and reveals his obsession with and devotion to the

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p.147.

short story format.¹⁷⁰ The coming-of-age stories are the focus of this chapter, and a central concern of this dissertation. They will be discussed in greater detail later.

Su Tong chose a more realistic style to reflect the ordinary lives of contemporary, urban Chinese. These stories include *Why Would the Snake Fly*, “Lihun zhinan” <离婚指南> (“A Guide to Divorce”), “Renmin de yu” <人民的鱼> (“The People’s Fish”) and “Baixue zhutou” <白雪猪头> (“White Snow and a Pig’s Head”). These works can be regarded Su Tong’s attempt at realistic writing. In the postscript of *Why Would the Snake Fly*, Su Tong quoted Lu Xun’s words that he “was directly facing a bleak and dismal life,”¹⁷¹ when he described the struggle of those who live around the railway station area — the symbolic bottom of the social ladder — on the eve of New Millennium. He said he ran away as soon as he finished writing and left his characters fighting for their lives.¹⁷²

This categorization of Su Tong’s stories is not intended to summarize or exhaust the limits of his writing, but it helps to disclose Su Tong’s diverse content and style, and demonstrate his constant effort to surpass himself.

Critics and his contemporary writers unanimously concur that Su Tong is an accomplished storyteller. Wang Anyi 王安忆, a woman writer from Shanghai, even worries that Su Tong may be so obsessed with telling an interesting story that he may “degenerate” into a popular story writer.¹⁷³ Of course, Wang’s concern reveals her

¹⁷⁰ Su Tong, Preface to *Young Blood* 《少年血》 (*Shaonian xue*), Nanjing: Jiangsu wenyi chubanshe, 1995.

¹⁷¹ Lu Xun, “Jinian Liu Hezhen jun” <纪念刘和珍君> (“In Memory of Ms. Liu Hezhen”), first published on *Yusi* 《语丝》, Issue 74, April 2, 1926.

¹⁷² Su Tong, postscript to *She weishenme hui fei* 《蛇为什么会飞》 (*Why Would the Snake Fly*), Taipei: Yifang chubanyouxian gongsi, 2002.

¹⁷³ Wang Anyi, “Women zai zuo shenme?” <我们在做什么?> (“What are we doing?”) in *Wenxue ziyoutan* 《文学自由谈》 (*Free Talk on Literature*), Vol.4, 1993, pp.27-32.

superficial understanding of the nature of literature and prejudice against popular literature, but in a certain sense, it reveals Su Tong's fellow writers' recognition of his story-telling ability. Wang's worry is unnecessary because Su Tong's interesting stories still pursue lyrical language and diverse literary techniques.

Another contemporary Chinese writer, A Cheng 阿城, comments on Su Tong, and his perceptions are, in my opinion, accurate and substantive:

No doubt, Su Tong is one of the best contemporary writers in mainland China. His narrative is devoid of the violence that permeated China after 1949. In other words, even if Su Tong portrays violence, he doesn't use violent language. Su Tong's reading experience would have been under the shadow of violent language for several decades. Surprisingly, he walked through the shadow, but wasn't contaminated by it. [His language] is rotund and tranquil. If you know how pervasive the violent language has been [in China] in the past forty years, then you can understand that Su Tong must be one of those Chinese writers with strongest sense of self . . . A chef always has the smell of the kitchen, but Su Tong is just like a chef in a movie, who doesn't have the smell of the kitchen.

苏童无疑是中国最好的作家之一，他的叙述中有一种语气，这种语气没有几十年以来的暴力，或者说，即使苏童描写暴力，也不是使用暴力语言来描写暴力。苏童的阅读经历应该是在几十年来的暴力语言的阴影下，他从阴影里走过来而几乎没有阴影的气息，如此饱满，有静气，令人讶异。如果了解多年来暴力语言的无孔不入，就可以明白苏童是当今自我力量最强的中国作家之一。厨子身

上总要有厨房的味道，苏童却像电影里的厨师，没有厨房的味道。

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According to A Cheng, many of Su Tong's works, such as *Rice* and "Raise the Red Lantern," involve a theme which is uncommon in contemporary Chinese literature – predestination, which, in Su Tong's stories, is mingled with one's personality. The theme of predestination is a continuation of the *Dream of the Red Chamber*. Contemporary Chinese ideology has rejected the concept of predestination and regards art as instrumental in achieving the Chinese Communist Party's (hereafter CCP) political goals. Consequently predestination disappeared from Chinese literature for many years; the tragedy was no longer tragic, but rather a combination of misery, grievance, and "false stoutness" 假阳刚. The result of this amalgamation was absurdity. The most touching point in Su Tong's stories is that readers can see people's destiny under the disguise of a social system.¹⁷⁵

Su Tong says that his obsession with fiction is neither inborn nor cultivated, but a grace given to him from above to let an ignorant person like him have some "outstanding" trait.¹⁷⁶ He says:

Fiction is like a huge labyrinth in which my fellow writers and I grope. It seems all our effort is to find a lamp switch and hope for the splendid brightness to instantaneously lighten up our fiction and our whole life.

¹⁷⁴ A Cheng, *Weinisi riji* 《威尼斯日记》 (*Diary in Venice*), Beijing: Zuoja chubanshe, 1998, p.62.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p62.

¹⁷⁶ Su Tong, "One Year after Another," in *Eleven Beats*, p.174.

小说是一座巨大的迷宫，我和所有同时代的作家一样小心翼翼地摸索，所有的努力似乎就是在黑暗中寻找一根灯绳，企望有灿烂的光明在刹那间照亮你的小说以及整个生命。¹⁷⁷

In his autobiographical prose, "One Year after Another" 年复一年, Su Tong describes himself as a reserved, withdrawn, timid and incompetent person who has always indulged in some "worldly and paltry" hobbies, such as playing *majiang*, reading popular magazines and looking for trendy clothing. He says he cannot live without these "secular" things because he fears that any thing more sophisticated would drain away the energy and mental clarity reserved only for writing fiction.¹⁷⁸ This may be Su Tong's way of differentiating himself from the stereotypical image of the Chinese writer as sanctioned by the CCP.

Su Tong emphasizes that the novel should have a soul. It should attain a certain state of austerity and emptiness, of bizarre abstruseness, or of philosophy or humanity. It is pointless to distinguish which state or realm is low or high; they are all the soul of the novel. Unfortunately, many stories don't achieve this kind of state; instead they only have a false and practical shell because the author's soul isn't involved in writing. Su Tong describes this as a tragedy.¹⁷⁹ He says:

Fiction is a reflection of a writer's soul. You inject part of your soul into your writing; hence, the writing contains part of your life. You imprint special marks on your work by arranging every single detail and sentence

¹⁷⁷ Su Tong, "Finding the Lamp String," in *Beauty on Paper*, p.141.

¹⁷⁸ Su Tong, "One Year after Another," in *Eleven Beats*, p.173.

¹⁷⁹ Su Tong, "Xiangdao shenme shuo shenme" <想到什么说什么> ("Say whatever I can Think of"), in *Beauty on Paper*, p.133.

in your own way. Then you build the house of fiction based on your own aesthetic standard. All this requires the loner's courage and wisdom. You sit in this newly finished house with loneliness and arrogance, while readers visit it with curiosity. I think this should be the effect of fiction. 小说是灵魂的逆光。你把灵魂的一部分注入作品从而使它有了你的血肉。你在每一处都打上某种特殊的印记，用自己探索的方法和方式组织每一个细节每一句对话，然后按你自己的审美态度把小说这座房子构建起来。这一切都需要孤独者的勇气和智慧。你孤独而自傲地坐在这盖起的房子里，让读者怀着好奇心围着房子围观，我想这才是一种小说的效果。¹⁸⁰

For Su Tong, a writer doesn't take any responsibility for enlightening, saving or educating readers. Compared to the thirst for being educated or enlightened, a reader's drive to satisfy his or her curiosity is much closer to Su Tong's sense of what literature aims at. Furthermore, Su Tong believes that loneliness is something everyone has to live with and struggle against throughout their whole life.

For this chapter, I will focus on Su Tong's coming-of-age stories, which form an important component of his writings. I will discuss his full-length novel, *North Side Story*, and four short stories: "Memories of Mulberry Garden," "An Afternoon Incident" "The Sad Dance" and "Roller Skating Away."

Su Tong admits that he was greatly inspired by the works of the American writer J. D. Salinger and hence wrote a series of coming-of-age stories, namely the Toon Street Series. With the Cultural Revolution as the historical background and fictional Toon

¹⁸⁰ Su Tong, "Xiaoshuojia yan" <小说家言> ("Writer's Words"), in *Renmin wenxue* 《人民文学》 (*People's Literature*), vol.3, 1989, p. 100.

Street in the northern part of Suzhou city as the geographical background, Su Tong tries to demonstrate that in an abnormal era adolescents can never achieve maturity and enter adulthood. The mood of these stories is casual and adolescent. Su Tong points out that these coming-of-age stories are exceptionally significant to him even though very few critics have paid attention to them. He says: "The reminiscences of my childhood are remote but clear. Picking up my memories from where they have fallen gives me an illusion of coming back." 童年的记忆非常遥远却又非常清晰, 从头拾起令我有一种别梦依稀的感觉。¹⁸¹

In the following paragraphs, I will first briefly provide the outlines of the stories, then I will analyze them.

"Memories of Mulberry Garden" does not tell a complete story, but is a record of a few fragments observed and experienced in a summer by the first-person narrator — a fifteen-year-old boy. There are five characters in the story: the first-person narrator, two other boys — Xiaodi (Brother Xiao 肖弟) and Maotou (Hairy Head 毛头) — and two girls — Danyu (Crimson Jade 丹玉) and Xinxin (Pungent 辛辛). The story starts with a scene where the narrator runs into Brother Xiao and Hairy Head on his way to a public bathhouse. Afraid of being bullied by Brother Xiao, the narrator agrees to help him deliver dating messages to Crimson Jade and stand guard for their tryst. Brother Xiao makes Crimson Jade have three abortions. Finally however, the narrator avenges his humiliation by beating Brother Xiao in a fist fight, causing Crimson Jade to leave him. The narrator does not see her again until she is found dead together with Hairy Head in a bamboo grove. No one knows how or why they die, but their names are carved on the

¹⁸¹ Su Tong, "Casual Talk on the Past," in *Beauty on Paper*, p.44.

stone bridge by their friends. In this story, Su Tong doesn't make the events clear to the readers. Maybe from the perspective of a fifteen-year-old boy, this world is full of mystery.

The short story, "An Afternoon Incident," records a murder witnessed by a high school boy — the first-person narrator — one afternoon. Huozi (Harelip 豁子) is the narrator's classmate and is regarded as a hero because of his harelip, his giant physique and his bravery. The narrator is obsessed with Harelip's new hair style, a crew cut, and asks him one afternoon to give him the same hairdo. The narrator plays truant that afternoon, but does not see Harelip. Roaming on the street, he is stopped by barber Zhang who promises to give him a hairdo the same as Harelip's. Sitting on the barber's chair, the narrator notices a young man standing on the stone bridge and waiting for someone. From the man's appearance, the narrator figures out that it might be Qiuqi, a hooligan living on the southern part of the city who was severely beaten by Harelip and his friends the summer before. What happens later bears out that assumption. Qiuqi is waiting for Harelip and finally avenges himself by stabbing Harelip to death. Sitting on the barber's chair, the narrator witnesses the whole incident. Later, on his way back home, he sees his younger sister, who points out that barber Zhang has not given him Harelip's hairdo, but instead has shaved off all his hair. Shocked and saddened by Harelip's death, the narrator loses his temper and takes it out on his younger sister. At the end of the story, the narrator says:

I will never forget that afternoon because it was the ugliest time in my entire life. I hope no one looks at me. May nobody in the world see my ugly appearance.

那天下午我永生难忘，那天下午是我一辈子最丑陋的时光。我希望谁也别看我，希望全世界谁也别看我的丑模样。¹⁸²

“The Sad Dance” is a warm and sad story in which a twelve year-old boy first experiences jealousy, disappointment and sadness. This is just a small episode in a fourth grade student’s life. One day, the narrator is picked to join a dancing team 文艺宣传队 by the dancing teacher, a gentle and kind lady in her fifties. Later, the narrator finds out that he has to compete against another boy Li Xiaoguo (Small Fruit Li 李小果) whose father is an official. According to the narrator, however, this story is actually about another child, a beautiful crystal-like girl named Zhao Wenyan (Elegant Swallow Zhao 赵文燕). She suffers from urinary incontinence 失尿症; whenever she is onstage, she cannot help squatting and urinating. In spite of this disadvantage, the dancing teacher still keeps the girl on the team and takes great pity on her. The kind-hearted teacher knows that Elegant Swallow’s sickness is the result of stress. She is on constant alert to prevent her mother from hanging herself. One day, when leading the children in rehearsal, the dancing teacher suddenly dies of a cerebral haemorrhage. With her passing, the narrator’s short dancing career is terminated. The competitor, Small Fruit, takes the role and dances onstage. From this incident, the narrator tastes jealousy, sadness and disappointment. At the end of story, the narrator writes a few lines about the futures of the other two young dancers. Elegant Swallow becomes a dancer, but her mother finally kills herself after her

¹⁸² Su Tong, “An Afternoon Incident,” in *Young Blood*, p.322.

daughter leaves home for dancing school. Small Fruit suffers paralysis after falling from the scaffolding. In the narrator's words,

This is the tragedy of fate, which means you might have only danced once, but then you break your legs.

这叫做悲剧命运。悲剧命运就是你一辈子只跳过一次舞，但你的腿却摔断了。¹⁸³

This is also Su Tong's comments about the Cultural Revolution. People who has experienced the Cultural Revolution are very likely to be permanently traumatized, and cannot ever dance again in the rest of their lives.

"Roller Skating Away" records a day in the life of a Toon Street teenager. It reads like a nightmare. The protagonist is a high school student. On the first day of the new semester, his younger brother breaks his roller skates. He goes to look for his friend Cat Head to repair the roller skates and finds Cat Head masturbating. Shocked by what he sees, he is late for school. In class, he is required to recite a poem by Mao Zedong and is interrupted by the crying of his classmate, the ugly girl Li Dongying, who is experiencing her first menstruation. Then, he is expelled from the classroom and accidentally discovers an affair between the Party secretary and the school's music teacher. Later he witnesses a bloody scuffle and flees home; however, at home, he encounters more appalling incidents: the neighbor Xiao Meng's beautiful but insane wife has tried to drown herself again, and, tired of his wife's crazy behavior, this time Xiao Meng did not save her. At

¹⁸³ Su Tong, "The Sad Dance," in *Young Blood*, p.312.

last, the protagonist hears the most devastating news of the day: Cat Head, skating recklessly on the street, finally died under the wheels of a truck.

North Side Story tells the story of four boys who live on Toon Street: Dasheng (Growth 达生), Xude (Virtue 叙德), Hongqi (Red Flag 红旗) and Xiaoguai (Little Cripple 小拐). This is a sad and bloody story in which the four boys all end up in different predicaments, but no one is better off than the others. The novel starts with the accidental death of Dasheng's father. He is hit by a truck on his way to work because Dasheng has taken his bicycle and he has to borrow a broken one from his neighbour. After his father's death, Dasheng is repeatedly reminded by his mother — the daughter of a street snake-performer — that he caused his father's death. Obsessed with a heroic vision, Dasheng always looks forward to a bloody rumble to demonstrate that the kids on Toon Street are not Lanshi (puppy shit 烂屎), a nickname given them by the teens from other parts of the city. Dasheng eventually validates himself as a true hero by creating a scuffle and single-handedly fighting ten people. He pays a heavy price for his courage, however — he is killed.

Dasheng's friend, Hongqi, a quiet boy with beautiful eyes, is sentenced to nine years in prison for raping a fourteen year-old neighbor girl Meiqi (Fine Jade 美琪). Meiqi eventually drowns herself because of the humiliation and people's gossip and turns into a ghost roaming Toon Street day and night.

Dasheng's friend Xude seems to find a relatively normal path in life, taking a job in a bottle-washing factory staffed by former prostitutes. The CCP intends to reform them into "good" women. Xude is seduced by a lascivious married woman, Jinlan (Golden

Orchid 金兰), who also has an affair with Xude's father. The love triangle completely destroys Xude's family. At the end, Xude elopes with Jinlan and their new-born baby to northern China.

Dasheng's friend Little Cripple is a kleptomaniac and causes difficulty for his family. His mother died in childbirth and Little Cripple has been cared for by his two sisters and violently disciplined by his hot-tempered father. Ironically, however, Little Cripple finds himself giving lectures as a model youth after he accidentally discloses a hidden ammunition depot and a "class" enemy. In this way, for the first time in his life, Little Cripple glorifies himself and his family.

Role Models and Peer Community

After giving the outlines of four short stories and one novel, I turn to a close reading of these stories by examining the parental society and the negative role model it plays, teenager's peer community, and the possible solutions the desperate teens pursue in this story.

In a normal society, the parental society, which is composed of parents, teachers and elders, provides positive role models for young people to imitate until the appropriate behaviors became habitual. Parents and teachers are the most significant adults in the lives of adolescents. Besides providing moral guidance to their offspring and disciples, more significantly, they help the young to gain a facility for introspection and a sense of history.¹⁸⁴ However, in an abnormal society, such as mainland China during the period

¹⁸⁴ The writer Robert Bly raises the concept of sibling society in contrast to parental society in his book *The Sibling Society* (Mass.: Addison-Wesley Pub., 1996). He has identified the present American society as a sibling society in which adults and adolescents are less differentiated. Since the 1950s, the fast development of commercialism,

from 1969 to 1979, the parental society loses their educational and guiding function, and force the young people to turn to their peer community to seek for support and counseling.

In China during the Cultural Revolution, the escalation of anti-intellectualism and anti-traditionalism lead to moral degeneration, lack of introspective ability and a loss of the “roots” of Chinese culture: Confucian “benevolence (ren 仁) and altruism (shu 恕) – the humanism of China’s ancient propriety (guli 古礼).”¹⁸⁵ Meanwhile, education is no longer what it should be because it is in collusion with a valueless, chaotic society; it does not consider the lessons that the past has to offer. Consequently, adults — both parents and teachers — cannot provide a moral compass for youth and fail to pass on the traditional values of Chinese culture. From the youth’s perspective, this absence of proper parental authority figures and positive role models forces them to turn to their peers for guidance. Unfortunately, the peer community cannot provide the necessary nutrition for emotional growth. Therefore, teenagers during the Cultural Revolution were caught in the transition between childhood and adulthood, struggling in an uncertainty which seemed as prolonged as adolescence itself. In other words, they were frozen at the threshold of adolescence.

technology, single-parenting, divorce, and the media-driven emphasis on the youth culture have all made adults less mature and responsible than their parents’ generation. On the other hand, because of growing up in working, single family homes, adolescents take on more adult responsibilities; the sibling society is thus one in which “parents regress to become more like children, and the children, through abandonment, are forced to become adult too soon.” (132) This problem is further complicated as people remain adolescents long past the normal adolescent period. Bly argues that in the parental society, the world of the first half of the twentieth century, there were numerous representatives of the adult community: teachers and elders to whom the young were drawn. These elders served as positive role models for young people to imitate until the appropriate behaviors became habitual. Among the elders, parents and teachers were the most significant adults in the lives of adolescents. In sibling society, however, due to the lack of maturity among adults, adolescents have to make do with peer guidance from sibling society.

¹⁸⁵ Wang Zengqi, a modern Chinese writer has said about his understanding of the “roots” of Chinese culture: “Confucian and Confucius’s thought is the leading element [in my thought] – benevolence (ren) and altruism (shu) – the humanism of China’s ancient propriety (guli).” Michael Duke, “Reinventing China: Cultural Exploration in Contemporary Chinese Fiction,” *Issues and Studies* (August 1989), p34.

The effects of the lack of positive role models from parental society and the negative peer guidance from peer community upon adolescents during the Chinese Cultural Revolution is best illustrated in Su Tong's *North Side Story* and other coming-of-age stories.

Let's look at the role models he has in the adult world. Then we will look at his peer community, and what he learns from his peers.

In traditional Chinese society or in Confucian discourse, it is the responsibility of the father and the teacher to guide youth, as has been described in two lines of the "Three-Character Classic" 三字经: "To feed without teaching, is the father's fault. To teach without severity, is the teacher's laziness." 养不教 父之过, 教不严 师之惰.¹⁸⁶ The importance of role models provided by parents and teachers is especially emphasized in Confucian discourse. It is coincident with social learning theory: "what adults do and the role models they represent are far more important in influencing adolescent behavior than what they say. Teachers and parents can best teach human decency, altruism, moral values, and a social conscience by exhibiting these virtues themselves."¹⁸⁷ During the period of Cultural Revolution, however, with the total rejection of Confucianism and other traditional Chinese values, fathers and teachers lost their guiding functions.

First, we will look at school. In the story of *North Side Story*, the school has been taken over by the Workers' Propaganda Team (WPT). The head of the WPT becomes the

¹⁸⁶ Wang Yinglin(王应麟 1223-1296), *San zi jing. Bai jia xing. Zeng guang* (三字经, 百家姓, 增广), edited by Yuan Tingdong 袁庭栋, Chengdu: Ba Shu shu she, 1988, p.4. The *Sanzi Jing*, usually translated as the *Three-Character Classic*, has been a required text for all Chinese children in traditional Chinese society. Kids would recite it as a group, accompanied with the swaying of the body to give it a proper rhythm. It was written in the thirteenth century and usually attributed to Wang Yinglin, a renowned Confucian scholar. The "poem" consists of a series of couplets of three characters. The complete text is less than 1200 characters but in that limited space it manages to enumerate most of the salient features of the Confucian tradition.

¹⁸⁷ F. Philip Rice, *The Adolescent - Development, Relationships, and Culture*, Second Edition, Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1978, p.73.

principal of the school. Even Dasheng feels this change in the school's leadership is absurd. School is no longer a place where children can learn how to be a good person. It has lost the function of education: "to propagate doctrines of the ancient sages, to transmit learning, and to dispel confusion." 传道,授业,解惑.¹⁸⁸ All the boys and girls of school age on Toon Street enroll in a school named Dongfeng 东风 Middle School. Whenever those youngsters are challenged by teenagers from another area, they announce the name of their school to frighten the rivals, because the school has long since become a place of undaunted murder and arson 杀人放火.

The teachers even think they should be allowed to take guns to school in order to protect themselves from students' attacks. Facing this reality, instead of examining their failed role as educators, the teachers try to shirk their responsibilities. They trace back the history of the school and find out that its site was the location of a prison in the Ming and Qing dynasties. Su Tong deliberately arranges for a history teacher to reveal this fact. The history teacher's discovery "legitimizes" the teachers' failure of "propagating doctrines of the ancient sages, transmitting learning, and dispelling confusion" The teachers feel much relieved because the school has its tradition of being a place of undaunted murder and arson. Supposedly intellectuals, they have long lost the ability of self-retrospection. They use vulgar language and violence against their students and other adults. When Old Kang, a member of so-called the Five Black Categories 黑五类,¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁸ Han Yu (韩愈 768-824), "Shishuo 师说," in *Selected Works of Han Yu* (Han Yu wen xuan 韩愈文选), edited by Tong Dide, Publisher? 1980, p.52.

¹⁸⁹ The Five Black Categories (Hei wu lei 黑五类) refers to five categories of people: landlords (地主), rich peasants (富农), rightists (右派), counterrevolutionaries (反革命), and bad elements (坏分子).

points out their failure as teachers, they answer him with insulting language, fists and kicks.

The teachers have regressed to the same moral level as their students. They are not the role models of their students anymore. Hence, they lose the respect of their students. The students and teachers curse and hit each other. It seems the only discipline the school has left is to expel its students. Therefore,

The white posters announcing expulsions are posted on the walls beside the school gate. The names of expelled students are constantly updated and spring up like bamboo shoots after rain.

勒令某人退学或开除某人学籍的白色海报张贴在学校大门的侧墙上,海报上的名字总是在吐故纳新,象雨后春笋般地不断涌现。¹⁹⁰

Those teenagers, Dasheng and his friends Little Cripple, Hongqi and Xu De are banished from school one by one. For them school has never been a place of “propagating doctrines of the ancient sages, transmitting learning, and dispelling confusion.”

Now, we will look at another two supposed role models in Dasheng's life — his father and mother.

First of all, Dasheng's father, a foundry worker, has been absent from Dasheng's life since the boy was thirteen years old due to a traffic accident which was indirectly caused by Dasheng himself. The things we know about this figure mostly come from Dasheng and his mother's recollections. The memories Dasheng has of his father are of his hot temper, coarse language and violence. It seems the only way this sturdy man

¹⁹⁰ Su Tong, *North Side Story*, p.10.

knew to discipline his son was beating him up. His last words before his tragic death are to curse his son : "I should have beaten you to death!" 揍不死的东西!¹⁹¹ Dasheng is not really sad about his father's death. He actually benefits from it. With his father's passing, he is relieved from physical abuse. When he looks at his deceased father's picture on the wall, he can still feel the angry flames in the man's eyes.

In *North Side Story*, there are another two father figures. One is Little Cripple's father, Wang Deji, and the other is Xude's father. Even though they are physically alive and with their sons, they only cause humiliation and disaster for their children. Wang Deji, Little Cripple's father, a widower and drunkard, is sexually suppressed. In his neighbour's words, he is just like a male dog. He is crazy about women. When he stares at women, his eyesight is "like a pair of scissors ready to cut a woman's clothes open." 像要剪开她们的衣裳.¹⁹² He indulges in the mission assigned by the Residents' Committee¹⁹³ to capture the perpetrators of illicit sexual acts in parks at night. He prohibits his own daughter from dating. When his eldest daughter secretly goes out to date a man, he locks her out of the house at midnight causing her to be murdered by hooligans. Little Cripple has been hiding in Dasheng's house. He is Dasheng's only friend who is not resented by Dasheng's mother. She has sympathy for him because he doesn't have a mother, and because he is a cripple. Little Cripple comments on his own father:

¹⁹¹ Ibid., p.7

¹⁹² Su Tong, *North Side Story*, p.218.

¹⁹³ Residents' Committee is called *jumin weiyuanhui* 居民委员会. It is a self-governed, grass-root organization in each urban residency area in the People's Republic of China. The director, deputy director and committee members are elected by the residents. Even though it is not an administrative organ of the government, it is under the administration of Public Security Bureau. Its main functions are in accordance with China's 1982 National Law Code 111.

He dares to do anything. He is malicious and cruel. He doesn't even care about his own life, how can he care about me? I suspect that my dad has killed people before. I suspect that my mom did not die of sickness, but was murdered by my dad . . . I also suspect that my crippled leg was broken by my dad.

他什么事都敢干 . . . 我爹手毒, 他连自己的性命都不在乎, 还在乎我吗? 我怀疑我爸杀过人。我怀疑我妈妈不是病死的, 是让我爹弄死的 . . . 还有我的 这条腿, 我怀疑是让我爹打断的。¹⁹⁴

From the above description we can see that the image of the father in *Chengbei didai* is harsh and punitive. Based on what has been observed by the psychologist F. Philip Rice,

Parents who rely on harsh, punitive methods are defeating the true purpose of discipline: to develop a sensitive conscience, socialization, and cooperation. Cruel punishment, especially when accompanied by parental rejection, develops an intensive, uncaring, hostile, rebellious, cruel person. Instead of teaching children to care about others, it deadens their sensitivities, so that they learn to fear and hate others, but no longer care about them or want to please them. They may obey, but when the threat of external punishment is removed, they are antisocial people. Many criminal types fit this description.¹⁹⁵

This is exactly the effect of Dasheng's and Little Cripple's fathers' punishments on their sons. Instead of being disciplined, both Dasheng and Little Cripple fear, hate and want to be away from their fathers. They become more violent and destructive.

¹⁹⁴ Su Tong, *North Side Story*, P.65.

¹⁹⁵ Philip Rice, *The Adolescent – Development, Relationships, and Culture*, P.526.

Another father figure in the story is Xude's father. Even though he is not punitive or violent as the above-mentioned two fathers, what he brings to his family is even more destructive. He is seduced by the same woman who has an affair with his son. Drunk and driven by guilt, he provides a confession of the affair to his wife and son. His confession finally leads to his son's hatred of him and flight from home, his wife's contempt and his own paralysis and humiliation.

Dasheng's mother, Tengfeng 腾凤, his other parental figure, is also far from a positive role model. Without doubt, she possesses genuine human goodness: self-sacrifice, loyalty, compassion, and diligence, but she is far more sophisticated than the traditional Chinese woman — the embodiment of a filial daughter, a faithful wife and a caring mother. As the daughter of a snake-performer, she was sexually harassed by her own father before her marriage and was later sold by her father for two hundred *yuan* to a foundry worker as his wife. "Father treated Teng like a snake. After he finished playing with her, he just dumped her in this strange city." 父亲把腾凤也当作他的一条蛇，要过了就随手扔在这个陌生的街市上了。¹⁹⁶ "Father and chilly wind at night are two knives stabbed in her memory. They left permanent injury on Tengfeng." 父亲和夜里的寒风是她记忆中的两把刀，它们在腾凤的身上留下了永恒的伤害。¹⁹⁷ After marriage, she constantly suffers her husband's physical and sexual abuse. All these experiences make her hate both her father and her husband. Being afraid of her husband's sexual and physical abuse, she secretly wishes for her husband's death. However, after her husband dies in a traffic accident, she constantly blames her son for causing the accident.

¹⁹⁶ Su Tong, *North Side Story*, p.15.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.144.

Her cowardly character has changed beyond recognition. Sometimes in the gloomy and depressing days, this poor woman chases and beats her son with a broom handle and tearfully complains of her sufferings.

腾凤以前温软懦弱的性格在丧夫之后已经变得面目全非，在一些阴郁得令人伤情的天气里，胜凤用扫帚柄追打着儿子，嘴里哭诉着她的悲苦。¹⁹⁸

The response she receives from her son, however, is "You are out of your mind" 你这个神经病。¹⁹⁹ When her father, the old snake-performer, finally comes back to her for accommodation, she turns down his request. The poor old man finally freezes to death under a bridge on Lunar New Year's eve. For Dasheng, his mother sets negative example in terms of filial piety. When his grandfather is chased out of their home, the old man tells Dasheng: "Someday you should treat your mother the same way she treated me today" 她今天怎样对我，你以后也怎样对她。²⁰⁰ Feeling guilty about her father's death and her failure to play her proper role as a filial daughter, she tries to hide the truth from her son by denying that the old snake-performer was her father.

In spite of the destructive relationship between Dasheng and his parents, readers can still notice Dasheng's affection towards his father and mother. For example, on his way back home from the Double Pagoda town 双塔镇, his bicycle gets a flat tire and his friend tells him just to ride it like that. Dasheng, however, strokes the bicycle, which he inherited from his deceased father, in the darkness, shakes his head, and tells his friend:

¹⁹⁸ Su Tong, *North Side Story*, p.8.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid..

²⁰⁰ Ibid., p.141.

“No. The bicycle would fall apart if I rode it. I would rather walk back home with the bicycle.” 不行，这么骑回家车子就散架了，我宁可推着车走回家。²⁰¹ In another scene Dasheng takes the only alarm clock 钟 from home to fight Pig Head and his fellows. Right before his death, he entrusts Pig Head to take the clock back home for him because his mother needs the alarm clock for work. Both bicycle and alarm clock are the tokens of Dasheng's attachment to and affection of his parents.

Throughout the novel, Dasheng's alienation and awareness of his own lack of maturity have him seeking an older person to mentor him. Despite losing the role models of his teachers, his father and his mother, Dasheng still tries to find a role model for himself. Dasheng's constant effort of seeking a mentor is seen in his looking for a martial arts instructor.

He makes a trip with his friend, Xude, to the nearby Double Pagoda town with the hope of finding a martial arts master named Monk. It turns out he has received false-information. There is no such person in the small town. The only outcome of their trip is climbing to the top of the wooden tower to see their houses from afar. The second time, Dasheng's friend has told him that there is a master named Yan the Third whose kung fu is the best in the area, but he doesn't take disciples anymore. Dasheng doesn't give up. He finally enters into the room of the legendary master, only to find that the master is too old and weak to teach him anything. As a master of martial arts, Yan the Third is also disillusioned by the status quo and refuses to teach youngsters kung fu because he

²⁰¹ Ibid., p.22

believes those who want to learn kung fu are all hooligans. He drives Dasheng out of his room. Dasheng's dream of finding a mentor is completely broken.

As I discussed before, school should have been a place where children could learn from their teachers and peers. In Dasheng's case, school has lost its function of educating youngsters. Moreover, Dasheng is banished from school because of his misconduct. Now he has to turn to his peers on street. Like Holden Caulfield in *The Catcher in the Rye*, in a world devoid of older male role models, Dasheng is left with his peer group, his peer community, represented by the Toon Street clan. These peers on the street fail him as well.

Xude seems to be Dasheng's best friend in spite of the fact that their mothers are constantly at war. They hang out most of time before Xude goes to work in the bottle-washing factory. Xude is smart, but often acts by instinct, without careful thought. Dasheng also finds his friend to be unfair, cowardly, and frustrated by lust. The night they make their way home from the Double Pagoda town where they tried to find the kung fu master, both of them are worried about being scolded by their mothers. Unfortunately, Dasheng's bicycle has a flat tire, and he cannot ride it anymore. At this moment, Xude chooses to ride his bicycle home and leaves Dasheng himself walking through the dark suburb. Even though Dasheng makes no objection to his friend's decision, he is very disappointed. He knows that he would have stayed with Xude if it had been Xude's bicycle that had developed a flat tire. He concludes that Xude is not a loyal and fair friend at all.²⁰²

²⁰² Su Tong, *North Side Story*, p.22.

What frustrates Dasheng even more about Xude is his mockery and contemptuous tone, and his habit of playing pranks. When the three friends, Dasheng, Xude and Little Cripple, go to the Grass Basket Prison to “visit” their jailed friend Hongqi, Xude urges Dasheng to climb to the top of a tree and peer into the prison. When Dasheng is at the top of the tree, Xude frightens him by imitating the sound of shooting and causes him to fall and break his leg. Dasheng doesn’t tell his mother how he got a broken leg. He does not want Xude to be punished by his mother. Afterwards, however, Xude never seems to pay attention to Dasheng’s injury even though he caused it. When Xude sees Dasheng has left his bed and is trying to walk by himself, Dasheng thinks Xude will be surprised to see him walking and will ask about his leg. Xude says nothing, however. He doesn’t really care about his friend.²⁰³

The bottle-washing factory where Xude works used to be a workshop where prostitutes were reformed through labour.²⁰⁴ Now twenty years have passed. Those old prostitutes have lost their coquettish manners, but, ironically, the young girls and so-called “innocent women from good families” (良家妇女) take over their heritage. Soon after Xude goes to work in this factory, he is seduced by a lascivious woman named Golden Orchid. At the end of the story, as per Golden Orchid’s arrangement, Xude, Golden Orchid and their baby son take the train to Qingdao. It is Xude’s first time on a train. His expression is a combination of joy and perplexity.²⁰⁵

Dasheng’s other friend, Little Cripple, habitually steals and lies. His habit of pilfering, ironically, finally brings him honour and fame. When he tries to steal from Old

²⁰³ Ibid., p.70.

²⁰⁴ Su Tong’s story, *The Red and the Pink*, has more detail description about reforming former prostitutes.

²⁰⁵ Su Tong, *North Side Story*, p.249.

Kang's house, he accidentally finds a hidden ammunition depot and hence "ferrets out" Old Kang as a hidden counterrevolutionary. Because of this incident, Little Cripple is glorified as a hero and a model youth by the government. He gives speeches throughout the city. He is also guaranteed a job. Even though it sounds like a farce, it is the first time that Little Cripple makes his father proud. It is also the first time that father and son can have an affectionate and equal conversation. On their way home, the father advises Little Cripple to behave and strive to join the CCP and cut off his bad friends Dasheng and Xude. This incident gives the family hope to improve their social status. They have already begun to be admired by the neighbours. By including this episode, Su Tong intends to demonstrate that in an abnormal time, this seemingly harmonious father-son relationship is actually based on false elements and conditions.

A Solitary Hero (孤胆英雄)

From the above analysis we can see that Dasheng's alienation is almost complete — from parents, from friends and from society in general as represented by the school. What makes Dasheng's experience particularly difficult is that he is keenly aware of being isolated. His own profound recognition of alienation occurs when at the end of the summer he suddenly realizes that his close friends — Hongqi, Xude and Little Cripple — have drifted apart.

Seemingly there is no one he can turn to for guidance, as those few he does turn to do not provide him with effective help. He has to head forward by himself, and make his own decisions as to what kind of person he should become.

A sociologist has pointed out that “if emotional and social needs of adolescents are not met in the interpersonal relationship in the family, they turn to the gang to fulfill status needs that would otherwise go unmet. . . . Street gangs hold nearly absolute control over the behavior of individuals.”²⁰⁶

This is exactly what Dasheng does. He aimlessly roams the streets and looks forward to encountering something meaningful. When one of his friends laughs at him for killing a cat instead of a man, he swears he will soon let people know that he is a “true man” 好汉. Forming a gang in Toon Street and becoming the “No. 1 man” or “a real man” in the northern part of the city become Dasheng’s ultimate goals.

When Pig Head’s gang calls Dasheng and all the teenagers on the Toon Street “puppy shit,” Dasheng is deeply irritated and insulted. He challenges Pig Head’s gang by proposing a fight. Unfortunately, no one on Toon Street wants to follow him. Therefore he decides to go to the fight by himself. He thinks: “The most sensational news will be born at eight o’clock this evening.” 今晚八点, 本市最具爆炸性的新闻就要产生了。²⁰⁷ He finally demonstrates that he is a true man, but sacrifices his life by single-handedly fighting ten people.

It is evident that part of Dasheng’s difficulty arises not so much from his being inherently bad as much as his having no one after which to model himself. Suspended between the world of school and the poor and vulgar Toon Street lifestyle, between childhood and adulthood, Dasheng is adrift in a sea of peers every bit as adrift as he is. Without any positive role models to follow, these teenagers follow their instincts. In

²⁰⁶ Philip Rice, *The Adolescent – Development, Relationships, and Culture*, p.261.

²⁰⁷ Su Tong, *North Side Story*, p.261.

essence, Dasheng's 1970s dilemma depicts the peer community of the Cultural Revolution.

A Failed Catcher in the Rye

Su Tong has said that his coming-of-age stories are written under the influence of J. D. Salinger. When I read these stories, I try to trace Salinger's marks in Su Tong's writing. The most obvious similarities are the casual tone, the first-person adolescent narrator, the extensive usage of slang, and the loosely organized plots. Some critics have tried to relate the teenage protagonists in Su Tong's stories to the image of "the catcher in the rye" in Salinger's story, because these critics are inspired by Holden Caulfield's vision: "I keep picturing all these little kids playing some game in this big field of rye and all. Thousands of little kids, and nobody's around — nobody big, I mean — except me. And I'm standing on the edge of some crazy cliff. What I have to do, I have to catch everybody if they start to go over the cliff — I mean if they're running and they don't look where they're going I have to come out from somewhere and catch them. That's all I'd do all day. I'd just be the catcher in the rye and all."²⁰⁸ Su Tong does create images of "catchers" in his stories, but they are not teenagers. The catchers in Su's coming-of-age stories are all marginalized adults.

In "Memories of Mulberry Garden," Su Tong makes no effort to develop the image of the catcher. Perhaps because it is his first coming-of-age story, the image of the catcher is not yet fully developed. If readers examine the story carefully, however, they may notice Xinxin's grandpa, who appears to be a prototype for the catcher in Su's later stories. In this story, there is a short passage related to this image:

²⁰⁸ J. D. Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye*, Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1951, p. 224.

At that time, I thought I had won Xinxin. However, it seemed that she forgot everything after one night. She didn't go to the stone stairs anymore. I had no way to contact her. Her grandpa was very good at martial arts. Somehow he got wind of this affair, and started to protect his granddaughter.

那一阵我以为跟辛辛搞上了，但辛辛睡了一觉后好像把什么都忘了，她不再一个人到石阶上去了，我没法跟她联系。她爷爷武功挺棒，不知听到什么风声，开始保护他的孙女了。²⁰⁹

Here, Grandpa is only guarding his own granddaughter, and he is just a catcher for his own house. Following this story, however, the image of the catcher becomes clearer and clearer, and is gradually developed into one of the main characters in Su's later stories.

In "An Afternoon Incident," the catcher is the barber Zhang, who forces the narrator to sit on a chair for a hair cut and won't let him become involved in the bloody killing. Actually, the narrator witnesses the whole event while barber Zhang is giving him his hair cut. The location of old Zhang's barber shop is critical; it is at the ramp of the bridge, where Zhang can easily see what is happening on the bridge. The stone bridge is exactly the place where the teenagers on Toon Street always hang out. When there is no business, Zhang dozes off in his barber's chair. In fact, he is sitting at the edge of Holden Caulfield's "crazy cliff" and watching the teenagers.

He has known all these kids since they were born. That afternoon when the narrator plays truant and roams the street, it is Zhang who stops him and promises to give him the same haircut as Harelip's. He knows the potential danger for a kid roaming the

²⁰⁹ Su Tong, "Memories of Mulberry Garden" in *Young Blood*, p.273.

street on a school day, especially when the kid is associating with someone like Harelip. Even though Zhang seems to be taking a nap when the narrator passes, he immediately opens his eyes and shouts: "Have a haircut, come on." 剃头吧, 来吧.²¹⁰ Even as he hesitates, barber Zhang presses the narrator into the chair and says: "Don't move. I can give you whatever hairdo you want." 坐着别动, 我什么样的头都会剃.²¹¹ Barber Zhang deliberately cuts his hair slowly because he knows what is going to happen on the bridge. He has observed the fellow standing on the bridge for two days and knows that the man is not a local and is waiting to avenge himself. Probably he knows he cannot prevent what is going to happen, but what he can do is to save this young kid. His only method is to hold this kid down tightly on his barber's chair.

When the killing happens, the narrator wants to rush to the stone bridge to have a close look and shouts at Zhang: "Take your hand away. Let me go and have a look." 你放手, 让我去看看. Barber Zhang yells: "You have not finished your haircut, you cannot go." 头没剃完, 不准去.²¹² He uses his eagle-talon hands to hold the narrator's head tighter and tighter. Finally, after everyone has left the bridge, Zhang releases his hands and announces that the haircut is finished and the boy can go. At the end of story, the narrator finds out that Zhang has shaved his head instead of giving him the same haircut as Harelip. This is also Zhang's way of keeping him away from the hooligans on the street, by differentiating the boy's hair style from theirs.

In "The Sad Dance," the catcher is Duan Hong, the dancing teacher. This image may derive from Su Tong's memory of his first school teacher who always wore a kind

²¹⁰ Su Tong, "An Afternoon Incident" in *Young Blood*, p. 315.

²¹¹ Ibid, p.316.

²¹² Ibid., p.319.

and gentle smile on her face, which was rare in those chaotic times. Duan Hong is a spinster in her fifties who always wears a pair of white tennis shoes.

Her waist is more pliable than that of an eight year-old girl, and her movement is more graceful than the willows in the wind. She has danced since she was young, and neglects to get married or have children. Duan Hong is an old maid.

她的腰肢比八岁女孩还要柔韧，舞步比风中杨柳还要婀娜。她从年轻时就这样跳着，忘了结婚，忘了生孩子，段红是个老处女。²¹³

She likes to whisper encouraging words into the ears of her children. All the children feel lucky to hold her hand. The first-person narrator repeatedly compared Duan Hong to an old hen who leads a flock of young chicks to practise dancing. She is like a hen who always tries to protect her chicks, such as her protections of the crystal girl and the narrator described earlier. Her warm and protective gestures are like sunshine to these helpless children.

In *North Side Story*, the image of the catcher is Old Kang, the former owner of a Chinese medicine shop, and now a scrap-picker. In this story, Su Tong endows his catcher with more cultural and historical significance. Old Kang is guarding traditional Chinese culture and moral codes.

In the previous pages I have discussed the absence of adult and peer guidance in Dasheng's world. Actually, the only possible positive role model for Dasheng in the adult world is this Old Kang. During the Cultural Revolution, however, Old Kang is marginalized and labeled as a member of the Black Five Categories. He is despised by

²¹³ Su Tong, "The Sad Dance" in *Young Blood*, p 308.

people and loses the right to speak. Therefore, even though he understands perfectly what an adult role model ought to be, he is unable to demonstrate it. He tries to speak up, but no one listens. Even though Dasheng is keenly aware of his need for a mentor and eager to have someone to guide him, he would never think of Old Kang. He is too young to recognize a wise man in disguise.

Old Kang retains the fundamental values inherent in Confucian humanism and the Chinese intellectual tradition. Similar to A Cheng who emphasizes the importance of education and people's spiritual needs in "The King of Chess" and "The King of Children," Su Tong, by depicting the character — Old Kang — in *North Side Story*, also lays "stress on education for civilization [which] represents both a much-needed reaffirmation of the spiritual values of the 'Old Society' and a call for serious reevaluation of Chinese tradition."²¹⁴

In *North Side Story*, Old Kang is a witness to history and the bearer of historical memory. He constantly refers back to what had happened in the Old Society. The two places where Old Kang always appears are at the pharmacy and at school, though he is not allowed to enter. He can only observe from the outside. The pharmacy is a place to maintain physical health, while school promotes mental health.

The year 1949 is a watershed in Old Kang's life. Before 1949, he was the owner of a Chinese medicine shop named Longevity and Health Hall 寿康堂. Chinese medicine is the symbol of traditional Chinese culture. However, after 1949, his shop was confiscated and he became "an object of remolding" 被改造的对象. Since 1960s he has

²¹⁴ Michael Duke, "Reinventing China: Cultural Exploration in Contemporary Chinese Fiction," *Issues and Studies* (August 1989), p.40.

been picking up scraps of paper on the streets of northern part of the city. Hence, he is called scrap-picker Old Kang. Here, Su Tong deliberately turns this character into a scrap-picker because paper is one of the places where history is recorded. In fact, Old Kang is a history-picker.

The Chinese medicine shop, the Longevity and Health Hall, has been changed to Healthy People's Pharmacy 健民药店, which sells Chinese medicine, Western medicine, agricultural chemicals, pesticides, and gives out free contraceptives. The Chinese medicinal chest of padauk wood has been covered with dust for twenty years; Old Kang has picked up scraps for twenty years. People on Toon Street are used to the view of Old Kang's hunchback and his wicker basket. Despite being deprived of the ownership of the medicine shop, Old Kang, regardless of the season, always sits on the steps of the shop to sort out the scraps in his wicker basket.

The scraps include various kinds of posters, such as slogans and hygienic propaganda, court bulletins, popsicle wrappers, and newspapers. Old Kang's scraps came from two main sources. One is the school posters publicizing the names of expelled students; the other is the old newspapers used to wrap oily food at the grocery stores. He always plucks out the old newspapers, because they fetch the highest price. As he does this, he reads over the headlines: Kim Il Sung has just left, and Sihanouk has arrived; American devils are expanding their military force, so on and so forth.²¹⁵

Old Kang helps people to recall history. Sometimes Old Kang's memory seems to be confined to the years before 1949. What he sees in the present propels his thoughts to

²¹⁵ Su Tong, *North Side Story*, p.49.

the old days. He constantly reminds people of how things were in the past. He repeatedly tells people what is happening now is sinful or a crime 罪过.

The teachers complain about the chaotic state of the school and the evils of the students, saying:

While teaching here, we should get permission from the Public Security Bureau to take firearms and ammunition [to protect ourselves]. . . In my opinion, Dong Feng School might just as well be transformed into a jail for juveniles.

在这儿教书就该向公安局申请枪枝弹药 . . . 我看把东风中学改成少年监狱还差不多。²¹⁶

Old Kang is very surprised to hear such words from the mouths of teachers. He refutes them:

Without an education, children will never learn to be responsible citizens. Now that the school no longer teaches even the 'Three Character Classic,' the children don't know how to distinguish good from evil. How can they ever learn to be good?

孩子不教不成人，现在学校连《三字经》都不教，孩子们善恶不分，他们怎么会学好呢？²¹⁷

Unfortunately, the teachers don't understand Old Kang, but simply conclude that he is advocating Confucian thought which should have been struck down long ago. Old Kang's remarks only invite mockery, beatings and physical violence from the teachers.

²¹⁶ Ibid., p.112.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

Old Kang cannot help sighing that nowadays the teachers no longer behave like teachers. He recalls his distant childhood, when the children in the northern part of the city all went to Peach Flower Alley to attend school. The alley was very narrow.

Whenever a teacher passed through, the students would automatically yield and bow to the teacher. In addition, the teacher always carried a ruler, used to deal with naughty boys.

The teacher, however, could only slap the children's hands and bottom, nowhere else.

Old Kang can only conclude his reminiscence by saying: "It is a crime, it is really a crime!" 罪过，真是罪过！²¹⁸

When Old Kang sees the broken pieces of fine porcelain, he cannot help asking himself: "Why [did these children] have to smash such precious china? Why did these children have to damage the good things?" 为什么非要砸这些珍贵的瓷器？孩子们为什么非要弄坏那些好东西？²¹⁹ Those pieces of porcelain were all from his medicine shop and were used to contain precious medicine, such as musk, ginseng and deer antler 麝香 参茸. They were confiscated, however, by the students at the beginning of Cultural Revolution, later to be broken or taken home by housewives as containers for salt or sugar. He shows the broken pieces of porcelain to the people on the street, and looks at them with a compassionate gaze. He is not really worrying about the porcelain, but the loss of traditional Chinese culture and values. Unfortunately people don't understand him at all. They are indifferent to his words, and reply: "They broke it, so what? You're such a crazy old fool." 砸碎就砸碎了吧，这有什么？老康你他妈的老糊涂了。²²⁰

²¹⁸ Ibid., p.113.

²¹⁹ Ibid., p.114.

²²⁰ Ibid., p.115..

He might be muddled because there are so many things he cannot understand. When he sees the girl, Meiqi, go to the pharmacy to buy sleeping pills, he recalls that Meiqi's grandpa, the owner of a rice store, suffers from insomnia resulting from his constant lookout for rats in his store. He often came to Old Kang to buy sleeping pills. Old Kang tells Meiqi not to touch this kind of medicine. He cannot figure out why such a young girl needs sleeping pills. When he sees the pharmacy closed for a "political study session," he says: "What is more important: political study or people's lives? What if someone has an emergency and comes to the pharmacy to buy medicine?" 学习要紧, 还是人命要紧? 假如有人来抓急药怎么样呢?²²¹ He doesn't understand why a political study session is more important than people's lives. When he witnesses the snake performer frozen to death, he cannot figure out why the family of such an old man could let him spend a chilly winter night outside. He can only say that it is a crime.

Even though Old Kang realizes that fewer and fewer people understand him, even though he is deprived of the right to speak, he doesn't lose his conscience or integrity. Old Kang has his own rule. Even if he is picking scraps of waste paper, he still observes the rule. If the poster has been up for less than three days, then he won't touch it. Even though there is a good opportunity for Old Kang to "atone for his crimes" 立功赎罪, Old Kang still turns down the request of the Residents' Committee to observe people's trysts in the park at night because he believes that Heaven would not spare him if he did such a thing.

All these catchers, Old Kang, Duan Hong, Barber Zhang and others, however, cannot save those children. They are standing on the "edge of the crazy cliff," but they

²²¹ Ibid.

cannot catch the boys, or they catch one, or two, but they cannot catch the others. They know the danger, they know the children are running up to the “crazy cliff,” but they cannot help because their power is too weak compared to the overwhelming evil of the times. Or more accurately speaking, the whole of China during the Cultural Revolution had already run off the crazy cliff. They are destined to be failed catchers.

A Clear Conscience

As I mentioned earlier, one of the important features of the *Bildungsroman* is its inwardness and introspectiveness. Even though Su Tong describes the people on Toon Street as acting on their instincts and having no ability of self-examination, he deliberately sets up an episode which forces these numb people to reflect on and examine their conscience. When an elementary school teacher, Zhou, takes her students on a field trip, her son Doggy, a retarded child, is left unattended on the stone bridge, and falls into the river as he tries to imitate a flying bird. Instructor Zhou accuses those who saw Doggy in danger but didn't lift a finger to save him. She asks who passed the stone bridge before her son's incident and records those peoples' names on a list. When people come to her to defend themselves, instructor Zhou answers: “Don't tell me about what you did, tell your own conscience what you did.” 不用告诉我，告诉你自己的良心吧。²²² After that, having a “clear conscience” gradually becomes trendy on Toon Street. People frequently bring up this term in their conversations or arguments. “Do you have a clear conscience?” 你有良心吗 or “Your conscience has been eaten by a dog.” 你的良

²²² Ibid., p.204.

心让狗吃了。²²³ Even those on Instructor Zhou's list use the term "conscience" to defend themselves, saying

Does Instructor Zhou have a clear conscience? I was in the river for an hour to search for her son Doggy. . . . Now it seems we pushed Doggy down into the river and she recorded our names on a list. Doesn't she have any conscience at all?

周老师还有良心吗? 我在水里泡了一个钟头捞他家狗狗, 好像是我把狗狗推下桥的, 她把我记在黑名单上, 她还有一点良心吗?²²⁴

In Chinese culture, the most direct expression of ethical self-reflection and is "to examine one's own clear conscience." In an abnormal era, people's consciences are easily becoming numb, but certain incidents may cause people to scrutinize their own conduct, even though only for a very short moment and in a rather superficial way.

Sexuality, Emotion, Violence and Death

Adolescence has been described as a period of sexual maturation and change. An adolescent's emotional reactions to the changes are as important as the physical changes themselves. Psychologist F. Philip Rice has made it clear that "until the endocrine system completes its changes and gets into balance, the adolescent may exhibit emotional instability, fluctuations of mood, extreme emotional sensitivity, temper tantrums, periods of anger or moodiness, crying spells, or periods of excessive elation."²²⁵ So adolescents desperately need social and familial guidance and support in order to tide them over this highly self-conscious and hypersensitive period.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Philip Rice, *The Adolescent – Development, Relationships, and Culture*, p.108.

Under Mao Zedong's regime, asceticism was one of the tools used to control his people since the Yan'an era. It was aggravated by the highly political suppression of the Cultural Revolution. People might occasionally tell sexual jokes, but parents were too embarrassed to seriously discuss the subject of sexuality with their children, let alone give any guidance. Most adolescents were brought up to feel that sex is wrong and dirty. Some developed a pathological, irrational fear of sex, generated by years of repressive and negative teaching.

In this situation, these teenagers' oppressed sexual desire was likely to be channeled through violence. Violence was also closely related to the people's silence. In an era of extreme political suppression, people choose silence. To be silent means, first of all, not to scream from pain or from fear. It also means that the individual agrees to deprive himself of his most elementary right: the right to speak, to reason, to have his say. His argument remains mute. In an era without the right to speak, violence becomes the only means of expression. Children witness the violence of the adult world and inevitably become involved themselves. The violence breeds fear in these helpless teenagers, driving them to run away. They have, however, no place to flee to.

Therefore, in Su Tong's coming-of-age stories, sexuality is always accompanied by violence or its extreme form — death.

His short story, "Roller skating Away," directly deals with this theme. I have given the outline of this story above. The plot is not new at all: a teenager is shocked by witnessing the adult world and loses his innocence. What the protagonist witnesses in this chaotic day is symbolic of three important things in life: sex, violence and death.

Cat Head's self-gratification and Li Dongying's first menstruation reveal the teenager's sexual awakening, while the scene of adultery in the warehouse reveals the licentious desire of adults. Su Tong's treatment of sexuality is full of sin and embarrassment. The death of Cat Head may be related to his guilt and fear because his secret of self-gratification was discovered by others. The author does not make it clear in the story, but the final sentence can be a clue: "What puzzled me is that Cat Head's skating skill is incomparable; how could he be hit by a truck?" 我想不通的是猫头驾驶滑轮车的技术无人匹敌，他怎么会让汽车撞了呢?²²⁶ Cat Head's seemingly frenzied behavior can also be regarded as a desperate gesture of flying away from the confines of the world. A girl's first menstruation is normally a symbol of female maturity. In this story, however, the author portrays an ugly, stupid girl who announces her first menstruation by crying out in public. Finally, sexuality is revealed through a scene of adultery in a filthy and chaotic place. This sense of sin and fear derive from the era of asceticism — the 1970s — during which Su Tong grew up. In the eyes of the youngsters in Su Tong's stories, the maturation of their bodies is regarded as the source of all kinds of disasters. Maturity terminates their pure and innocent childhood. The secret desires of their bodies flourish in the darkness. They are curious, frightened and ashamed.

After the protagonist witnesses the violence, he runs back home. At home, however, he is forced to face the most extreme form of violence, death, in a neighbour's suicidal act and Cat Head's fatal road accident.

Another short story, "Memories of Mulberry Garden," also ends with the death of two young lovers, Crimson Jade and Hairy Head, in a bamboo grove. The ending is

²²⁶ Su Tong, *Young Blood*, p.303.

unexpected. Most of the story describes the affair between Crimson Jade and Brother Xiao, and says nothing about the love between Crimson Jade and Hairy Head. There are some cues, however. For example, when Brother Xiao praises Crimson Jade's braveness in enduring three abortions, saying: "That girl is really something. I eavesdropped outside of the door [of the operating room], but didn't hear her cry at all." 那丫头真行, 我在门外听, 就是听不到她喊. Hairy Head says: "Crimson Jade is finished. She will have trouble giving birth in the future." 丹玉完了, 以后生孩子麻烦了.²²⁷ Another clue is that Hairy Head says that if he likes a woman, he will snap at her face and leave bite marks. He did just that: he left bite marks on Crimson Jade's face.

Su Tong sets up Hairy Head as a contrast to Brother Xiao. Brother Xiao is crude and impetuous but by essence selfish and cowardly. Hairy Head is kind-hearted, sensible and sensitive. When Brother Xiao uses his strength to bully the weak by forcing the narrator to deliver a message to Crimson Jade, Hairy Head kindly helps pick up the dropped towel; when Brother Xiao alleges that the narrator must be Crimson Jade's younger brother because he has her eyes, Hairy Head defends Crimson Jade saying that she is the only child in the family. When Brother Xiao brags about making Crimson Jade pregnant three times, Hairy Head is worried about Crimson's wellbeing; after Crimson Jade leaves Brother Xiao, she and Hairy Head perish together.

The image of Crimson Jade is mysterious and full of contradictions. She is shy, quiet and very feminine, but also seductive, bold and courageous. She never cries or shouts, but she uses her black and sunken eyes to express her disagreement and anger. During the day, she shuts herself away in a mysterious mulberry garden filled with dark

²²⁷ Su Tong, "Memories of Mulberry Garden" in *Young Blood*, p.274.

and gloomy houses, elm and osmanthus trees, but secretly meets Brother Xiao at night in her boudoir. She is so shy that she always walks close to the wall, but she rubs her long legs against the boys' "sensitive part" when dancing. She stays with Brother Xiao even though he forces her into three abortions, but immediately leaves him when he is defeated by the narrator.

In contrast to Crimson Jade, there is another girl named Xinxin (Pungent) who is simple, sweet and conventional. Like Crimson Jade, she also longs for a boy's arms, but the boldest thing she can do is to lean her head on the narrator's shoulder for a short moment. Su Tong doesn't devote much ink to depicting Xinxin. At the end of the story, Su contrasts the fates of Crimson Jade and Xinxin. Many years later, the narrator returns to his hometown and runs into Xinxin. She is now a pregnant woman and completely ignores him. She peacefully passes over the stone bridge where the late Crimson Jade's name is carved and leaves the narrator wondering what is wrong with her.

In "Memories of Mulberry Garden," Su Tong's poetic treatment of death is in sharp contrast with the cruel, fierce, ghastly and sometimes decadent image of death in such stories as *Rice*, "Opium Family," and "Nineteen Thirty-four Escape." At the end of this story, death seems to be a quiet, warm and lyrical closing ceremony of the young couple's lives: in the deep and serene bamboo grove, the exquisite and composed girl, Crimson Jade, with a clear circle of tooth-marks on her face, dies in Hairy Head's arm. Neither before nor after presenting this scene, does Su Tong tell the reader anything about when, why or how this young couple dies. He just pushes this picture to the front. Then he casually says:

I didn't expect them to die in this way. I felt there must be a "mistake" around this incident. Why did they want to die? They shouldn't be afraid of anyone, because there is no need to be afraid. Maybe they were just afraid of this "mistake."

[我]没想到他们是这么死的。我觉得事情前前后后发生了“差错”。他们为什么要死呢？他们不会害怕谁，因为谁都用不着害怕。也许他们就是害怕这个“差错”。²²⁸

By saying this, Su Tong is not pretentiously leading the story to mystery. The young couple could die for any reason: maybe just an accident, maybe a foolish love suicide, or maybe a homicide. Su Tong's interest is not in disclosing the causality of the death, but to set off the poetic atmosphere of death.

In traditional Chinese culture, bamboo groves are always connected with the image of lofty, cultivated and reclusive literati, such as the famous "Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove."²²⁹ In this story, however, Su Tong sets the bamboo grove as the backdrop for the death of two teenagers in order to highlight their innocence and transcendence. Also, the tooth marks on the girl's face are a symbol of love. After their death, the names of Crimson Jade and Hairy Head were carved on the stone bridge by their friends. The bridge becomes a monument to their love. This scene also reminds the reader of the ending of Shen Congwen's bizarre story, "One Woman and Three Men," in which the proprietor of a Tofu shop holds the dead body of his lover in a cave surrounded by flowers.

²²⁸ Ibid., p.276.

²²⁹ "Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove 竹林七贤" refers to seven famous literati — Ruan Ji 阮籍、Ji Kang 嵇康、Shan Tao 山涛、Liu Ling 刘伶、Ruan Xian 阮咸、Xiang Xiu 向秀 and Wang Rong 王戎 — in the Jin Dynasty 晋代 (265-420). These talented and unrestrained men of letters always drank, sang and wrote poems in a bamboo grove.

Now let us turn to the novel *North Side Story* to examine the sexual frustration of Dasheng and his friends.

One of the most important considerations in any discussion of adolescent sexuality is the concept of masculinity and femininity. In this novel, a thirteen year-old girl, Meiqi (Beautiful Jade), is the prettiest on Toon Street. Her femininity catches the attention of the teenage boys in the neighbourhood, especially Hongqi, a quiet boy with beautiful eyes. Actually, they like each other. He often teases her. Su Tong describes them:

He liked to talk to this neighbour girl. Her shy smile and black eyes seemed to be the only enjoyable thing in the summer. He didn't know when he started to flirt with her, and she would always be half shy and half upset . . . He liked to see this girl's equivocal eyes and blushing face, but he didn't know why.

他喜欢和这个漂亮的邻家女孩说话,女孩羞赧的微笑和又黑又大的眼睛似乎成了夏季唯一令人愉悦的事情,不知道是从什么时候开始的,红旗用街上流行的方式和美祺打情骂俏,美祺总是半羞半恼 . . . 他喜欢看女孩躲躲闪闪的眼神和双颊飞红的模样,他不知道为什么喜欢。²³⁰

If there had been no tragic incident, they should have become a regular couple years later. Every thing changes, however, after that summer afternoon.

That afternoon, Hongqi feels left out by his two friends, Dasheng and Xude, who go to the Double Pagoda town to look for the kung fu master without taking him. In his opinion, they break the rule of friendship. Feeling left out, Hongqi decides to go swimming by himself. That lonely afternoon, his disappointment with his friends, the

²³⁰ Su Tong, *North Side Story*, p.33.

stimulation from hearing a bloody scuffle, and the admiration of this beautiful young girl work on him together, and turn into a strong lust which completely controls him. He rapes Meiqi. Afterwards, he realizes that he has run into trouble, but he is not sure what kind of trouble it is. He recognizes his sin in Meiqi's painful and panic-stricken eyes and her bloody skirt. His deed ruins both of them. He is sentenced to prison for nine years and Meiqi commits suicide.

If we say Hongqi's sexual misconduct is driven by libido, then Dasheng's case is more subtle and complicated. Dasheng has a fatal secret — his undeveloped penis. He becomes self-conscious, hostile and defensive whenever the subject of sex is involved. The most humiliating experience in Dasheng's life is when his pants are removed by policemen in a police substation. The secret of his body is revealed and he is mocked. Dasheng swears that he will get revenge. One thing he wants Pig Head to fulfill for him before his death is to punish Little Ma, the policeman who took off his pants. Therefore, after Dasheng's death, Little Ma finds the tires of his bicycle always punctured. He cannot figure out why people on Toon Street hate him so much. Even little girls puncture his tires.

There is a strange relationship between Dasheng and Meiqi. In fact, it is Meiqi who actually awakens Dasheng's sexual desire in spite of his late maturation. When Dasheng and his friends first see Meiqi after the tragic incident, and when his friends are all commenting on this issue, Dasheng keeps silent:

The silent Dasheng saw a sudden gust of wind. The wind blew from the city moat, and blew Meiqi's white skirt which looked like a bird trying to fly to the right and left, but unable to fly upwards. Dasheng watched

Meiqi use her hands to hold down her skirt and walk down the bridge as if she was proceeding with a dead bird in her hands. The shadow of this girl suddenly became mournful and graceful. Dasheng felt his heart lightly hit by something . . . another hit . . . what kind of thing was it, so gentle and so weak? Dasheng shook his head, he didn't know. Even many years later, he still could not explain his heartbeat on that summer night on the northern bridge.

而沉默的达生看见的是一阵突如其来的风。风从护城河上吹来，吹动了女孩美祺的白裙，白裙象一只飞鸟般地朝左侧和右侧飞，但白裙飞不起来，达生看见美祺用手压着她的裙子朝桥下走，美祺好象握着一只死去的鸟儿朝前走，女孩整个背影突然变得如此凄楚如此美丽，达生觉得他的心被什么东西弹击了一下，咚，又弹击一下，是什么东西这么柔软而纤弱？达生摇了摇头，他不知道，直到很多年以后，达生仍然无从解释那个夏夜在北门大桥上的心跳。²³¹

After Meiqi's suicide, she frequently visits Dasheng in his dreams. Meiqi, this beautiful girl, is Dasheng's fantasy even though he doesn't realize or want to admit it. When he discovers his nocturnal emission and sees the red heart left by Meiqi's ghost on his window, he is frustrated and angry.

Dasheng's mind is clear in his dream. He shouts to the ghost Meiqi: "I am not Hongqi, I am Dasheng." 我不是红旗，我是达生。²³² However, in the dream, the Meiqi's wet and lithe body is close to him, her beautiful and sad eyes silently stare at him. Water keeps dripping from her black hair, green skirt and fingers on to Dasheng's youthful body. These water drops give Dasheng his wet dream and make him feel tired in the

²³¹ Ibid., p44.

²³² Ibid., p.234.

morning. Dasheng is not afraid of the ghost Meiqi. His concern is that these dreams are diminishing his strength and jeopardizing his goal of becoming the bigshot in the northern part of the city.

Dasheng finally takes his revenge by killing a cat which, he thinks, is the incarnation of Meiqi, or controlled by Meiqi's soul. The ghost of Meiqi, however, doesn't stop visiting him. This time, she comes with the cat. Meiqi is Dasheng's fantasy of sexuality and femininity though she is only a ghost.

Symbols

North Side Story is a vertical story in which certain characters move back and forth from an sinister supernatural plane to a human plane or, in other words, from the nether world to this world. Some objects, such as a snake or a paper heart, become the medium which connects the two worlds together. In addition, they themselves become highly symbolic.

The most important symbol is the *Mirabilis Jalapa* flower, also known as "common four o'clock." In this story, it is the most frequently seen flower on Toon Street because it is a hardy plant that needs no special attention, planted casually beside the walls of courtyards. It grows only in the summer, blossoms in the evening, and withers with the coming of autumn; it is also called the "supper flower" 夜饭花. Su Tong says that these flowers suit the reality of Toon Street. They are just like the children on Toon Street, who can only be seen at supper time. Most of the day, their mothers can never find them. The life of this kind of flower is as short-lived as the lives of many of the young people on Toon Street.

The supper flower directly relates to two girls, Meiqi and Jinhong (Red Brocade 锦红), who both die of rape and attempted rape. After the death of Jinhong, Su Tong says: "Some people's lives suddenly withered, just like the Supper Flower on the street in the autumn." 一些人的生命就象秋天²³³街头的夜饭花突然枯萎坠落了。

After Meiqi is raped, her mother finds that the supper flowers in front of their house no longer blossom. The blossomless supper flowers are ugly. She cannot figure out if her daughter's bad luck has anything to do with these wilted plants.

When Meiqi returns to school in the fall, she finds out that she has become the loneliest girl in Dongfeng Middle School. The girls who used to hang out with her now all avoid her and don't talk to her anymore. Meiqi feels they look at her as if she were a beggar. They all know what happened to her the previous summer. She can hear her heart crying. She hopes the class will never be over; she wishes she could fly home after the class so that she wouldn't have to face the terrible looks of her classmates. Meiqi continuously discusses methods of suicide with Qiuhong (Autumn Crimson 秋红), the only girl still talking to her. She knows she only needs thirty sleeping pills to kill herself. She tells her mother she doesn't want to go to school anymore. If her mother forces her to go, then she would rather die. Her mother is also thinking of moving away from the dirty and brutal community, and escaping from the rumors and gossip about Meiqi. She tells her daughter to endure for a couple of days; they will move as soon as they sell the house. Meiqi cannot wait any more, however. She cannot take the harsh words from her neighbours, her classmates and Hongqi's family anymore. She drowns herself in the river and takes all the red paper hearts with her. The unusual thing is that Meiqi's body is

²³³ Ibid., p.210.

never found. She disappears as soon as she jumps into the river. The third day after her suicide, a red paper heart appears on the door of Hongqi's house. Meiqi takes her revenge by becoming a beautiful ghost roaming Toon Street with these red paper hearts in her hands and a supper flower garland on her head.

It is noteworthy that Meiqi takes the red paper hearts with her before she drowns herself. Afterwards, whenever she returns to the human world from the nether world, she leaves a red heart on the door or the window of the house she has visited. Meiqi has been wronged unto death. Hongqi rapes her, but it is people's gossip that finally pushes her to death. The red heart symbolizes her clear conscience. Just like the primary school teacher Zhou who asks people to examine their conscience, this vulnerable girl returns from the nether world to avenge herself by interrogating people's consciences.

In this story, snakes also become a medium to connect the human and nether worlds. Before the snake performer goes back to look for his daughter, a snake comes to deliver a message for him. Seeing the dead snake in front of her door, and inhaling the stench of the death, Dasheng's mother knows that her father will come. After the snake performer dies, he is transformed into a snake and haunts his daughter's house to avenge himself.

Later in the story, a swarm of bugs hovers in the air of Toon Street. The old men say they have come from the nether world. They portend a disaster: a conflagration or a flood. Young people, however, don't believe the old people's words. They think it is just superstition. It is Meiqi's ghost who finally kills all the bugs. People say they hear the sound of Meiqi stamping on the bugs in the night. The next morning people find dead bugs and red paper hearts on the ground. The bugs and Meiqi, both from the nether world,

visit the Toon-Street at night, so what does it mean? Meiqi is warning these people that a big disaster is coming if they continue living as they have been. This is a street, however, which has done away with superstitions. No one believes the old people's words about ill omens and disasters.

Toon Street is full of 'optimistic' people. They quickly clean the ground and pour the dead bugs into the garbage and go to work as usual . . . The revolutionary masses on the Toon Street are not afraid of either heaven or hell. Will they be frightened by some bugs and a ghost?

香椿树街基本上是乐观者的天下，他们匆匆地把死虫堆扫进阴沟和垃圾箱，然后就象往常一样去工厂和商店上班了... 香椿树街的革命群众天不怕，地不怕，难道他们会被一群飞虫一个幽灵吓倒吗？²³⁴

The masses on Toon Street want to banish the distress and detestation from their hearts. They have no confidence or ability to be introspective about what is happening during the Cultural Revolution. This scene also reminds readers of the similar scene in another writer Yu Hua's short story "The Year Nineteen Eighty Six (一九八六)": after the history teacher kills himself by self-inflictedly demonstrating the ancient punishments on the street, his body is quickly collected and street is cleared. His wife, daughter and the masses immediately feel relaxed and jubilantly walk into the hypocritical sunshine. They cast the history teacher, who remembers and deliberates upon the past, into darkness and loneliness. Their aloofness and indifference toward the teacher is the same

²³⁴ Ibid., p.233.

aloofness and indifference they have, or the populace has more generally, toward the spiritual life.²³⁵

In *North Side Story*, there is a special prop — a clock or a watch. The story both starts and ends with a death somehow related to a clock or a watch. At the beginning of the story, Dasheng takes his father's bicycle to practice riding, but due to the malfunction of his friend Xude's watch, he is late in returning the bicycle to his father who urgently needs it to get to work. This mistake indirectly causes his father's tragic accident. At the end of the story, in order to get to the fight in time, Dasheng takes the alarm clock used to wake his mother for work. He cannot return it because he dies. His death then leads to his mother's madness. This poor woman roams the street in the rain like a ghost and asks every person she meets: "Did you see my alarm clock?" 你看见我家的闹钟了吗?²³⁶ Clocks and watches are instruments of time. Time is closely associated with death. The Chinese sound of "clock 钟" has the same sound with "终" which means "the end," or "death." By using the prop of clock at the end of story, Su Tong may intend to say this is not only the ending of the story, but also the ending of Dasheng's fate, or in a broader sense, the ending of the Chinese youth in the Cultural Revolution.

The young protagonists in Su Tong's coming-of-age stories, with Dasheng in *North Side Story* as their representative, go on a journey to find the self. If Dasheng had lived in a normal society or era, like the protagonists in conventional European *Bildungsroman* stories, he should be able to achieve an accommodation with society or

²³⁵ Hua Li, "Chinese Avant-Gardism: A Representative Study of Yu Hua's '1986'," in *BC Asian Review*, University of British Columbia, Vol. 13, 2002, pp.36-48.

²³⁶ Su Tong, *North Side Story*, p.269.

life at the end. However, more like Holden Caulfield, Dasheng finds himself upset with the society — Toon Street during the Cultural Revolution — in which he lives. Due to the fact of lacking positive role models from the parental world and support and understanding from the sibling world, Dasheng has to find his own solution to make peace with his reality — becoming a solitary hero. However, it only leads to his self-destruction. Dasheng and his adolescent friends are frozen between childhood and adulthood in 1970s' China which was running off the “crazy cliff.”

Su Tong has admitted in an interview that almost every story in the Toon Street series bears the shadow of his own childhood. He used the polarities of “wild 野生的” and “tame 家养的” to contrast the children living in the Cultural Revolution and the children living in the post-Mao era. He emphasized that the word “wild” does not mean that the children in the 1960s and 1970s, such as Dasheng, Hongqi or even himself, had no discipline. The “wildness” means that they “respond to the whole world by their instinct and intuition” 按照自己的本能和直觉，来跟整个世界打交道。²³⁷ Even though in school they are forced to read and recite Mao's boring analects, the children always find interesting things for themselves to do after school. Su Tong affirmed that in certain sense they enjoyed an “absolute freedom” 绝对的自由 because they followed their nature 天性. He concludes that “no matter how cruel the system is, it won't be able to subdue human nature” 再严酷的制度也压抑不了人的天性。²³⁸

²³⁷ This interview is published on *Nandu zhouban* 南都周刊 on March 5, 2006. The journalist Huang Zhaohui 黄兆晖 interviewed Su Tong, and wrote the article with the title “Subversion Does Not Mean Progress 颠覆并不意味着进步.”

²³⁸ Ibid.

As an adult, however, Su Tong reflects on the tragic side of this freedom.²³⁹ He refers to Wang Shuo's story, "The Fierce Animals" 动物凶猛, which was made into the movie, *The Days of Brilliant Sunshine* 阳光灿烂的日子 by Jiang Wen 姜文. The story presents a seemingly happy and free adolescent experience during the Cultural Revolution. As children, they did feel happy at that time because they could do whatever they wished, following their instincts. Children could easily play truant, get involved in bloody gang fights, love affairs, or get up to all sorts of antics, as did Dasheng and his friends in *North Side Story*. They felt that was the way the world was; as far as they knew, everyone was living like this. There was no other point of reference. They did not know that children in other parts of the world lived differently.²³⁹ As children, they could not realize the danger of behavior motivated only by instinct and intuition. They didn't know the danger of growing up without positive role models from the parental world. They did not realize that this freedom would lead them to destruction.

Meanwhile, the seemingly unconfined behavior of the children in that time reveals their helpless inability to cope with the actualities around them and their longing for a different world. Only after they grew up and lived in a relatively normal society, did they begin to realize the tragedy of their childhood. The passage of time also compels them to consider the cultural consequence of the Cultural Revolution upon themselves and their generation in general. That's why, many years later, Su Tong is now so obsessed with writing stories about children growing up in the time of his own childhoods — during the Cultural Revolution. As an adult, he has a more sober attitude to examine the life of young people in the China of the 1960s and 1970s. He has a

²³⁹ Ibid.

profoundly tragic sense of the unleashed, energetic and chaotic life youth lead in a time of trouble.

Chapter 4

A Trembling Youth

Yu Hua's Early Life

The vision of life reflected in a writer's works is often closely connected with his personal life. Dickens' childhood, for instance, throws light on certain recurring characters in his novels such as orphans and rejected children. Understanding Kafka's and Zhang Ailing's real life problems with their fathers also helps readers better interpret "The Metamorphosis" and "The Golden Cangue." Similarly, in order for readers to obtain a better understanding of Yu Hua's obsession with violence and death in his early short stories, it would be helpful to review his early life.

Yu Hua was born at noon on April 3, 1960 in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, the second boy in a doctor's family. Many years later, in an article "My Earliest Reality," Yu provided a vivid and touching description of his childhood.²⁴⁰ He stayed in Hangzhou for a short period of time with his family. His mother often mentioned their experiences there, describing the house and the surroundings in which they used to live.

When Yu Hua was one year old, his father left Hangzhou for Haiyan 海盐, in order to realize his great aspiration of becoming a surgeon. Later, his mother took Yu Hua and his brother to Haiyan as well. His mother's impressions of this small, materially impoverished town are summarized in her comment, "One could hardly even see a

²⁴⁰ For Yu Hua's autobiography, see "Wo Zuichu de xianshi" <我最初的现实> ("My Earliest Reality"), in Wo Nengfou xiangxin ziji 《我能否相信自己》 (*Can I Believe in Myself?*). All the information about Yu Hua's early life is drawn from this book, pp. 205-212.

bicycle!” 连一辆自行车都看不到!²⁴¹ Yu Hua's memories began in this place with no bicycles, where the main street, paved by slab stones, was narrower than a lane, and where the wooden electrical poles at the sides of the street buzzed all day long. The hospital in which Yu's parents worked was divided in two by a river. The inpatient department, located on the south bank of the river, was connected with the clinic and dining hall on the north bank by a narrow wooden bridge peppered with large cracks. Yu Hua recalled that his foot often slipped into a crack and the river below always frightened him. In the summer, his parents' colleagues sat leisurely on the unstable railings of the wooden bridge to smoke and chat; their bravery roused Yu Hua's admiration. This image of his hometown, Haiyan, remained permanently etched in Yu Hua's mind. These narrow streets and rivers with people standing or sitting leisurely on the bridge keep recurring in his short stories and novels years later.

Yu Hua was a quiet and docile boy. His mother remembered that every afternoon she went to the kindergarten to pick him up and found him sitting in exactly the same place she had left him in the morning. He sat there alone while his young friends played nearby. When Yu Hua was four years old, he started to come home from kindergarten by himself, or more accurately speaking, he was led home by his brother who was two years his senior. His brother, however, always forgot his duty, going somewhere else to play and leaving Yu Hua behind. Consequently young Yu Hua had to return home alone,

²⁴¹ Ibid., p. 206.

dividing the way into two parts. The first part involved walking straight from the kindergarten to the hospital, while in the second, he trudged into a small lane opposite the hospital. His home was located at the end of that lane.

When Yu Hua grew older, his parents locked him and his brother upstairs at home instead of sending them to kindergarten. The young brothers routinely leaned over the windowsill to enjoy the scenery outside, for the countryside where peasants worked in the fields was just out that window. Yu Hua recollected that the most exciting moment of the day was when these peasants finished their day's labor and one man would stand on the ridge of the field and shout, "it's time to knock off." 收工了.²⁴² People gradually walked to the edge of the field and some women repeated "Knock off," again and again. In the midst of these cries, the two young brothers watched more peasants walk on the ridges with hoes on their shoulders. Mothers shouted the names of their children and children ran with baskets in their hands. Several of them ran so fast that they fell down. This scene must have impressed Yu Hua deeply because more than two decades later he described the same picture in his novel *Cries in the Drizzle* when the young protagonist leans out the upstairs window with his friend Guoqing 国庆 to view the vast field outside.²⁴³

²⁴² Ibid., p. 207.

²⁴³ Yu Hua, *Xi Yu yu huhan* 《细雨与呼喊》, Taiwan: Yuanliu chuban gongsi, p. 241. This novel was first published in *Harvest* in 1991 with the title *Xiyu yu huhan* 细雨与呼喊. Yu Hua changed the title to *Zai xiyu zhong huhan* 在细雨中呼喊 when it was printed as a book by Huacheng chubanshe in 1993. However, the novel printed by Yuanliu chuban gongsi in Taiwan in 1992 still uses the old title *xiyu yu huhan*. In this dissertation, the proper names and quoted English translations related to this novel are exclusively from the English version of this novel *Cries in the Drizzle* in manuscript form, translated by Allan. H. Barr in 2006.

Yu Hua's parents were seldom home during his childhood. Sometimes, he and his brother were locked in the entire night. The only thing they could do during these times was to move the tables and chairs around and fight with each other. On each occasion, Yu Hua lost the battle, crying until his parents returned so that they would punish his brother. Most often, however, his parents did not come back until he lost his voice and fell asleep. Yu Hua's mother was often on night duty. She bought food from a dining hall, taking it back home as her sons' supper. After dinner, she hurriedly returned to the hospital. Yu Hua's father spent most of his time in the operating room, often returning home after Yu Hua and his brother had already fallen asleep and leaving again before they woke up. In his childhood dreams, Yu Hua often heard someone shouting out the window "Doctor Hua! Doctor Hua! Emergency!" 华医生，华医生，有急诊!²⁴⁴

When Yu Hua's brother started primary school, Yu also obtained his own liberation from home. He followed his brother to school every day, playing outside the classroom while his brother was in class. After school, they returned home together. Occasionally his brother took him into the classroom, but was severely reprimanded by the teacher for so doing. From then on, Yu Hua never dared to enter the classroom with his brother.

Yu Hua describes his family's inter-personal relations. Actually there is nothing unusual in this -- it depicts a typical family in Mainland China in the 1960s. Since 1949,

²⁴⁴ Yu Hua, "My Earliest Reality" in *Can I Believe in Myself?* p. 208.

the Chinese Communist Party had gradually destroyed the tenderness and warmth felt by individuals towards one another, even those from the same family. Family was far less important than a Communist Party career. Yu Hua presents exactly the same family model in *Cries in the Drizzle*. In that story, both Doctor Su and his wife work in a hospital, while their two sons are left uncared for. Doctor Su's family is even more apathetic than Yu Hua's own.

Yu Hua says little about his childhood relationship with his brother, but some of his short stories and novels reveal his less than positive vision of this fraternal relationship. In "One Kind of Reality," for example, the brothers Shangang 山冈 and Shanfeng 山峰 kill each other without showing any mercy. In *Cries in the Drizzle*, the protagonist Guanglin and his brother and Su's brothers never get along particularly well, even going so far as to take a hostile attitude towards one another. Perhaps this is a reflection of Yu Hua's feelings about fraternal relationships as experienced during the Maoist era.

Since Yu Hua grew up in the environs of a hospital, he always remained calm when facing death and blood. Young Yu Hua often sat beside the door of the operating room to wait for his father. Every time his father came out, his white gown, hat and gloves were stained with blood. Sometimes a nurse followed his father with a bucket of blood and fleshy stuff in her hand.

Later, the family moved into the hospital. The window of Yu Hua's bedroom was directly opposite the mortuary. Yu often heard the mourning cries of the relatives of the

dead people during the night: "the cries of their relatives resounded through the endless night and rose a notch, like the sun at dawn." 他们亲人的哭声也从漫漫黑夜里响彻过来，在黎明时和日出一起升起。²⁴⁵ In his childhood, he awoke from dreams listening to those sad sounds, which were so enduring and touching that he felt they were not cries but the most moving ballad in this world. Meanwhile, he discovered a truth -- many people die in the middle of the night. In the daytime, he frequently stared at that mortuary which, masked by several trees and seemingly without a door, looked lonely, solitary, even mysterious.

At noon one summer day, young Yu Hua entered this room, finding nothing but a concrete slab inside. He stood beside the slab and touched it cautiously. "I felt incomparably cool and refreshed. On that scorching afternoon, for me it was not death, but life." 我感到了无比的清凉，在那个炎热的中午，它对于我不是死亡，而是生活。²⁴⁶

Afterwards, at the most sweltering moment of the summer day, young Yu Hua often came to this room and lay down on the cool concrete bed to have a nap. He was afraid of neither death nor blood.

This period of life in the hospital deeply affected Yu Hua's future literary creations. For example, this small mortuary and the concrete bed appear three times in Yu Hua's novel *To Live*.²⁴⁷ The protagonist Fugui 福贵 experiences the death of his son, daughter and son-in-law in the same hospital, and their bodies are laid on the same concrete bed.

²⁴⁵ Yu Hua, the quotation and information in this paragraph come from "Preface to Italian Version of *One Kind of Reality*," in *Can I Believe in Myself?* p. 152.

²⁴⁶ Yu Hua, "My Earliest Reality" in *Can I Believe in Myself?* p. 153.

²⁴⁷ Yu Hua, *To Live*, Michael Berry tr. New York: Anchor Books, 2003.

In *Chronicle of a Blood Merchant*,²⁴⁸ the hospital is also an important setting, where the protagonist Xu Sanguan goes to sell his blood twelve times. The vivid descriptions of the hospital and people there are influenced by Yu Hua's childhood experiences.

Similarly, violence, fear, death and blood also fill his writings, especially his short stories. His friends and readers kept asking him, "Why do you write so much about death and violence?" Yu Hua answered this question with another question "Why is there so much violence and death in life?"²⁴⁹ Yu Hua later admitted that the remote memory of his childhood life may be a source of some of his writings and that those hidden and fragmentary impressions of his life as a small boy certainly played a great role in determining his future literary creation.

Though he could dauntlessly face death and blood, young Yu Hua did have a secret fear. He recalled,

At that time, my only fear was seeing treetops shining in the moonlight at night. The sharp treetops glistened, extending into the sky. Every time this scene made me tremble with fear. I did not know the reason, but I was scared as soon as I saw this.

当时我唯一的恐惧是在黑夜，看到月光照耀中的树梢，尖细树梢在月光里闪闪发亮，伸向空中。这情景每次都让我发抖，我也不知道是什么原因，总之我一看到它就害怕。²⁵⁰

²⁴⁸ Yu Hua, *Chronicle of a Blood Merchant*, Andrew F. Jones, tr. New York : Pantheon Books, 2003.

²⁴⁹ Yu Hua, "Preface to Italian Version of *One kind of reality*," in *Can I Believe in Myself?* pp. 151-53.

²⁵⁰ Yu Hua, "My Earliest Reality" in *Can I Believe in Myself?* p. 209.

Years later, in his *Cries in the Drizzle*, Yu Hua specifically described this as the secret fear of a seven-year-old boy.

Yu Hua finished primary school in 1973, the same year in which the small town of Haiyan opened a library. His father applied for two library cards, one for Yu Hua and one for his brother. Yu Hua started reading fiction, especially novels. He almost finished all the Chinese novels of the Maoist era, including such well-known works as *Bright Sunny Day* 艳阳天 and *Golden Road* 金光大道, *Shining Red Star* 闪闪的红星, and *Wind and Cloud in the Mine* 矿山风云. The latter two were his favorites.

Yu Hua found most of the works of fiction relatively boring, however, particularly compared to the more fascinating big character posters on the street. Every day, on his way back home from school, he spent about an hour in front of these posters. Yu Hua observed how the people he knew hurled invectives and spread slanderous rumors against each other on these posters in the most malicious language.²⁵¹ On these big character posters, people's imaginations were brought into full play as all the literary techniques were applied, including fabrication, exaggeration, analogy, irony and the like. Yu Hua states, "This is the earliest literature I read. On the street, in front of the big posters, I began to like literature."²⁵² It sounds somewhat ironic, humorous even, that those posters initiated Yu Hua's interest in literature. It is true, however, that the posters were far more interesting than contemporary "Command Literature 遵命文学." Yu Hua frequently

²⁵¹ Ibid., p. 210.

²⁵² Ibid., p. 211.

employs those big character posters in his writings, giving detailed descriptions of their contents, as in the novels *Chronicle of a Blood Merchant* and *To Live* and his story "1986."

After Yu Hua finished middle school, he studied in a medical institute, later becoming a dentist in the town health center. Yu Hua, however, felt this job was too stiff, too boring. He found it unbearable to work eight hours a day, to punch in and out on schedule. He preferred more free, imaginative and creative work. In Yu Hua's own words, his primary motive for writing was to avoid having to be a dentist any longer. At that time, his greatest ambition was to work in the town's cultural center, because people there did not need to sit in an office eight hours a day but could wander around town instead. There were three ways to work in the cultural center: music, painting and writing. The first two were too difficult for Yu Hua, requiring skills he did not possess. So he started writing. Five years later, after examining thousands of opened mouths at the dental clinic, Yu Hua began working at the cultural center. Thereafter, all the changes in his life had something to do with writing. Later, he left Haiyan for Jiaxing 嘉兴, then moved to Beijing.

Yu Hua had been in Haiyan for almost thirty years. He was familiar with everything there. He grew up with the streets and river in the small town. Without doubt, his life in Haiyan effected a profound and far-reaching influence on his writing. He states,

Every corner [of Haiyan] can be found in my mind. The dialect [of that place] comes out of my mouth automatically when I talk to

myself. My past inspiration stems from that place, so does my future inspiration.

那里的每个角落我都能在脑子里找到,那里的方言在我自言自语时会脱口而出。我过去的灵感都来自那里,今后的灵感也会从那里产生。²⁵³

His early life in Haiyan determines the main elements in his writing. What he does now is to review his past. Yu Hua confesses that with the passage of time, he has increasing feelings towards Haiyan; regardless of the type of story he writes, the characters and scenes automatically return to his hometown. Yu Hua emphasizes the relationship between his writing and his hometown, saying, "As long as I write, I will go back home." 我只要写作,就是回家。²⁵⁴

Early Literary Influences

Yu Hua admits that he has been deeply influenced by foreign literature. He did not grow up surrounded by literature, but fortunately, when he did begin to try his luck at writing, China was experiencing liberation from Maoist totalitarianism. Literature returned as part of people's lives. Many classical Chinese books and foreign novels were reprinted during this period. People lined up in front of bookstores to buy these books, reflecting the literary thirst of a whole era. Yu Hua placed himself in the midst of those

²⁵³ Ibid., p. 211.

²⁵⁴ Yu Hua, *Can I Believe in Myself?* p. 251.

people, as a drop of water merging into the sea.

At the outset, Yu Hua was confused when faced with such a vast world of foreign literature as well as classical and contemporary Chinese literature. As though drifting on an ocean, he lost his direction. Reading, for him, became a kind of struggle for existence. When finally able to make a decision, he chose foreign literature as his preferred reading, stating,

My choice is a writer's choice, or a choice made with writing in mind, rather than a choice of attitude toward life and experience.

Only from foreign literature can I really understand what writing techniques are, and realize the richness of literary expressions through the practice of my own writing.

我的选择是一位作家的选择，或者说是为了写作的选择，而不是生活态度和人生感受的选择。因为只有外国文学里，我才真正了解写作的技巧，然后通过自己的写作去认识文学有着多么丰富的表达。²⁵⁵

The Japanese writer Kawabata Yasunari 川端康成 was the first foreign author to deeply influence Yu Hua's writing.²⁵⁶ In 1980, Yu Hua read Kawabata's short story, "The Izu Dancer," in Ningbo 宁波 and was stunned by Kawabata's writing. The early 1980s were the golden era of Scar Literature 伤痕文学 in Mainland China, but from "The Izu

²⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 193.

²⁵⁶ Yu Hua, "Chuanduan kangcheng yu kafaka" <川端康成与卡夫卡> ("Kawabata and Kafka"), in *Can I Believe in Myself?* pp. 90-94.

Dancer" Yu discovered another way to express trauma, a manner of expression much more powerful and touching than that of mere Scar Literature. In the following five or six years, he became infatuated with Kawabata, a sensitive and exquisite writer, from whom he learned how to express details by describing one's feelings. This laid a solid foundation for his future writing.

It was perhaps harmful for Yu Hua, however, to be obsessed with one writer for such a long period of time. Fortunately, he encountered Franz Kafka's writing in the spring of 1986. Kafka's stories, "The Metamorphosis" and "The Country Doctor" introduced Yu Hua to a new freedom of form and expression in literature. Milan Kundera describes Kafka's novels as "the seamless fusion of dream and reality; a supremely lucid gaze set on the modern world, along with the most unfettered imagination."²⁵⁷ It is this unfettered imagination which attracted Yu Hua and emancipated him from his obsession with Kawabata. Yu regarded Kafka's writing as being as free as the wind and, at that time, he felt that his writing should be similarly relaxed. At the end of 1986, he published his first celebrated short story, "On the Road at Eighteen." Other stories, such as "Past and Punishment" and "Nineteen Eighty Six," also show the influence of Kafka.²⁵⁸

In literature, writers necessarily affect each other's styles. Other writers' influences encourage a writer to constantly discover new things to make his or her own writing more

²⁵⁷ Milan Kundera, *The Art of the Novel*, translated by Linda Asher, New York: Grove Press, 1986, p. 81.

²⁵⁸ Some critics have made detail comparisons between Yu Hua's "Nineteen Eighty Six" and Kafka's "In the Penal Colony (1914)," between "On the Road at Eighteen" and "The Country Doctor (1917)." See Li Xiaona "Free Writing: Brief Talk on Kafka's Influence on Yu Hua" in *Journal of Yichun University (Social Science)*, vol.25, No.5, Oct. 2003, p.81-82. Sun Caixia, "The Implication of Penalty" in *Modern Literary Magazine*, No.3, 2003, pp.49-51.

independent. Yu Hua asserts,

The legacies of Kawabata and Kafka are two museums which tell us what has once happened in the history of literature; they are not banks and do not support any successors.

川端康成和卡夫卡的遗产是两座博物馆，所要告诉我们的是文学上曾经出现过什么；而不是两座银行，他们不供养任何后来者。

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While Kawabata taught Yu Hua the basic skills of writing, Kafka informed him of the liberation of thought. Both Kawabata and Kafka are writers of extreme individualism; their feelings are entirely personal. It is for this reason that their writings are so moving and touching, and it is also for this reason that Yu Hua was attracted to them.

With the passage of time, Yu Hua found himself attracted to a greater range of writing styles, thereby permitting an increasing number of writers to enter his field of vision. Yu Hua still regrets, for instance, that a true understanding of Lu Xun's works came so late in his career. Though he read Lu Xun's short stories at an early age, he did not realize Lu Xun's literary value until he became a mature writer. In the mid 1990s, he reread Lu Xun's works and was deeply attracted by the concise narrative style and profound meaning of Lu Xun's short stories. He concluded:

²⁵⁹ Yu Hua, "Wo Weishenme xiezuozuo" <我为什么写作> ("Why Do I Write"), in *Can I Believe in Myself?* p. 94.

I think it is too late for me to read Lu Xun, because my writing can hardly go back at this time. However, he will also have an effect on my future life, reading and writing. I feel he will support me emotionally and ideologically at every moment.

我认为我读鲁迅读得太晚了, 因为那时候我的创作已经很难回头了, 但是他仍然会对我今后的生活, 阅读和写作产生影响, 我觉得他时刻都会在感情上和思想上支持我。²⁶⁰

Though Yu Hua's writing is closely related to foreign literature, he cannot evade his profound connection with Chinese tradition and culture. Chinese culture is neither an influence nor a model, but rather, the very blood which supplies his life -- his image, body, language, attitude, dietary habits, character and so forth. Yu Hua insists that all his feelings stem from the soil of China. The roads, villages and rivers given life by his pen will never be Russian scenes and his characters will never perform Spanish dances. His works express the voice of his own nation since they come from his inner heart, his soul. Yu Hua confirms that Chinese traditions endow him with life and growth, and Western literature provides him with a working method.

Early Literary Attitude and World Outlook

The publication of "On the Road at Eighteen" established Yu Hua's reputation as an innovative writer. For Yu Hua, this six thousand-word short story reflected a new attitude

²⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 254.

to his writing -- the expression of truth 对真实的表达. In this quest for truth, Yu Hua is similar to Marcel Proust, who set himself the very goal of philosophers and mystics: the search for truth which necessarily takes the form of "a depiction of error."²⁶¹ Proust applied "the depiction of error" to distinguish his understanding of truth from "useless duplication of days gone by."²⁶² Yu Hua also indicates all his efforts at writing are attempts to approach the truth, a truth with specific connotations.

In 1986, Yu Hua began to think philosophically about the concept of truth.²⁶³ Before 1986, his mode of thinking had been tightly confined by common sense. In 1986, however, he suddenly broke free of the bonds of common sense, exploring the concept of truth on a more abstract level. He determined that life itself is not real. Only people's spirits are real. He emphasized the sensation or perception of the world. Only when people enter into the spiritual world can they truly feel the boundlessness of it. In the spiritual world, all the values provided by common sense are shattered. Yu Hua insisted that people's daily life experiences make them lack imagination. These experiences are only responsible for the superficial level of things, estranged from the essence of spirit. As a result, the connotation of truth in everyday life is inevitably distorted. He felt that an individual's shallowness stems from limitations in personal experience.²⁶⁴ If, for instance, a writer describes one thing just as it stands, no matter how vivid and honest his

²⁶¹ Vincent Descombes, *Proust's Philosophy of the Novel*, translated by Catherine Chance Macksey, Stanford California: Stanford University Press, 1992, p. 4.

²⁶² Marcel Proust and Jacques Riviere, *Correspondance: 1914-1922*, ed. Philip Kolb. Paris: Plon, 1955, p. 3.

²⁶³ Yu Hua, "Hypocritical Work" 虚伪的作品 in *Can I Believe in Myself?* p. 161.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

description is, he can never reach the true nature of that thing. What is obtained is only a superficial truth. Such a concrete approach to writing must necessarily suffocate the talents of a writer, rendering our world full of only concrete things, such as houses, streets and rivers, without understanding the essence of the world. After Yu Hua concluded that such limited forms of writing could only lead to a superficial truth, he started to look for a new manner of expression. He no longer faithfully described the pattern of a thing, but instead employed a "hypocritical" 虚伪 form much the same as Proust's "depiction of errors."²⁶⁵ Yu Hua deliberately chose the term "hypocritical" because, in comparison to people's experience and common sense, this form deviated from the order and logic provided by the material world, allowing him to more freely approach the truth or essence of the world as he saw it.

Yu Hua thinks "On the Road at Eighteen" reflects the truth of life in such a "hypocritical" form.²⁶⁶ Describing a boy's experiences as he leaves home, this is a well-knit short story which achieves its symbolic effect through a series of displacements. On a bleak highway, a young boy walks alone and tries to find an inn or to hitch a ride from someone. Eventually he gets a lift from a truck driver, an apple vendor. Unfortunately, the passing peasants rob the apples on the truck and tear off the truck tires. The driver, however, remains indifferent in the face of this robbery, finally grabbing the

²⁶⁵ Ibid., pp. 158-172. In June 1989, Yu Hua published this famous manifesto to illustrate his writing attitude, causing an intense response in the Chinese Literary Scene.

²⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 158.

boy's bag and leaving with the peasants. The boy stays in the abandoned truck, the inn for which he has been searching.

While this story sounds illogical and absurd, it is highly symbolic, with home symbolizing imprisonment and leaving home the goal of life. All the displacements taking place on the road, such as the driver's indifference and enthusiasm, as well as the robbery by the peasants, exemplify the lack of reason and the abundance of disorder in the real world. The inn, for its part, signifies eternal peace. Yu Hua uses this symbolic method to reflect his understanding of the real world and also criticize human nature after the Maoist era: the truck has more warmth than the people.

In the years 1986 and 1987, Yu Hua also wrote "1986," "Mistakes at the Side of the River," and "One Kind of Reality." When he no longer trusted common sense, he started to pay attention to another kind of reality -- violence. His skepticism about the employment of common sense directly resulted in his extreme ideas about chaos and violence. Yu Hua admitted that in the 1980s he was an angry and grim writer.²⁶⁷ He was more concerned with the negative side of reality. The above-mentioned three short stories all reveal this alternative view of the world, a world of violence, blood and death, mediums applied by Yu Hua to express his meditation on human existence. "1986," for example, describes a history teacher's self-mutilation, his intention being to remind people of the catastrophe of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. "Mistakes at the

²⁶⁷ Yu Hua, "Preface to the Chinese Version of *To Live*" in *Can I Believe in Myself?* p. 144.

Side of the River," for its part, attempts to reveal the author's vision of human relationships by depicting a series of murders committed on the banks of a river. During the period in which he wrote these stories, Yu Hua thought violence stemmed from an individual's innermost desires, that violence was full of passion and enthusiasm. In the face of violence and chaos, civilization had degenerated into a slogan, and order into an ornament. Ten years later, Yu recollected that when those stories were written, he always had nightmares, dreams of killing himself or of being killed by others. With the passage of time, however, his inner anger dissipated, and he gradually rid himself of this obsession with violence.

Yu Hua preferred a kind of narrative which, in simple words, tells people another person's story, as compared to a narrative which told other people the author's own story.

Yu stated:

Even if it is my own story, as soon as it enters the narrative, I transform it into another's story. In the process of the narrative, the most simple and efficient way of transforming personal experience is trying to avoid direct or straightforward expression. Let the cloudy sky bring to light the sunshine.

即使是我个人的事，一旦进入叙述我也将其转化为别人的事。在叙述过程中，个人经验转换的最简便有效的方法就是，尽可能回避直接的表达，让阴沉的天空来展示阳光。²⁶⁸

²⁶⁸ Yu Hua, "Hypocritical Work" in *Can I Believe in Myself?*, pp. 166-167.

Yu Hua advocated a kind of uncertain language 不确定的语言 whose opposite was popular language 大众化的语言. He felt that daily language, popular language, possesses no individuality because in popular language, one sentence may evoke only one meaning. It provides a predictable reality and confines our understanding of this world. Uncertain language, by contrast, breaks the restrictions of popular language, searching instead for a more truthful and reliable expression to reveal a reality open to limitless variations and interpretations. In order to reveal the true nature of the world, language has to violate common sense, to search for a way of expression which can provide multiple possibilities and present many levels of life. In the meantime, it must also break the bonds of grammar and apply grammatical juxtaposition, displacement and transposition. Yu Hua observes that words -- such as pain, fear and joy -- do not reflect an individual's true inner feelings, but are merely a generalization.²⁶⁹ Only uncertain language could express these emotional or psychological states, language which was more objective and authentic than popular language. His emphasis on uncertain language was his attempt to reveal the truth.

Yu Hua recognized that he could not fully understand the nature of the whole world. His understanding of the world in different periods of his life was just an understanding of a limited portion of the world, an exploration of human possibilities. As a matter of

²⁶⁹ Ibid., pp. 167-168.

fact, this kind of understanding was a recognition of the world's structure as a whole.

From "On the Road at Eighteen" to "One Kind of Reality," the structures of these stories are general imitations of the structures of reality, with the plots and paragraphs of the stories progressing step by step. When he wrote "World Like Mist," however, he had already given up such imitation of the structure of reality. He put more facts in his works, adopting a structural mode of juxtaposition and transposition so as to present the diversity of the world. At this time, he felt deeply the uncertainty of fate. He reconsidered the various kinds of relationships in this world: people and people, people and reality, houses and streets, trees and rivers. All these things have their own fates and destinies endowed by the world. The inherent laws of the universe are hidden in these destinies.²⁷⁰

The story "World Like Mist" was constructed on the basis of this recognition of the world. In this story, the connections between people and people, people and things, things and things, plot and plot, detail and detail seem obscure, blurred. Yu Hua felt this way of writing fully presented the strength of fate -- the inherent law of the world.

Yu Hua had a specific understanding about time, interpreting it in his story "For the Young Girl Yangliu" 献给少女杨柳. Yu Hua insisted that time was the framework of the things that happened in the past in which chronological sequences could be broken.²⁷¹

When the facts of the past are rearranged in a different chronological order, different meanings occur. Obviously this kind of arrangement or rearrangement is achieved in

²⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 170.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

memory, an arrangement Yu Hua called memory logic 记忆的逻辑. Memory could reconstruct the past world at any time. After each reconstruction, a new meaning could be bestowed upon the past world. In traditional narrative, the technique of flashback is a kind of exploration of time, for the most part, a technique remaining on the superficial level of time. The writing of "For the Young Girl Yangliu" was an implementation of Yu Hua's conception of time, as explained in his statement:

When I utilized time to construct the story 'For the Young Girl Yangliu,' I felt excited about rushing into a new world. After I tried to employ a split, overlapping and displacement of chronology (time), the happiness I gained exceeded my expectation.

在我开始以时间为结构，来写作《此文献给少女杨柳》时，我感受到闯入一个全新世界的极大快乐。我在尝试地使用时间分裂，时间重叠，时间错位等方法以后，收获到的喜悦出乎预料。²⁷²

In addition, Yu Hua was more concerned with revealing desire than merely portraying the character of the protagonist. He did not find much artistic value in portraying individual characteristics which could be described with abstract words such as optimistic, cunning, honest, melancholy and so forth, since it is obvious that such characteristics do not truly reflect an individual's inner heart. Sometimes, such adjectives even hamper the writer's further exploration of a protagonist's sophisticated psychology.

²⁷² Ibid., p. 171.

In literary works, Yu believes that people, trees, houses and rivers all have their own unique desires. A river demonstrates its desire by flowing. A house discloses its desire by silence. The combination of all these desires forms the symbolism of a literary work.

After publishing a series of short stories which employed experimental language and achieving fame as a representative writer of the "Avant-Garde School," Yu Hua turned his attention to Chinese popular society, making a leap from experimental writing to a new, more realistic narrative in the 1990s. In fact, this was the necessary result of Yu's long-lasting exploration of the truth of the world. For a rather long period, Yu's literary works originated from the tension of his indulgence in an imaginative world, which was tightly controlled by reality. As a result, he vented this tension by writing of violence and death, becoming an "angry and grim" writer. In the early 1990s, with an increase in his life experiences, Yu Hua gradually altered his view of the world, stating that:

I used to treat reality with a hostile attitude. With the passage of time, however, the anger in my inner heart gradually calmed down.

I started to realize that a real writer is looking for a kind of truth which involves no moral judgment. The mission of a writer is, neither venting his grievance, nor accusing and exposing, but he should reveal loftiness to people. The loftiness mentioned here is not a simple goodness, but a kind of transcendence after understanding all things, treating good and evil without

discrimination, looking upon the world with a sympathetic view.

我一直是以敌对的态度看待现实。随着时间的推移,我内心的愤怒渐渐平息,我开始意识到一位真正的作家所寻找的是真理,是一种排斥道德判断的真理。作家的使命不是发泄,不是控诉或者揭露,他应该向人们展示高尚。这里所说的高尚不是那种单纯的美好,而是对一切事物理解后的超然,对善与恶一视同仁,用同情的目光看待世界。²⁷³

"Looking upon the world with a sympathetic view" has in fact become Yu Hua's new writing ideal. In his eyes, the world is important, even holy. It is this type of devoutness and piety which orients his writing of *To Live* and *Chronicle of a Blood Merchant*, while his earlier novel, *Cries in the Drizzle*, is regarded as a transitional work between his stages of experimental writing and realistic narrative. Some critics view this earlier novel as the conclusion and summit of Yu Hua's experimental writing.²⁷⁴

Three Short Coming-of-Age Stories

There are three stories in the collection of *Timid as a Mouse*: "Timid as a Mouse," "Summer Typhoon" and "The April Third Incident." These stories all explore the inner world of growing men — a history of fear, restlessness and illusion.²⁷⁵ None of the protagonists in these stories are "normal" teenagers; each one is either unreasonably

²⁷³ Yu Hua, "Self-preface to *To Live*" in *Whether I Can Believe in Myself*, pp. 143-146.

²⁷⁴ Wu Yiqin 吴义勤, "Gaobie xuwei de xingshi" <告别“虚伪的形式”> ("Farewell to Hypocritical Form") in *Wenyi zhengming* 《文艺争鸣》 (*Contention in Literature and Arts*), vol.1, 2000, p. 71.

²⁷⁵ Yu Hua, "Self Preface" in *Zhanli* 《战栗》 (*Tremble*), Beijing: Xinshijie chubanshe, 1999, p.2.

timorous or lives in his own restless illusions. By narrating these teenagers' inner journeys, Yu Hua presents an alternative truth. In the following paragraphs, I will examine "Timid as a Mouse," and "The April Third Incident."

In "Timid as a Mouse," Yu Hua describes a boy so timid he is even afraid of a goose. In school, he is often derided by both his teacher and his classmates, and is even bullied by girls. He never dares to fight or swear at them. When he leaves school to work in a factory, he willingly and happily does the most humble work — cleaning the workshop. His fellow workers enjoy the clean environment he creates, but laugh at his stupidity at the same time. He never has a chance to enjoy the benefit of the factory because he does not fight for it. In this story, Yu Hua doesn't make any moral or value judgments, but he sets up a contrast for the protagonist, his friend, Lü Qianjin, who attends the same school, and later works with him at the factory. Lü Qianjin is just a ruffian, but it seems he is much better off in the society than the protagonist. The name of the protagonist is Yang Gao 杨高 which is the homonymic of lamb 羊羔. The lamb is a symbol of sacrifice, innocence, kindness and frailty. In this story, the lamb is neglected, insulted and hurt. People take advantage of the protagonist's innocence, kindness, honesty and weakness. At the end, when he tries to defend his dignity by threatening to kill Lü Qianjin, his kindness stops him and he incurs further humiliation. Yu Hua uses the protagonist as a mirror to reflect the brutality, numbness, utilitarianism and ugliness of the masses.

This story is an extension of another story, “I Have No Name of My Own” 我没有自己的名字 in which a retarded orphan named Laifa 来发 is constantly insulted by people around him. (This character can also be vaguely identified as Guoqing’s co-worker in *Cries in the Drizzle*.) Instead of his name, people address him as “sneeze” 喷嚏, “Bumwipe” 擦屁股纸, “Olddog” 老狗, “Skinypig” 瘦猪, or simply say “Overhere” 过来, “Clearoff” 滚开, or “Hey” 喂.²⁷⁶ In depriving him of his real name, people steal his dignity and make him as petty and low as dust. Expelled from the human world by the masses, he makes friends with a stray dog. Laifa doesn’t lose his desire to be recognized as a human being. When people finally call him by his real name, “Laifa,” his heart beats rub-a-dub. The price of this recognition, however, is the death of his only friend, the dog. People use him to catch his dog and later kill and cook it. This incident becomes the trigger of his inner change. He shuts the door on this human world. He voluntarily gives up his name and chooses the state of namelessness. He says: “If anyone ever calls me Laifa again, I’m not going to answer.” 以后谁叫我来发, 我都不会答应了.²⁷⁷ This is his way of fighting against this inhumane society. In spite of the calm and apathetic narrative, Yu Hua invites the reader to identify with Laifa by making him the first-person narrator. On the other hand, Yu Hua makes a real target directly against the masses, from the young to the old, who obtain their happiness by mercilessly attacking others, as the

²⁷⁶ Yu Hua, “Wo meiyou ziji de mingzi” <我没有自己的名字> (I Have No Name of My Own)” in *Huanghun li de nanhai* 《黄昏里的男孩》(*Boy in the Twilight*), Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 2004, pp.68-69. I am using Allan H. Barr’s English translation of this story from *Boy in the Twilight*, in manuscript form in 2006, p.4.

²⁷⁷ Ibid, p.87. Barr, *Boy in the Twilight*, p.22.

masses in the story mercilessly trample on Laifa's dignity. It is they who truly lose their name — human being.²⁷⁸ They lack an interior self and a respect for life. They are just creatures who live by natural instinct.

Those masses are much like their predecessors in Lu Xun's stories. They are the same curious and insensible masses who numbly watch the decapitation of another Chinese; they are the same countrymen who motivated Lu Xun to switch from medicine to creative writing.

Even though the above-mentioned two stories were written in the 1990s, they both take place in the 1970s. Yu Hua, as in "1986" and many other stories, is reminding people of the devastating impact of the Cultural Revolution on the Chinese masses, who became even worse than the numb countrymen in Lu Xun's time. If we say, Lu Xun describes his countrymen as "senseless bystanders" 毫无意义的看客,²⁷⁹ during the Cultural Revolution, these same countrymen degenerated into brutal persecutors.

The two stories, "Timid as a Mouse" and "I Have No Name of My Own," can also be read as Yu Hua's version of "Gimpel, the Fool," written by Isaac Bashevis Singer who is the winner of the 1978 Nobel Prize in Literature.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁸ Jiang Fei 姜飞, "Yu Hua jiushi niandai xiaoshuo de jiedu" <余华 90 年代小说的解读> ("Interpretation of Yu Hua's Stories written in the 1990s"), in *Shenyang shifan xueyuan xuebao* 沈阳师范学院学报, vol. 25, No. 2, March 2001, pp. 12-17.

²⁷⁹ Lu Xun, preface in *Nahan* 《呐喊》 (*Call to Arms*), Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1979, p.III.

²⁸⁰ "Isaac Bahevis Singer (1904-1991) is the most famous Yiddish writer of the twentieth century, and translations of his works have made him one of the most beloved in English. A prolific writer who vividly conjured the annihilated Jewish world of eastern Europe, he spoke to the fears, longings, and ambivalence of America's modern nation of immigrants. Singer drew on folk memories and mystical traditions to create a body of work that moved dramatically from the realistic to the fantastic, in ways that startled readers and inspired other writers. Singer's characters—often Holocaust survivors haunted by their immediate past and disoriented by American reality—dramatized the conflicts not only of postwar American Jews, but of an entire society committed both to cultural pluralism and to assimilation. His

Yu Hua selected ten short stories which are most influential on his writing and compiles them into a collection titled *The Warm Journey* 温暖的旅程. Singer's "Gimpel, the Fool" is one of them. Yu Hua has spoken highly of this story. He says that Singer describes "a soul purer than a blank paper. Because his name (Gimpel) is closely connected with the fool, his fate becomes a history of the deceived and the oppressed." 比白纸还要洁白的灵魂, 他的名字因为和傻瓜紧密相连, 他的命运也就书写了一部受骗和被欺压的历史。²⁸¹ The apparent weakness, that kind and honest Gimpel presents when he faces those who bully and humiliate him is actually powerful enough to defeat all the mighty. This is also what Yu Hua wants to express in his stories, "Timid as a Mouse" And "I Have No Name of My Own." Even though the protagonists of both stories are mercilessly trampled by the seemingly strong masses, their innocence, kindness and honesty are more powerful; they represent the hope of resuming a rational, ethical, tolerant and humane Chinese folk society.

In many articles, Yu Hua has expressed his appreciation of Lu Xun's writing, especially Lu Xun's treatment of detail. Some critics have compared Yu Hua's early stories with Lu Xun's, and point out that Yu Hua is one of the best successors of Lu Xun in terms of criticism of national characters and of portraying personal enlightenment,

writing is a unique blend of religious morality and social awareness combined with an investigation of personal desires." Quoted from the website <http://www.ibsinger100.org/life/1/> and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isaac_Bashevis_Singer.

²⁸¹ Yu Hua, ed., Preface to *Wennuan de lücheng* 《温暖的旅程》 (*The Warm Journey*), Beijing: Xin shiji chubanshe, 1999, p.8.

such as in his stories, "Nineteen Eighty Six," and "One Kind of Reality."²⁸² Yu Hua recalls being "flabbergasted"吓了一跳 by Lu Xun's "The Diary of a Madman."²⁸³ Later, Yu Hua wrote a short story, "The April Third Incident" in which the fusion of dream, illusion and reality is reminiscent of Lu Xun's "The Dairy of a Madman," which has been hailed as China's first modern short story, and consists of a purposely fragmented diary in thirteen sections.

Like the "The Diary of a Madman," "The April Third Incident" focuses on the insane psychological state of a young man who has just celebrated his eighteenth birthday and who has been haunted by the illusion that people around him, including his parents, neighbours, former classmates, and even strangers, are all in a conspiracy to kill him on April 3rd. The time span of the story is only two or three days. Much of the action occurs in the protagonist's dreams and imagination. This story was written in 1987 when Yu Hua was still fond of experimental writing. The story is not an easy read, and it seems that Yu Hua deliberately makes it difficult to follow by breaking the chronological sequence and rearranging the episodes. This story requires more than one reading to understand the plot, the implications, and to distinguish the fantasy from the reality. Some paragraphs starting or ending with ellipsis dots can be read as the protagonist's imagination of the dangers and threats he faces. The story contains twenty-two sections and uses numbers as subtitles. There are thematic links among even-numbered chapters and the odd-numbered

²⁸² See Ye Liwen's 叶立文 "Subversion of the Historical Rational: The Narrative of Enlightenment in Yu Hua's Stories 颠覆历史理性: 余华小说的启蒙叙述" in *Xiaoshuo pinglun* 小说月报, No.4, 2004, pp.40-45.

²⁸³ Yu Hua, *Can I Believe in Myself?*, p.254.

chapters; for example, reading chapters eight, ten, twelve, fourteen, sixteen and eighteen consecutively and then chapters eleven, thirteen, fifteen and seventeen consecutively will enhance the reader's understanding of the plot. The chronological sequence of chapters three, four and five is in fact three, five and four. The author's displacement of chronological sequences emphasizes the protagonist's own confusion between fantasy, dream and reality.

Lu Xun's portrait of the madman is "afflicted with an increasingly sharpened perception of reality."²⁸⁴ "Thus it is precisely the madman's growing insanity that provides the basis for an unusual process of cognition which leads to his final realization of the true nature of his society and culture."²⁸⁵ What does Yu Hua want to pass on to his readers by depicting an afflicted young man? Leo Ou-fan Lee points out that the "recurring image of the moon gives rise symbolically to a double meaning of both lunacy (in its Western connotation) and enlightenment (in its Chinese etymological implication)." What, then, is the meaning of Yu Hua's story?²⁸⁶

Critics have made diverse interpretations of "The April Third Incident." For example, Xiaobing Yang has interpreted this text in a post-modern discourse as Yu Hua's subversion of rationality and certainty.²⁸⁷ The Chinese critic Ye Liwen has interpreted this story as Yu Hua's extension of Lu Xun's madman who constantly feels the hostility of the

²⁸⁴ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Voice from the Iron House: A Study of Lu Xun*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987, p.55.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Yang Xiaobing, "Shenme shi zhongguo de hou xiandai zhuyi" <什么是中国的后现代主义> "What is Chinese post modernism?", in *Lishi yu xiuci 历史与修辞*, Lanzhou: dunhuang wenyi chubanshe 敦煌文艺出版社, 1999, p. ??.

outside world toward him and can only discern the two characters representing “cannibalism” [*chi ren* 吃人] in books about Chinese history.²⁸⁸

Lu Xun’s madman lives in a transitional era in Chinese history, is trained as a traditional Chinese literatus, and sees the dark side of traditional Chinese values and culture; the young protagonist in Yu Hua’s story grows up in a modern socialist society and doesn’t share the vision on Chinese history with the madman. His feeling of fear and hostility from the outside world is more a reflection of the turbulent psychological experience of being an adolescent. It seems that Yu Hua wants to emphasize that the age of eighteen as a watershed in a young man’s life. The young man starts to distance himself from his childhood; he sees the outside world differently, he relies heavily on his own intuition, feeling and judgment, he flees from his home and sets out on a strange journey. Two other stories, “On the Road at Eighteen” and “Northwest-Wind-Whistling-Noon” 西北风呼啸的中午, deal with the same theme.

The specific date of April Third was not chosen randomly by the author; it is Yu Hua’s birthday. This may suggest that Yu Hua harbors more personal feelings about the age of eighteen in this story. The story starts on the morning of the protagonist’s birthday. The author doesn’t give the name of the protagonist, but the other characters in the story all have their own names. Without giving the protagonist a specific name, we may assume that it was Yu Hua’s intension to portray the typicality of this turbulent

²⁸⁸ Ye Liwen’s “Subversion of the Historical Rational: The Narrative of Enlightenment in Yu Hua’s Stories” in *Xiaoshuo pinglun*, No.4, 2004, pp.40-45.

psychological experience of a boy growing up. In the story, his parents have forgotten his birthday, and there is no celebration for him at all. The only feeling he gets on his eighteenth birthday is a lack of support 无依无靠. The age of eighteen is a watershed in his life. He has a premonition that things will be different after this day. He imagines that a big conspiracy against him is planned for April 3rd. His parents, neighbours, friends, classmates, and strangers are all confederates in this conspiracy. Like the madman in "The Diary of a Madman," whose cognition begins with "sensory perception — the snarling glances from a dog and a neighbor, gossip and comments from the people on the streets,"²⁸⁹ the protagonist of Yu Hua's story also eavesdrops on his parents' conversation on the balcony and their exchanges with neighbours. He catches the fragments, "Are you almost ready . . .?" 准备得差不多了吗? and "The April third;" he sees his formers classmates' suspicious grin and hears their chitchat;²⁹⁰ he captures the vague intimation of impending disaster from the girl Snow White on whom he has a crush; he finds the strangers on the street spying on him, the truck driver attempting to knock him down. To his big surprise, he discovers that "even the children are properly trained." 就是连孩子也训练有素了 to spy on him, aim at him with a toy gun, and lie to him.²⁹¹ This image of children is identical with that in Lu Xun's "The Diary of a Madman." It is also noteworthy the image of father as an overseer and persecutor. So the young protagonist

²⁸⁹ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Voices from the Iron House: A Study of Lu Xun*, p.55.

²⁹⁰ Yu Hua, "The April Third Incident" in *I am as Timid as a Mouse*, p.124.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p.142.

finally decides to flee from home. He gets on a coal cargo train the night before the April third.

The combination of dream, imagination and reality makes readers uncertain or even suspicious about the truthfulness of the upcoming conspiracy against the protagonist. The more readers read, the more readers believe that the conspiracy is just the young protagonist's conjecture. Regardless of whether the reader believes in the conspiracy or not, it is the truthfulness of reality projected in the young protagonist's mind. In the eyes of this young man, the world is full of hidden crises, uncertainty, conspiracy, untrustworthiness and absurdity. It is the same world in which he used to live, but since his eighteenth birthday, he judges this world from his own perspective. His fantasy is, in fact, a sober recognition of reality in disguise. This story discloses the turbulent, fearful, contradictory and suspicious psychology of a growing boy, and his recognition of the world.

Chen Sihe has pointed out that every story written by Yu Hua in 1986 and 1987 can be read as an allegory. Yu Hua constructs a closed and individual fictional world in which he presents the truthfulness of reality based on his personal understanding. Chen emphasizes that Yu Hua has a strong impulse to interpret the world. He compares Yu Hua to a child who suddenly detects the secret of the world and is eager to publicize his discovery. Yu's presentation of maturity is mixed with astonishment. This astonishment

provides a new perspective, and enables him to see the other side of the world.²⁹²

In "The April Third Incident" Yu Hua reveals the unexpected discovery and exploration of the absurdity of reality by the adolescent suddenly facing the adult world. In the story, a harmonica is mentioned twice; it is related to the age of eighteen. At the beginning of the story, the narrator "... walks into the station 车站 of the age of eighteen, and this station is permeated with the sound of a harmonica." ... 他走进了十八岁的车站, 这个车站洋溢着口琴声。²⁹³ At the end of the story, when he is on the cargo train, he recalls a neighbour who plays a harmonica at his window every day, but dies of hepatitis at the age of eighteen, "hence, the sound of the harmonica also dies." 于是那口琴声也死去了。²⁹⁴ The harmonica symbolizes the joy and innocence of childhood. When the boy next door dies on his eighteenth birthday, the beautiful sound of the harmonica dies, the happiness and innocence of childhood die, and the beauty of the outside world dies. Later, the image of this boy appears again in *Cries in the Drizzle*.

Cries in the Drizzle

Cries in the Drizzle is Yu Hua's first full length novel, published in 1991. In the preface to the Italian version, Yu Hua describes it as a book of memories:

²⁹² Chen Sihe, Chapter 17, section 4: "Canku yu lengmo de renxing fajue 残酷与冷漠的人性发掘," in *Zhongguodangdai wenxueshi jiaocheng* 中国当代文学史教程, Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2001.

²⁹³ Yu Hua, "The April Third Incident" in *I am as Timid as a Mouse*, Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 2003, p113.

²⁹⁴ Ibid, p.165.

My experience is that writing can constantly evoke memory and I believe these memories belong not merely to myself. They are possibly an image of one era, or a brand left by the world in the inner heart of one person Memory cannot restore the past. It only reminds us once in a while of what we had before!

我的经验是写作可以不断地去唤醒记忆,我相信这样的记忆不仅仅属于我个人,这可能是一个时代的形象,或者说是一个世界在某一个人心灵深处的烙印。”“经历总是比回忆鲜明有力....回忆无法还原过去的生活,它只是偶然提醒我们:过去曾经拥有什么? ²⁹⁵

This novel reminds us of that which we had in our childhood. The structure of this novel is based on Yu Hua's understanding of time in memory. Memory can reconstruct the past world at any time. With each new reconstruction, new meaning is bestowed on the past world. In the narrative of this novel, time becomes the fragments of memory rearranged in "today's" position.

Cries in the Drizzle is a reminiscence of the narrator's boyhood from six to eighteen years of age, spanning the years from 1966 to 1978. This period of time coincides with the Cultural Revolution (1966 – 1976), which provides the temporal background for this novel, a sentimental and miserable backdrop. During this time, anything abnormal and absurd becomes possible. Yu Hua gives his reader a child's understanding of family, friendship, sex and marriage, fate, death and birth, interspersed

²⁹⁵ Yu Hua, "I Have Two Lives" 我拥有两个人生, in *Can I Believe in Myself?* p. 148.

with his adult comments. The story describes the solitary and helpless experiences of Sun Guanglin 孙光林 and his young friends, Su Yu 苏宇, Guoqing 国庆 and Lulu 鲁鲁. Their experiences produce a series of effects from a strong sense of abandonment to great loneliness, inescapable fear, feelings of alienation from family, yearning for friendship, and the psychological trauma that comes with the disappearance of fantasy and hope.

Growth is the main theme in this story. The story involves three generations: the grandparents, the parents and the young generation. The birth of Guanglin and the death of his grandfather represent the two poles of the life cycle; the different life stories of the characters comprise the complete process of growth. It is around the growth of Guanglin's generation that the main plot of the story develops, with emphasis placed on two particular qualities of growth -- the anxiety of growth and the fear of growth.

As we saw in Chapter Three of this dissertation, the parents in Su Tong's stories are negative role models for their children. In Yu Hua's stories, the situation is even worse. The young characters in *Cries in the Drizzle* are all abandoned by their families or fathers in various ways. They have to turn to their friends for support and guidance. In contrast with the Su Tong's unitary treatment of the cold, chaotic and violent peer community, Yu Hua makes an important distinction between friends, who are warm and supportive, and peers more generally, who are often callous and malicious. On the one hand, the general peer community seems to be the epitome of the adult society: biological brothers, such as Guanglin and Guangping, Su Yu and Su Hang, are remote or even hostile to each other;

Guangping is betrayed by his classmates; Guanglin is tormented by other boys when Su Yu is arrested; Guoqing is informed on by other children at school, and Lulu's schoolmates ridicule him. On the other hand, the small peer community, composed of Guanglin and his friends, rare and precious, plays the role of a family: they are connected emotionally and provide genuine support to each other. This positive friend circle is in sharp contrast with the adult society of the Cultural Revolution. Hereafter, I will use the term "peer community" to specifically refer to this circle of friends.

In *Cries in the Drizzle*, the parental world disappoints the protagonist and his fellow teenagers in three ways: it abandons the children, provides negative role models and causes disillusion toward beautiful things; meanwhile, the peer world plays the role which should have been played by the parental world: providing support, comfort, warmth, understanding, even guidance to the frustrated adolescents. The result of this contrast is the youth's fear of growing up and entering the adult world.

Before examining these two contradictory worlds in detail, I would like to briefly discuss the structure and historical background of the story. There are four parallel chapters in this novel. In traditional narrative form, the chapters of a novel are typically arranged in chronological order. In *Cries in the Drizzle*, however, Yu Hua does not arrange these chapters in chronological sequence. The four chapters juxtapose to different aspects of childhood life within the same time period. The first chapter, the main part of

the story, concentrates on the protagonist's family life, a panorama of his whole childhood. It also serves as the information reservoir for the whole book by producing the outlines, mentioning key points, creating suspense and foreshadowing the scenes in the following three chapters. The next three chapters enlarge upon certain episodes, though each chapter could stand alone. Because this novel is a reminiscence composed of different stories of the protagonist himself and also of the people around him, the application of this juxtaposed structure enhances the entirety of each story.

Although this novel involves many characters, it does not create confusion about their relationships because the author applies a basic unit -- family -- to unite or separate them.²⁹⁶ When one character's story is narrated, the stories of his family members are unveiled simultaneously. Family is a thread sewing different stories together. The life and fate of each character is exposed through his or her relationship with his or her family. The application of family as the basic structure of the novel endows the work with a profound atmosphere of culture and humanity. In Chinese culture, and likely in all human culture, family is the most basic and important unit of society. Traditional Confucian values center on family relationships. Consequently, when Yu Hua attaches individual characters to the larger family unit, the conflicts of the characters take on deeper cultural implications, leading the readers to consider the loss of traditional Chinese cultural and moral values in an abnormal era.

²⁹⁶ Wu Yiqin 吴义勤, "Qiecuile de shengming gushi" <切碎了的 生命故事> ("The Broken Life Stories") in *Xiaoshuo pinglin* 《小说评论》, vol. 1, 1994, p. 62.

Degenerating and Helpless Parental Society

In a certain sense, the story of these adolescents is a history of being abandoned by their families or fathers. In the story, readers can hardly find a single intact and happy family. Five families are involved, and the narrative is developed through the interactions between the families and their children: the protagonist Guanglin, and his friends Su Yu, Guoqing and Lulu.

First of all, the protagonist Guanglin is abandoned by both his biological family and his foster family. At the age of six, he is adopted by a military man, Wang Liqiang 王立强, and his bed-ridden wife, Li Xiuying 李秀英. At the very beginning of the story, readers are told that Guanglin is taken away by Wang from his rural hometown Southgate 南门 to Littlemarsh 孙荡 where he spends five years with his adopted family. Life with Wang Liqiang's family seems to be the only normal time in Guanglin's childhood memory. This family is problematic, however. It is caught in the tension between the husband's healthy sexual desire and the wife's fragile condition. Wang Liqiang, a strong, enthusiastic man serving in the army, has a rather unpleasant and unsatisfied sex life with his wife, a pale and chronic invalid lying on her sickbed the entire day. Given these circumstances, Wang Liqiang enters into a two-year affair with another young woman. His privacy, however, is enthusiastically invaded by a female CCP cadre who, in the end, sees her two sons mistakenly murdered by Wang Liqiang as revenge. Afterwards, Wang

kills himself with a grenade. Li Xiuying, Wang's wife, subsequently leaves Littlemarsh one chilly morning. The event reflects not only the darkness and meanness of the human heart, but also the abnormal psychology of people suppressed by the CCP system. Wang Liqiang's austere life represents the sacrifice of sexual repression during the Maoist era, since his service in the army demands asceticism as a basic requirement. "This asceticism stems from that era and echoes with political grimness. Sexual repression is just the physiological response to political repression." 这是来自一个时代的禁欲，它和政治的禁欲遥相呼应，或者说性的压抑正是政治上压抑时的生理反应。²⁹⁷ Finally the husband's suicidal revenge destroys his own family and leaves Guanglin an orphan.

Guanglin, now an orphan, returns to his hometown, Southgate, to live with his biological family. He is not welcome there, however. He is denounced by his father as an "unlucky star" because on his first day back, the family home catches fire, seemingly without cause. Rather than feeling reunited with his family, Guanglin feels as though he is beginning yet another life of adoption. The situation in this family is even worse than that in his foster family. His father, a hot-tempered peasant, is an utter rogue who treats his own father and his sons as stumbling blocks in his life, ready to kick them away at any moment. He commits adultery with the widow next door and steals from his own family to benefit her. After the death of his wife, he degenerates further into a drunkard who often weeps at his wife's tomb in the middle of the night. At last, he drowns in a

²⁹⁷ Yu Hua, "Luxurious Washroom"奢侈的厕所 in *Can I Believe in Myself?* p. 131.

manure pit, perhaps an appropriate end for such a man's life. The mother, for her part, is a hardworking, kindhearted woman who endures all her hardships and humiliation in silence. The only time she vents her anger against her husband's adulterous behavior is on her deathbed, as she shouts at her husband, demanding that he not take her household utensils to the widow.

Guanglin has two brothers, Guangpin 光平 and Guangming 光明. The three brothers' lives overlap for a short period, then separate. Elder brother Guangping dreams of living in the city, an illusion which vanishes with his return to the countryside after he finishes high school, starting his mediocre and difficult life in Southgate. The younger brother, Guangming, for his part drowns in the river one beautiful summer noon while attempting to save another boy's life.

Another member of Guanglin's family is his grandfather Sun Youyuan 孙有元, a highly skilled stonemason in his youth. He follows the employment path of his father before him, later leading his fellow stonemasons in the construction of stone bridges everywhere in south China. His splendid career does not last long, since his predecessors have built so many strong stone bridges in the country that there is little need to build new ones. He is a member of the last generation of stonemasons, their decline beginning in the 1940s. Finally, the war forces him to give up his career and go back to his hometown where he encounters the tragedy of his parents' deaths. Fleeing from this calamity, he marries a distressed young woman of noble birth, who previously has a

short-lived marriage with the son of a gentry family. In the face of the once celebrated background of his wife, the grandfather is always self-abasing, humble and docile in his married life. After the death of his wife, he continues to live in his memories of the past. In reality, he becomes a great burden to his sons, living with their families alternately month by month because he hurt his back and as a consequence loses his employment. His remaining years are a miserable struggle for survival and endurance of constant humiliation from his son. Many years later, when Guanglin recalls his grandfather, he says: "Given my tender age before I left home, I could not possibly feel the extent of the humiliation Granddad suffered."²⁹⁸ 在我离家之前, 祖父在我们家中承担的屈辱, 是我当时的年龄所无法感受的。²⁹⁹ However, Guanglin does feel that his grandfather always tried to make himself invisible to the family, especially to his own son who mercilessly regarded him as a burden. Therefore, in the family, grandfather and Guanglin become two most unwelcome people.

Given this circumstance, Guanglin is alienated from both his family and the village people. He attempts to rid himself of his family because of his father's degradation and his own helpless life. Only the village pond provides Guanglin with feelings of warmth and he spends most of his lonely, thoughtful time there. He recalls, "If there is anything about Southgate that merits some nostalgic sensations, it must be the village pond."³⁰⁰ 南

²⁹⁸ Barr, tr. *Cries in the Drizzle*, manuscript, 2006, p.176.

²⁹⁹ Yu Hua, *Xiyu yu huhan*, p.189.

³⁰⁰ Barr, tr. *Cries in the Drizzle*, p.22.

门如果还有值得怀念的地方，显然就是那口池塘。³⁰¹ It is this pond that bears witness to his childhood loneliness and sentiments. The image of the pond repeatedly appears in the story. Recognizing the misery of his situation in the village, he says:

During the funeral I kept my distance. Isolation and neglect had practically nullified my existence, as far as the village was concerned . . . I realized with relief that I had been utterly forgotten. I had been assigned to a position where I was recognized and at the same time repudiated by everyone in the village.³⁰²

葬礼的时候我一直站在远处，长久的孤单和被冷落，使我在村里似乎不再作为一个人而存在 我如释重负地发现自己被彻底遗忘。我被安排到了一个村里人都知道我，同时也都否定我的位置上。³⁰³

Therefore, Guanglin is completely alienated from his family.

Guanglin's friend Su Yu has a similar experience of being alienated from his family. Su Yu's parents are both doctors. Su Yu and his younger brother Su Hang have always been envied by other children because they seem to live in such a happy, warm and affluent family. Under this facade, however, are the parents' hostility, untrustworthiness, resentment and humiliation of each other, and coldness, indifference and neglect of their children. Love, caring, happiness and warmth have long left the family since the father's

³⁰¹ Ibid., p. 28.

³⁰² Barr, tr. *Cries in the Drizzle*, p.43

³⁰³ Yu Hua, *Xiyu yu huhan*, pp. 46-47.

one-time affair with a seductive widow during their two years' stay in Southgate. The mother frequently uses this affair as a weapon against the father, and even accuses Su Yu of following his father's footsteps. Su Yu has feelings of shame towards his family because of this affair. Eventually, the parental coldness and neglect lead to his death. When he falls into a coma as a result of a cerebral haemorrhage, neither his parents nor his brother realize that he is seriously ill. They both think he is just sleeping in and even complain about him not getting the hot water ready for the family. His brother seems to be his last hope for help, but his brother also fails him. "Su Yu sent out to his brother a mental cry for help, but all that happened was that he closed the door behind him."³⁰⁴ 他向弟弟发出内心的呼喊, 回答他的是门的关上。³⁰⁵ Yu Hua has used three pages to describe Su Yu's silent begging for help from his mother, father and younger brother. He describes Su Yu sinking into a deep coma, but each time when Su Yu hears the voice of one of his family members, it seems that a beam of light stops his subsiding into darkness. His family's neglect of these silent pleas finally pushes him into darkness, however:

Su Yu's body finally found itself in an unstoppable fall, which accelerated and turned into a tailspin. A stifling sensation held him in its grip for what seemed like an eternity, and then, all of a sudden, he had attained the tranquility of utter nothingness, and it was as though a refreshing breeze was blowing him gently into tiny pieces, as though he was melting into countless drops of water that

³⁰⁴ Barr, tr. *Cries in the Drizzle*, p. 124.

³⁰⁵ Yu Hua, *Xiyu yu huhan*, p. 135.

disappeared crisply, delightfully, into thin air.³⁰⁶

苏宇的身体终于进入了不可阻挡的下沉，速度越来越快，并且开始旋转。在经历了冗长的窒息以后，突然获得了消失般的宁静，仿佛一般微风极其舒畅地吹散了他的身体，他感到自己化作了无数水滴，清脆悦耳地消失在空气之中。³⁰⁷

Su Yu is abandoned to his death by his parents in the form of indifference, coldness and neglect.

Both Guanglin and Su Yu are emotionally and mentally abandoned by their parents. Physically, they both have a family to turn to. Guanglin's other two friends, Guoqing and Lulu, however, are both physically abandoned by their fathers, and eventually become orphans.

During Guanglin's stay in Littlemarsh with the Wang family, he enjoys the friendship of his classmate Guoqing 国庆, a boy whose mother has passed away and whose father abandons him by marrying another woman. Guoqing becomes an orphan at the age of nine and later is forced to make his own living - delivering coal - at the age of thirteen. Yu Hua has given a vivid description to the change of Guoqing's fate:

One morning when he was nine, Guoqing woke up to find that he held his destiny in his own hands. Though far from being an adult, and still under the sway of paternal authority, all of a sudden he was

³⁰⁶ Barr, tr. *Cries in the Drizzle*, p.124.

³⁰⁷ Yu Hua, *Xiyu yu huhan*, p. 135.

independent. Premature freedom made him carry his fate on his shoulder the way he might carry a heavy suitcase, staggering along a busy thoroughfare, not sure in which direction to go.³⁰⁸

国庆在九岁的一个早晨醒来时，就必须掌握自己的命运了。在离成年还十分遥远，还远没有到摆脱父亲控制的时候，他突然获得了独立。过早的自由使他像扛着沉重的行李一样，扛着自己的命运，在纷繁的街道上趑趄不知去向。³⁰⁹

After his father deserts him, Guoqing, the formerly happy and sunny boy who used to have a wild fantasy about a white horse with wings, now befriends an old lady who lives in the memory of her dead relatives. She brings great comfort to Guoqing because she helps him to communicate with his late mother in the nether world. He starts to imagine his mother and recalls all the past memories. Now the imagination of this nine-year-old boy only leads him to the past instead of future. His talk is full of the word "past." Yu Hua's intent in setting up this odd friendship between Guoqing and the old lady is to demonstrate the destructive role of parental abandonment. This abandonment immediately terminates Guoqing's childhood and pushes him directly into adulthood, or even to old age.

Guoqing, deserted by the living, began to develop close relations with the old lady downstairs, who had been deserted by the dead . . .

He no longer invested all his time in our shared childhood, but

³⁰⁸ Barr, tr. *Cries in the Drizzle*, p.233.

³⁰⁹ Yu Hua, *Xiyu yu huhan*, p. 247.

rubbed shoulders instead with the lonely old lady. Sometimes I would see them on the street, walking along holding hands, and Guoqing's face, normally so animated, seemed a little glum next to her black arm. Her air of depletion was eroding Guoqing's thriving energy.³¹⁰

被活人遗弃的国庆,开始了与楼下那位被死人遗弃的老太太的亲密交往 他经常和那位孤单老太太呆在一起。有时我在街上看到他们两人拉着手一起走来,国庆本该是活泼的脸,在她黑色的手臂旁显得有些阴沉。这个女人以她垂暮的气息腐化着国庆蓬勃的生命力。³¹¹

In the story, there is another boy, Lulu, who is also physically deserted by his family and eventually becomes homeless. Lulu is a young friend Guanglin makes soon after the death of Su Yu. The friendship between Guanglin and seven-year-old Lulu is a refurbished version of his friendship with Su Yu. I will further discuss this friendship later in this chapter. Lulu is the only son of Feng Yuqing 冯玉清, who was seduced and betrayed by a young man when she was a beautiful young girl. Later, she eloped with a furrier and now, seven years later, she has returned to her hometown with Lulu. In order to make living, she has degenerated into a prostitute. From the very beginning, the father is absent from the family. This fact makes Lulu extremely attached to his mother Feng Yuqing. Unfortunately, Lulu eventually loses the care and protection of his mother when she is arrested for prostitution. Consequently, Lulu is sent to a shelter.

³¹⁰ Barr, tr. *Cries in the Drizzle*, p.246.

³¹¹ Yu Hua, *Xiyu yu huhan*, p.261.

As we saw in Chapter Three of this dissertation, the protagonists Dasheng and his friends in *North Side Story* are all expelled from school, and, in certain sense, are forced to receive their education on the street. In that story, the school has lost its function of education— “to propagate doctrines of the ancient sages, to transmit learning, and to dispel confusion,” and become a place of undaunted murder and arson. In turn, the teachers lose the respect from their students for failing to provide them with proper education and guidance. In *Drizzle*, Yu Hua presents a relatively positive image of education though schools do not emerge in at all a positive light. It is in different schools that Guanglin meets his bosom friends, Su Yu, Lu Lu and Guoqing, and obtains warmth and emotional and physical support from them, in spite of the callousness and malice of the their classmates in general. School, as we can see everywhere in this story, becomes the haven of these helpless teenagers. In addition, in contrast with Su Tong’s simplex treatment of teachers in *North Side Story*, Yu Hua presents relatively sophisticated and humanistic images of teacher, and reveals that they are, more or less, also the victim of the era. He also discloses their desires, weakness and predicaments as a human being in general. In this story, Yu Hua specifically depicts two teachers: the unnamed music instructor in Southgate whose rare finesse has been Guanglin’s ideal of adulthood for a long time, and Zhang Qinghai in Littlemarsh who has served as Guoqing’s guardian for a short period of time after Guoqing is deserted by his father.

In the story, Guanglin sees his music instructor “the least snobbish of teachers, favoring all his pupils with the same smile.”³¹² 是老师中最不势利的，他以同样的微笑对待所有的同学。³¹³ He is captivated by the teacher’s standard Chinese, beautiful voice and cultivated demeanor. More preciously, in an era when arts are exclusively in the service of the Party, the music instructor has the courage to tell his students: “Music begins where language disappears.”³¹⁴ 音乐是从语言消失的地方开始的。³¹⁵

No matter how Guanglin admires his music teacher's fine and elegant manner, this elegance, however, is weak and helpless in the face of the wildness and brutality of the chaotic students in a time when virtue and learning have been trampled underfoot. Once in the classroom, a student places his shoes on the windowsill and his naked feet on the desk. When the music teacher reminds him to behave, he responds to the music teacher with taunts and, in the end, even throws the teacher’s music book out the window. “Somehow I felt a sense of loss, having just witnessed my role model being so easily humiliated by Su Hang.”³¹⁶ 当时我内心涌上一股难言的悲凉，作为我成年以后的榜样，就那么轻而易举地被苏杭侮辱了。³¹⁷ Later, because of his affair with a female student, this music teacher is put into prison, and later is released to teach in a country school. Witnessing the life changes of the music teacher, Guanglin sees the vulnerability and transience of beautiful things and beautiful people in the adult world.

³¹² Barr, tr. *Cries in the Drizzle*, p.84.

³¹³ Yu Hua, *Xiyu yu huhan*, p.95.

³¹⁴ Barr, tr. *Cries in the Drizzle*, p.84.

³¹⁵ Yu Hua, *Xiyu yu huhan*, p.95.

³¹⁶ Barr, tr. *Cries in the Drizzle*, p.86.

³¹⁷ Yu Hua, *Xiyu yu huhan*, p. 97.

Zhang Qinghai, another teacher in this story, has some similarity with the image of catcher in Su Tong's *North Side Story*, in spite of the fact that he once maliciously forces Guanglin to admit a crime he has never committed, and uses threatening methods to control and discipline his students. Zhang Qinghai, though a knitter and henpecked husband at home, is an authority figure among his students, and acts as the protector of his student when it is sorely needed. After knowing Guoqing was abandoned by his father, Zhang Qinghai took Guoqing to see the man, commended Guoqing's achievements, and emphasized that Guoqing was a favorite with every teacher in the school. After hearing the father's heartless and sarcastic response, he talked back with a good sense of humor: "Actually, I was thinking of adopting him as my grandson."³¹⁸ 我倒是想收国庆做孙子。

³¹⁹ Later, seeing Guoqing squandering his limited life expense, Zhang Qinghai made himself responsible for managing Guoqing's money. Maybe his kindness and caring to Guoqing was just out of compassion, but given the general regressive situation of education during the Cultural Revolution, Zhang's behavior is rare and precious.

The parental world provides youth with many negative role models. Guanglin witnesses his father's betrayal of his mother, brutality towards the children, disregard of filial piety towards the grandfather, and irresponsibility towards the entire family. In his foster family, Guanglin finds weakness, frustration, desperation of the adults caught in the predicament, and darkness and meanness of the human heart. Self-destruction seems

³¹⁸ Barr, tr. *Cries in the Drizzle*, p.266.

³¹⁹ Yu Hua, *Xiyu yu huhan*, p.282.

to be the only solution. For Su Yu's part, what he finds in his parental world is narrowness and coldness of the human heart. For Guoqing, his father's selfishness, cowardice and irresponsibility force him to face the brutal reality of life much earlier than he ought to. Meanwhile, the miserable life of Lulu and his mother shows how a vulnerable woman is subjected to indignities by men.

It is noteworthy that in this story Yu Hua presents the women as being insulted and persecuted by men. Most adult women in this story, such as Guanglin's biological mother, foster mother, Su Yu's mother and Lulu's mother, are betrayed or rejected by their husbands or lovers; however, in presenting these adult women's miserable fates, Yu Hua takes care to reveal the good in human nature, as reflected in the image of the mother. Though the proletarian dictatorship tried to destroy traditional Chinese moral values, people are able to retain certain positive traits because of the influence of thousands of years of Confucian culture upon this society. This is also a bright hue that Yu Hua intends to paint on the otherwise dark adult world. For instance, after Guanglin's father's rejection of his family in favor of an adulterous relationship with the widow, the mother shoulders the heavy burden of the family, enduring humiliation and hardship without complaint in order to raise her children. Through this character, then, Yu Hua reveals the selflessness and greatness of maternal love. This maternal love also gives the alienated Guanglin warmth even though he is not getting along with his family. For example, when Guanglin finally leaves his hometown for university in Beijing, his mother says goodbye

to him at the edge of the village. Yu Hua writes:

As the morning winds blew, Mother watched us awkwardly as we walked away, seemingly not comprehending in what direction fortune was moving, and when I looked at her for the last time I discovered that her hair was now streaked with grey. "Goodbye," I said to her. She showed no reaction, and her ambiguous gaze seemed to be directed elsewhere. For a moment a warm feeling surged over me, for this picture of my mother tugged at my heartstrings.³²⁰

在晨风里，母亲不知所措地望着我们走去，仿佛不明白命运在那时所显示的一切。当我最后一眼去看母亲时，发现她的头发已经花白了。我对母亲说：“我走了。”母亲没有丝毫反应，她含糊不清的眼神似乎是在看着别的什么。那一刻我心里涌上一股温情，母亲的形象使我一阵心酸。³²¹

Guanglin's feelings of tenderness at this moment express his affection for, and reluctance to be apart from, his mother and his sympathy for her deplorable life. This warm and tender maternal love is not strong and powerful enough to protect the children, however.

Besides being abandoned by the adult world, the teenagers also have other experiences of disillusionment that further alienate them from the adult world and cause them to fear growing up. During Guanglin's childhood, he experiences his most profound disillusionment in witnessing the destruction of his two ideals of adulthood — his music teacher and the young woman Feng Yuqing.

³²⁰ Barr, tr. *Cries in the Drizzle*, p.56.

³²¹ Yu Hua, *Xiyu yu huhan*, p. 61.

Feng Yuqing, previously an innocent and beautiful girl, has been the symbol of feminine beauty in the village boys' eyes. Guanglin recalls: "In those days when I sat beside the pond, endless yearnings were inspired when Feng Yuqing walked by, exuding her air of youth and beauty."³²² 我坐在池塘旁的那些岁月，冯玉清在村里洋溢着青春气息的走动，曾经给过我连续不断的憧憬。³²³ Unfortunately, this innocent country girl is cheated and later rejected by a young neighbouring young man. Feeling insulted and desperate, Yuqing runs off with an old furrier. Years later, meeting her again with her only son Lulu, Guanglin is shocked by the changes she has undergone:

In that moment I had a clear view of her face, now ravaged by time, the wrinkles all too apparent. When her glance, now bereft of its earlier vitality, rested upon me, it was like a grey cloud floating towards me. She turned back towards the well, mercilessly revealing to me her sagging buttocks and thickening waistline. I turned and left, saddened not by Feng Yuqing's having forgotten me, but by my first introduction to beauty's pitiless decline. The Feng Yuqing who stood combing her hair in the sunlight outside her home would, after this, always be blanketed with a layer of dust.³²⁴

这一刻我清晰地看到了她那遭受岁月摧残的脸，脸上的皱纹已经清晰可见，她那丧失了青春激情的目光看到我时，就象灰暗的尘土向我漂浮而来。她转身走向井台，无情地向我呈现了下垂的臀部和粗壮的腰。我是这时候转身离去的，我内心涌来的悲哀倒不

³²² Barr, tr. *Cries in the Drizzle*, p.23.

³²³ Yu Hua, *Xiyu yu huhan*, p. 28.

³²⁴ Barr, tr. *Cries in the Drizzle*, p.138.

是冯玉清对我的遗忘，而是我第一次亲眼目睹到美丽的残酷凋零。那个站在屋前迎着朝阳抬起双臂梳头的冯玉清，在我此后的记忆里已经蒙上了一层厚厚的尘。³²⁵

Even though Guanglin and his friends see all these happenings in the adult world, they may be too young to realize the power of fate. By presenting the tragic lives of the adults, the author intends to reveal to readers his interpretation of destiny. Tightly controlled by their fates, the lives of the adult characters can hardly be influenced by their own wills and efforts. This is what Yu Hua understands by the internal laws of the world — the uncertainty of fate.

Living in the era of the Cultural Revolution, the characters in this story are destined to live tragic lives, the general fate of everyone living in that period. Yu Hua's interpretation of destiny, however, reaches far beyond this limited understanding. The various fates of Yu Hua's characters are manipulated by an invisible hand. The grandfather, for instance, is a hardworking and skillful stonemason, but his brilliant career lasts such a short time that he has to live in memory most of his life. While he tries to fight his fate by leading his fellow stonemasons to build bridges in south China, this only results in the deaths of his followers. Similarly, the mother, elder brother, Feng Yuqing and Wang Liqiang all challenge their fates, but with a bleak and desperate gesture. They cannot escape their destinies.

³²⁵ Yu Hua, *Xiyu yu huhan*, p. 151.

What the teenagers have received from the parental world are abandonment, negative role models and dissolution. The most immediate result of these experiences is loneliness. In fact, the atmosphere of loneliness pervades the entire story. Almost everyone in the story lives a lonely and alienated life, not only the children, but also the adults, even the fathers. For instance, in the adult world, Guanglin's grandfather's loneliness originates from his disillusion with the career of his youth; Guanglin's father's later alienation is caused by his own degeneration; and Wang Liqiang's isolation stems primarily from the lack of harmony in his sexual relations with his wife.

Guanglin's Self-Sufficient Peer Community

In the children's world, the feeling of loneliness is the impetus for Guanglin's longing for tenderness and warmth. Historically speaking, with the founding of the People's Republic of China, the Communist Party advocated collectivism, gradually substituting this "ism" for tender and warm relationships between individuals, relationships which were further destroyed in the Great Cultural Revolution.³²⁶ With tenderness and warmth withdrawn from people's lives, loneliness became an immediate reality. In the novel, however, Guanglin, with the pure heart of a young boy, yearns for these positive elements in spite of the cruelty of reality. Luckily, the small peer community in which Guanglin and his friends stay doesn't disappoint him.

³²⁶ Edward Friedman, Paul Pickowicz and Mark Selden, *Chinese Village, Socialist State*, Yale University Press, 1991. In this book, the authors illustrate how the CCP's dictatorship affected Chinese popular society and how ordinary people resisted these changes.

It is noteworthy that sibling relations play no role in the supportive peer community. The fragility of fraternal bonds is evident everywhere: Guanglin's strained relationship with his older brother Guangping, Su Yu's estrangement from his younger brother Su Hang, Lulu's yearning for an older brother, Liu Xiaoqing's loss of his older brother. As the psychologist F. Philip Rice notes, sibling relationships between older brothers who act as role models and younger siblings who imitate them can be "vitally important" in the development of an adolescent's personality traits and overall behavior. Further, these old siblings often serve "as surrogate parents, acting as caretakers, teachers, playmates and confidants."³²⁷ However, in Guanglin's case, it is from among his classmates and males younger and older that he finds necessary mental and physical support and guidance.

When Guanglin lives with the Wang family in Littlemarsh, his friendship with his classmate, Guoqing, provides him the sweetest memories about childhood. They go to the riverside to wait for waves or climb onto the roof of Guoqing's house to overlook the distant open field. More importantly, they learn to share with and support each other. After Guoqing is rejected by his father, Guanglin and another boy steal food from their homes to feed Guoqing. In return, Guoqing shares the pocket money given to him by his uncles and aunts with his friends. After Guanglin loses his foster parents, it is his friends who generously buy him a ship ticket and see him off at the ferry. The author deliberately

³²⁷ Philip F. Rice, *The Adolescent – Development, Relationships, and Culture*, p.44.

makes the adults absent from these scenes in order to demonstrate the self-sufficiency of the sibling world. When in difficulty, the children receive warmth, support, consideration and care from their peers.

After Guanglin returns to his hometown, he encounters the Su brothers: Su Yu and Su Hang. Because they both feel lonely and alienated, Guanglin and Su Yu establish a deep friendship. A couple of years older than Guanglin, Su Yu acts as both Guanglin's older brother and confidant.

Together they experience the anxiety of their sexual awakening. Their sexual curiosity and trepidation is disclosed particularly in the second chapter of the novel, when Su Yu's brother steals a medical book from his father's library and shows his classmates a picture of female genitalia. Guanglin, however, misses this chance at sexual awakening because he has to stand sentry at the door. His sexual awakening has its origins in yet more secret behavior — masturbating at night — through which he obtains a virtually mystical feeling. His life is divided into two parts — day and night. At night, he indulges in this mystical experience, whereas during the day, he feels guilty and impure. He is so tortured by this inner conflict that he alienates himself from Su Yu. Su Yu, however, after hearing Guanglin's concern, tells Guanglin that this is quite normal behavior for boys, and shows him the picture of female genitalia he has missed. Guanglin is completely released from his feelings of guilt. He says, "I will never forget that morning beside the

pond with Su Yu. In the wake of his admission, daytime recovered its beauty.”³²⁸ 我永远难忘和苏宇站在池塘旁的这个上午，因为苏宇的话，白昼重新变得那么美好。³²⁹

Like most of the boys in his class, Guanglin has a crush on Cao Li (曹丽), his classmate in high school, the girl of his sexual fantasies. She is so pure and holy in Guanglin's eyes that he blushes nervously every time he encounters her. The illusion of her purity is shattered irrevocably when, eavesdropping on her conversation with other girls, he hears that she is enchanted by the hairy, masculine legs of another boy, the worst student in the class. Yu Hua describes Guanglin's psychological fluctuation:

I walked all the way to the pond next to the school and stood there for a long time, watching the sunlight and the foliage that floated on the water's surface, and my deep disappointment with Cao Li slowly evolved into self-pity. For the first time in my life a beautiful dream had been shattered.³³⁰

我一直走到校旁的池塘边，独自站立很久，看着水面漂浮的阳光和树叶，将对曹丽的深深失望，慢慢转化成对自己的怜悯。这是我一生里第一次美好向往的破灭。³³¹

In spite of his comforting to Guanglin, Su Yu himself struggles with his sexual frustration, leading him to suddenly embrace a young woman on the street. For this misconduct, he is put into detention for one year. The incident, however, has a positive

³²⁸ Barr, tr. *Cries in the Drizzle*, p.97.

³²⁹ Yu Hua, *Xiyu yu huhan*, p. 107.

³³⁰ Barr, tr. *Cries in the Drizzle*, p.104.

³³¹ Yu Hua, *Xiyu yu huhan*, p. 115.

outcome as well since it enables Su Yu to understand and forgive his father's short-lived affair with the widow.

We were bewildered by that smile of his, and it was not until later that I understood what lay behind it. Despite Su Yu's seemingly terrible plight, he himself felt that pressure had been lifted from his shoulders. Afterwards he was to tell me, "I understood how it was my father came to do what he did."³³²

苏宇当初的笑容让我们大吃一惊，直到后来我才明白他为何微笑。那时的苏宇看上去处境艰难，可他却因此解脱了心灵重压。他后来告诉我：“我知道了父亲当时为什么会干出那种事”。³³³

Meticulous readers may find that Yu Hua, in a very subtle way, presents a hint of homosexual love between Su Yu and Guanglin. In Guanglin's eyes, Su Yu is a crystal boy: quiet, elegant, innocent and peaceful. Guanglin is jealous of Su Yu's friendship with Zheng Liang, a teenage boy of great stature. Guanglin becomes even more jealous of Zheng Liang when Su Yu describes his feeling of embracing a woman as holding Zheng Liang's arms. At last, however, Su Yu confesses to Guanglin that actually he felt he was holding Guanglin's shoulder instead of Zheng Liang's. After hearing Su Yu's words, Guanglin felt "his smile and his bashful voice warmed me and sustained me, that night when the moonlight came and went."³³⁴

³³² Barr, tr. *Cries in the Drizzle*, p. 114..

³³³ Yu Hua, *Xiyu yu huhan*, p. 125.

³³⁴ Barr, tr. *Cries in the Drizzle*, p. 121..

For a short period after Su Yu's death, Guanglin befriends a seven-year-old boy, Lulu 鲁鲁, the only son of Feng Yuqing. This friendship parallels his former friendship with Su Yu. In this friendship, however, he plays the role of Su Yu and acts as Lulu's older brother and protector. This friendship allows him to better understand his past friend.

Our friendship quickly blossomed. Two years earlier, I had experienced the warmth of friendship thanks to Su Yu, my senior in years, and now, when I was with little Lulu, I often felt as though I were Su Yu, gazing at me as I once was.³³⁵

我和鲁鲁的友情迅速成长，两年前我在年长的苏宇那里体会友情的温暖，两年后我和年幼的鲁鲁在一起时，常常感到自己成为了苏宇，正注视着过去的我。³³⁶

Lulu's loneliness and stubborn expression also remind Guanglin of his own childhood:

Watching his boyish gait, a warm feeling coursed through my veins. It was as though I was seeing my own childhood unrolling before me.³³⁷

看着这个小男孩在走路时都透露出来的幼稚，我体内经常有一股温情在流淌。我看到的似乎是自己的童年在行走。³³⁸

³³⁵ Ibid., p.133.

³³⁶ Yu Hua, *Xiyu yu huhan*, p.145.

³³⁷ Barr, tr. *Cries in the Drizzle*, p.130.

³³⁸ Yu Hua, *Xiyu yu huhan*, p. 142.

When talking with him, Lulu looks at him with happiness and admiration, and he feels Lulu's complete and unconditional trust. By presenting these two successive friendships, Yu Hua discloses the continuation of brotherhood in peer community. When the older sibling finishes his mission of guiding a younger boy, that boy in turn becomes the "caretaker, teacher, playmate and confidant" of his own younger sibling.³³⁹

Peer community vs. Parental Society

Besides presenting a self-sufficient peer community, Yu Hua goes even further, letting the peer community take care of the parental world. The children take on the responsibilities that should have been borne by the adults. In this story, readers can see everywhere that the sons are taking care of their fathers and mothers.

For instance, Guoqing always keeps the First Aid kit with him. Whenever his father becomes ill, he will ask him his symptoms and provide the proper medication as if he were a doctor. For Guoqing, the First Aid kit becomes a tie between father and son, and is also a token of his sense of responsibility to take care of his father. Even after Guoqing is abandoned by his father, he still firmly believes that his father will come back to him when the father is sick. His innocent belief, however, is finally shattered after seeing his father go to the hospital; he realizes that he has been completely rejected by his father. He tells his friends, with tears: "I saw him go in to the hospital. If he doesn't come to see me

³³⁹ F. Philip F. Rice, *The Adolescent – Development, Relationships, and Culture*, P.44.

when he's ill, then he'll never come at all."³⁴⁰ 我看到他去医院了，他生了病都不来找我，他就再也不会来找我了。³⁴¹ It is after this that he begins his friendship with the old lady, because she can bring him back to his late mother.

After his mother is arrested for prostitution, Lulu, the seven-year-old boy, goes to the Public Security Bureau and tries to take his mother back home. Later, after his mother is put into a labor camp, Lulu manages to escape from the orphanage and takes a long distance bus to look for his mother. When he finally finds his mother, he tells her that he plans to live with her in the labor camp. After his request is turned down by the police, he settles down right outside the labor camp so that he can watch his mother working in the field every day. Lulu's insistence on staying with his mother reveals both his emotional attachment to his mother and his intension of being her protector — the guardian of his mother's bedroom.³⁴²

Guangping, Guanglin's older brother, takes on the responsibility of supporting his family, sacrificing his own ambitions in life. When his father rejects his wife and children, Guangping looks after not only his own small family and his mother but also his paralyzed father-in-law. He works like a machine and runs like a rabbit from the fields to his home and his father-in-law's home. In spite of the family's poverty, when his mother is seriously ill, he insists on carrying her to the hospital. The mother refuses to go, saying,

³⁴⁰ Barr, tr. *Cries in the Drizzle*, p.246.

³⁴¹ Yu Hua, *Xiyu yu huhan*, p. 261.

³⁴² Philip F. Rice, *The Adolescent – Development, Relationships, and Culture*. In his book, Rice discusses that how the son tries to play the role of the guardian of his mother's bedroom in a single mother family.

"I am going to die anyway. The money's not worth spending."³⁴³ 死都要死了, 不要花那钱。³⁴⁴ When he carries his mother on his back, however, "a girlish, bashful look began to appear on her face."³⁴⁵ 脸上开始出现少女般甜蜜的羞涩。³⁴⁶ The mother is proud of such a demonstration of her son's filial piety.

Fear of Growing up, the end of Adolescence – Death

Guanglin, his brothers and his friends do not grow up under positive circumstances. On the one hand, their feelings of loneliness and isolation make them eager to grow up, wanting to join the company of the adult world, while on the other hand, the miserable experiences of their parents in that world frighten them. The overwhelming likelihood of a gloomy future makes them fear growing up, a fear confirmed by the adult life of Guangping. Guangping is a courageous boy who dreams of living a decent life in the city. This dream is shattered when entrance examinations to universities are cancelled during the Great Cultural Revolution, and students are deprived of the right to higher education. Students from the countryside are forced instead to return to their hometowns, having no opportunity to choose options for their own lives. "By the time Sun Guangping graduated from high school and returned home to work the land, his self-confidence had sunk to a new low."³⁴⁷ 孙光平高中毕业回家务农以后, 脸上的自信就一扫而光了。³⁴⁸ Without

³⁴³ Barr, tr. *Cries in the Drizzle*, p.67.

³⁴⁴ Yu Hua, *Xiyu yu huhan*, p. 72.

³⁴⁵ Barr, tr. *Cries in the Drizzle*, p.67.

³⁴⁶ Yu Hua, *Xiyu yu huhan*, p. 72.

³⁴⁷ Barr, tr. *Cries in the Drizzle*, p.58.

any specific purpose in life, he climbs into a widow's bed at night, as did his father. In the daytime, he watches the old men with wrinkles on their faces and dust on their bodies, walking back from the fields. His eyes reveal his complete emptiness and sadness. "This grim sight had struck a chord in him, making him wonder about the latter stages of his own life."³⁴⁹ 孙光平触景生情地想到了自己命运的最后部分。³⁵⁰ Giving tacit consent to the status quo, he begins his boring, destitute life in Southgate. Without any doubt, such will also be the future of his brothers and other fellow country boys. They understandably fear the inevitable journey to adulthood.

Responding to this gloomy future, Yu Hua sets death as the end of youth's journey.

Yu Hua chooses two symbols to represent two modes of existence: cries and drizzle.

Death is their common ending.

The very title of the story, *Cries in the Drizzle*, contains two symbols: cries and drizzle, with the latter the backdrop of the former. Though the story involves more than twenty life stories, the modes of existence of all individuals in this novel can fit into these two categories.

The story starts with a woman's cries: the sound of her weeping is accompanied by the fears of a six-year-old boy one rainy night. "Then, from far away, there came the sound of a woman's anguished wails. When those hoarse cries erupted so suddenly in the

³⁴⁸ Yu Hua, *Xiyu yu huhan*, p. 63.

³⁴⁹ Barr, tr. *Cries in the Drizzle*, p.58.

³⁵⁰ Yu Hua, *Xiyu yu huhan*, p.63.

still of the night, the boy that I was then shivered and trembled.”³⁵¹

一个女人哭泣般的呼喊声从远处传来，嘶哑的声音在当初寂静无比的黑夜里突然响起，使我此刻回想中的童年颤抖不已。³⁵² Rain forms the backdrop for this cries and is also a form of metaphorical weeping. The boy is fearful about the lack of response to the woman's wails:

Anxiously, I expected to hear another voice, a voice that would respond to her wails, that could assuage her grief, but it never materialized . . . Surely there is nothing more chilling than the sound of inconsolable cries on such a desolate night.³⁵³

我是那么急切和害怕地期待着另一个声音的来到，一个出来回答女人的呼喊，能够平息她哭泣的声音。可是没有出现 . . . 再也没有比孤独的无依无靠的呼喊声更让人战栗了，在雨中空旷的黑夜里。³⁵⁴

The boy later discovers a sound to answer the woman's wails, the rustling of the clothes of a man dressed in black walking in the field. In the end, however, the man in black is found dead in a dilapidated temple, completing the set of images: crying, drizzle and death. If crying and drizzle are two forms of existence, death is their final goal -- the ultimate fate of all human beings.

While "cries" may at times reflect a positive mode of existence, for the most part it

³⁵¹ Barr, tr. *Cries in the Drizzle*, p.3.

³⁵² Yu Hua, *Xiyu yu huhan*, p. 9.

³⁵³ Barr, tr. *Cries in the Drizzle*, pp.3-4.

³⁵⁴ Yu Hua, *Xiyu yu huhan*, p. 9.

is inevitably painted a tragic color. The younger generation and that of their fathers have different ways of cries. The former's cries are accompanied by a sense of loneliness and anxiety at the idea of growing up. The sexual awakenings of Guanglin, his brother, and Su's brother are calls of their youth. Guanglin, Su Yu, Guoqing and Lulu's pursuit of tenderness, warmth and friendship are rallying cries against an indifferent world; Guoqing's and Lulu's persistence in living with their parents is a railing against their fear of abandonment.

If the cries of the younger generation stem from their fears and sadness at the prospect of aging, then the earlier generation's calls originate from their lack of satisfaction with reality. The cries of the father and Wang Liqiang reveal their life disturbances and sexual passions. The father's adultery is a desperate wail against his failure to receive a political promotion. Wang Liqiang's bombing of the female cadre's house and subsequent suicide are shouts against asceticism, with, however, the end result of self-destruction.

In comparison to Guanglin's father and Wang Liqiang, the grandfather and Li Xiuying are much weaker and cannot cry out loudly against their adversities. Their lives can perhaps be likened to drizzle or ineffectual rain, even fog. For example, the grandfather lives a humble and self-abasing life, completely neglecting his own brilliant past. In his later years, he has to rely on his son and is forced to employ all his intelligence and cunning to secretly fight with his son for three meals a day. At last, he

waits for death on his sickbed, refusing to eat anything. His refusal of food is an indirect refusal to continue to live in this “drizzle” mode of existence. Li Xiuying, the wife of Wang Liqiang, is deprived of the ability to cry out because she is so weak that she must remain in bed all the time. She is destined to live a dreary existence in the drizzle. This sickly woman, however, makes the only loud noise in her life after the death of her husband. When the people from the army tell her the news of her husband's death, she screams, “You people—all of you—killed Wang Liqiang, and that’s a fact. But it’s me you really want to see dead.”³⁵⁵ 你们，所有的人杀死王立强，其实是为了杀我。³⁵⁶ Thus, she proclaims the true nature of her husband's death. In the drizzle, she rails against the whole system, the whole era.

If cries and drizzle are two modes of existence, then death is their common ending. Yu Hua's philosophical understanding of death deeply penetrates this story. Life is limited by the framework of time. Death, however, transcends time. It is notable that every time Yu Hua describes death, he applies the word “yi lao yong yi”——劳永逸 which means a solution holding good for all time. When recalling the death of his younger brother Guangming, Guanglin feels that his brother freed himself from the constraints of time. The death of his brother is a permanent departure:

When my vision traverses the long passage of memory and sees Sun
Guangming once more, what he left then was not the house: what he

³⁵⁵ Barr, tr. *Cries in the Drizzle*, p.306.

³⁵⁶ Yu Hua, *Xiyu yu huhan*, p.324.

walked out of so carelessly was time itself. As soon as he lost his connection with time, he acquired a fixity and permanence, whereas we continue to be carried forward by its momentum. What Sun Guangming sees is time bearing away the people and the scenery around him. And what I see is another kind of truth: after the living bury the dead, the latter forever lie stationary, while the former continue their restless motion. In the stillness of the dead, we who still roam footloose can see a message sent by time.³⁵⁷

当我的目光穿越了漫长的回忆之路，重新看到孙光明时，他走出的已经不是房屋，我的弟弟不小心走出了时间。他一旦脱离时间便被固定下来，我们则在时间的推移下继续前行。孙光明将会看着时间带走了他周围的人和周围的景色。我看到了这样的真实场景：生者将死者埋葬以后，死者便永远躺在那里，而生者继续走动。这真实的场景是时间给予依然浪迹在现实里的人的暗示。³⁵⁸

If death means only that a person is derailed from the path of time, then death should never be considered an abhorrent conclusion. This is the concept Yu Hua hopes to express through this story. He describes Guanglin's feeling when first seeing the dead man in the dilapidated temple: "It was the first time I saw a dead man, and it looked to me as though he was sleeping. That must have been the extent of my reaction when I was six: that dying was like falling asleep."³⁵⁹ 我第一次看到了死去的人，看上去他象是睡着了。这是我六岁时的真实感受，原来死去就是睡着了。³⁶⁰ Death means people enter

³⁵⁷ Barr, tr. *Cries in the Drizzle*, p.36.

³⁵⁸ Yu Hua, *Xiyu yu huhan*, p. 40.

³⁵⁹ Barr, tr. *Cries in the Drizzle*, p.5.

³⁶⁰ Yu Hua, *Xiyu yu huhan*, p. 11.

an eternal quietness.

In this story, besides the death of adults, three young men die before reaching their adulthood, Guanglin's younger brother and his two friends. The last two both die of sickness at the threshold of eighteen: Su Yu and an unnamed young man who always wears a peaked cap and can blow beautiful melodies on a long flute. The image of this anonymous youth first appears in Yu Hua's short story, "The April Third Incident" in which a young man plays harmonica instead of flute. The death of Su Yu and that young man is a permanent and silent slumber. Their youth is everlastingly sealed.

Conclusion

Tragic *Bildungsroman*

In the previous two chapters, I presented a thematic analysis of the coming-of-age stories of Su Tong and Yu Hua. In this chapter, I will place these stories in comparative perspective by relating them to both earlier Chinese *chengzhang xiaoshuo* written during the Mao Era and the European *Bildungsroman* tradition. In so doing, I will explore the interaction between the literary genre and individual Chinese literary work, and to demonstrate how these particular Chinese stories enrich the *Bildungsroman* literary genre by providing a body of tragic, semi-parodic or even anti-*Bildungsroman*. Their association with the Cultural Revolution generation endows these Chinese *chengzhang xiaoshuo* with such connotations.

In the following paragraphs, I will illustrate the tragic, anti- and parodic implications of Su Tong's and Yu Hua's coming-of-age stories from two aspects. I will first demonstrate how Su's and Yu's stories differentiate themselves from the coming-of-age stories written by other Chinese writers during the Mao Era in terms of both content and language; then I will refer the two Chinese authors' stories to the theoretical corpus of the *Bildungsroman* by examining their commonality with and discrepancy from the traditional *Bildungsroman* stories. I argue that the anti-, tragic and parodic sense of Su's and Yu's stories lies in the fact that they deviate from the traditional European *Bildungsroman* stories by not allowing the young protagonists to achieve accommodation

in society, or make peace with their realities after experiencing all kinds of ordeals and trials; thus depriving the reader of the educational function of *Bildungsroman*.

Since Mao's famous "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art" in 1942, Chinese literature in mainland China had become instrumental in legitimating and strengthening the CCP's reign. The view of literature mostly gave priority to political correctness over artistic merit. The basic task of writers was to create heroic models of workers, soldiers and peasants. The dominant conflicts of the stories were class struggle and the contradiction between public and individual benefits. Overt political messages are the hallmark of the literary works written in the Mao Era. As I showed in Chapter Two, the *chengzhang xiaoshuo* written in this period of time, such as Yang Mo's *The Song of Youth*, Wang Meng's *Long Live Youth*, and Hao Ran's *Bright Sunny Day*,³⁶¹ follow the formulaic writing promoted by Mao Zedong, which portrays Chinese young people as the "morning sun at eight or nine o'clock," who grow up into "the socialist new men" under the guidance and cultivation of the CCP. There is an evolutionary change in the formation of the young protagonist's character and socialization. No matter what class background the young protagonist comes from — whether proletarian class or petty bourgeois class — his or her youth is legitimated by becoming a member of the CCP in due course and devoting himself or herself to the career of constructing a socialist new

³⁶¹ See Richard King's *A shattered mirror: the Literature of the Cultural Revolution* (PhD Thesis, University of British Columbia, 1984) for more information about the literature during that period of time.

China. The young protagonist happily embraces his or her bright future in Mao's China. In these stories, the Party, either represented by the school teacher or the Party secretary, plays a positive key role in the psychological and mental development and maturity of the young protagonists.

Su Tong's and Yu Hua's coming-of-age stories, however, are drastically different from the stories written by Yang Mo, Wang Meng and other writers of the Mao Era in terms of characterization, plot, and language. First, the major characters in these two writers' stories are not typically active, progressive and pro-Party young men, even though they all come from the proletarian class – peasant or urban poor families. They are not good students in school. The major young characters in Su Tong's stories are all expelled from school and have to receive their education on the streets. The young protagonists in Yu Hua's stories are also not necessarily better off than those in Su's stories even though they are not banished from school. They are marginalized or alienated students. The positive and stereotyped images of the Party secretary, school teacher and revolutionary cadre, which are personalizations of the CCP and serve as the spiritual mentors of the young people in the coming-of-age stories in the Mao Era, are subverted in Su's and Yu's stories. For example, in Yang Mo's *The Song of Youth*, when the female protagonist, Daojing, sees Lu Jiachuan, an under-cover CCP member, she passionately exclaimed: "I am looking forward to seeing you — the Party — to save me,

a person at the verge of drowning” 我总盼望你——盼望党来救我这快要沉溺的人。³⁶²

In contrast, in Su's and Yu's stories, the CCP members mostly serve as negative role models for the young people in one way or another. For example, in Su Tong's short story, "Roller Skating Away," the young protagonist is expelled from the classroom and accidentally discovers the adultery between the Party secretary and the music teacher in school. In *North Side Story*, the school teachers have regressed to the same moral level as their students by using vulgar language and violence against their students and other adults. In the same story, the mass organizations related to the CCP, such as the Workers' Propaganda Team and the Residents' Committee, only play the role of damaging the educational system by taking over schools and monitoring the perpetrators of illicit sexual acts, rather than providing moral and political guidance to the young people. In *Cries in the Drizzle*, the guiding role of the Party to the young people is even more vague and destructive. Guanglin's foster father, Wang Liqiang, a military officer in the PLA who is often depicted as the heroic and politically progressive figure in Mao's formulaic stories, only becomes the victim of the CCP's asceticism and provides a tragic and negative role model for his foster son. The withdrawal of the CCP's guiding role in the formation and socialization of youth in Su's and Yu's stories is a parody to the coming-of-age stories written by the writers in the Mao Era.

In addition, the young characters' failure to achieve maturity and become the

³⁶² Yang Mo, *Qingchun zhi ge*, p.207.

successors for socialism is another element which endows Su's and Yu's stories with an anti- and parodistic taint. All of the young characters in these two authors' stories end up in a destructive way: Dasheng lies dead on the coal mountain after single-handedly fighting ten people; Hongqi will spend his youth in prison; Xude runs away from home to face an unpredictable future; Su Yu dies of sickness; Guanglin's little brother drowns; Guanglin's older brother struggles in the countryside. None of these young people become a communist member, model youth, or hero, except for Little Cripple in *North Side Story* and to a lesser extent the little brother Guangming in *Cries in the Drizzle*. However, Little Cripple's becoming of a model youth reads more like a parody than a positive presentation. Little Cripple is a kleptomaniac and constantly causes difficulty for his family. When he is trying to steal something, he accidentally exposes a hidden ammunition depot and a class enemy. Ironically, in this way, Little Cripple finds himself giving lectures as a model youth, and for the first time in his life, he brings glory to himself and his family. Making Little Cripple into a model youth under false circumstances is Su Tong's way of parodying the model youth in the Mao's formulaic stories.

The little brother, Guangming, in *Cries in the Drizzle*, drowns to save the life of an eight-year-old boy. Even though this admirable act of "sheji jiuren" 舍己救人 (sacrificing oneself to save others) had been repeatedly elevated to be a reflection of the lofty virtue acquired by the socialist new man in the Mao era, Yu Hua treats Guangming's

heroic sacrifice more as a tragedy to himself and his family by saying: "Sun Guangming drowned trying to save him. It would be going too far, of course, to present this as an act of heroic self-sacrifice. My little brother had not reached a level of such lofty virtue as to be willing to exchange his own life for someone else's" 孙光明是为了救那个孩子才淹死的。将舍己救人用在我弟弟身上，显然是夸大其词。弟弟还没有崇高到愿意以自己的死去换别人的生。³⁶³ Guangming's death provides his father and brother with a temporary illusion of Guangming as a hero, and they imagine the government will visit the hero's family, promoting them by means of reward. They dream of upgrading their political status. This entire sequence is just a satire Yu Hua uses to mock the hierarchical system of the CCP.

Not only do Su Tong and Yu Hua not approve of their young protagonists becoming progressive model youth under the CCP's guidance and cultivation, but they also utilize some episodes as microcosms to satirize the CCP's political control over its people. For example, in *Cries in the Drizzle*, Guanglin's primary school teacher suspects Guanglin of writing a slogan against him. Guanglin's two best friends are sent to persuade and induce him to admit this to the teacher. Facing his friends' betrayal and the teacher's interrogation, the young boy is forced to admit to a crime he never committed.

Guanglin's forced confession in school is a powerful and vivid example of the inhumane practice of Party ideology at the local level, which started from the Yan'an Rectification

³⁶³ Yu Hua, *Zai xiyu zhong huhan*, p.41. English is quoted from Barr's translation, *Cries in the Drizzle*, p.37.

Movement in 1942 through the Cultural Revolution. In contrast, in the coming-of-age stories written in the Mao Era, this kind of political work is always described in a positive way so that the young student recognizes his or her ideological mistakes with the help of his or her school teacher and classmates or friends.

In addition to these anti- or parodic implications reflected in the characterizations, plots, and endings, Su Tong and Yu Hua also subvert Mao Era rhetoric and use the popular ideological jargon and political slogans for the character's own benefits in their stories. In contrast, in the literary works of the Mao era, this political and ideological jargon was usually applied positively to transmit political messages. For example, in *Cries in the Drizzle*, when Zheng Yuda, an official from the town, asks Sun Kwangtsai's opinion of the People's commune, Kwangtsai confirms that the People's commune is a good thing because "Meals are free."³⁶⁴ In spite of the extensive propaganda about the benefits of implementation of the People's commune — promoting steel production, undertaking water projects, and improving agricultural productivity, the peasants only see the more practical side of the People's commune: everything is shared; private cooking is replaced by communal dining. Sun Kwangtsai's down-to-earth response to Mao's radical collective unit exposes the gap between official rhetoric and the grass-roots perspective.

In the same story, Mao's ideological statements are often appropriated for the characters' personal advantage. For example, a shrewish wife conveniently and

³⁶⁴ Barr, tr. *Cries in the Drizzle*, p.72.

passionately combines fashionable political jargon with classical poetry and pop lyrics to reprimand her husband, a gifted but henpecked poet; and the letters of repentance, pledges to reform, and statements of self-criticism, which are often written by the CCP members to show their loyalty to the Party, become the husband's written proof of his obedience to his harsh wife. In another scene, the CCP's practice of "remembering bitterness to think of sweetness" is exploited by both Guangping and his father, Kwangtsai, for different purposes. The father asks his wife and sons to wear ragged clothes to impress some government representatives, he says: "When we think of the miseries of the old society, we are all the more aware of how sweet life is in the new society."³⁶⁵ However, when Guangping is ridiculed by his classmates in school for wearing his ragged clothes, he "[thinks] up a compelling justification for his abandonment of this costume"³⁶⁶ and tells his father that the ragged clothes are an insult to Communist society.

It is also common to see in Su Tong's *North Side Story* that the children and women conveniently quote or ape Chairman Mao's words and political slogans to legitimate their non-political behavior. For example, before Sumei takes revenge on Jinlan, a debauched woman who seduces both Sumei's husband and son, Sumei cites Chairman Mao's famous sixteen-character guideline for the use of force — "We will never attack unless we are attacked; and if we are attacked, we will certainly

³⁶⁵ Barr, tr. *Cries in the Drizzle*, p.45.

³⁶⁶ Ibid.

counterattack” 人不犯我，我不犯人；人若犯我，我必犯人³⁶⁷ to encourage herself and justify her violence against Jinlan. In another scene, when the Old Zhu tries to mediate the tense relation between his mother and his wife Jinlan, he parallels the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relation with the rivalry between the USSR and the USA by saying “Even the revisionist Soviet Union and the imperialist America have initiated peaceful negotiation, how come the two of you cannot practice peaceful coexistence” 苏修和美帝都在搞和谈了，你们为什么就不能和平共处？³⁶⁸ The extensive exploitation of ideological statements and political jargon in Su’s and Yu’s stories, on the one hand, reflect the impact of political tag phrases on Chinese society in the Mao era at large; on the other hand, the sharp contrast between the overt political implications of the CCP’s statements and slogans and their down-to-earth applications by the masses amounts to a mockery of the Mao’s rhetoric and a parody of the language used in the Mao era’s literary works.

From the above analysis, we can see that Su Tong’s and Yu Hua’s stories are oppositional and parodic to the coming-of-age stories written in the Mao Era by their of subversion of the CCP’s positive role in the development of the Chinese youth, denial of the Chinese youth of their possibility to grow up into new socialist men and women, and exploiting and debasing Mao’s official jargon and political rhetoric. In addition, their

³⁶⁷ This famous tenet was laid down by Chairman Mao Zedong in 1939 in his article “On Policy,” and since then has become the CCP’s guideline for the use of force.

³⁶⁸ Su Tong, *North Side Story*, p.243.

stories undertake a more profound reflection upon the political background of the time.

Living in the Cultural Revolution, the characters in this story are destined to live tragic lives. Everything that is abnormal and absurd becomes possible. It is this abnormality and absurdity that underlie Yu Hua's manner of presenting history. Su Tong and Yu Hua embrace an essentially pessimistic view of the future of the Chinese young people in the 1970's. Both writers have experienced one of the most violent and chaotic eras in human history in their childhood; the Cultural Revolution is part of their memories. They are both writers with a strong historical sense. Therefore, writing coming-of-age stories is not only their lyrical way of exploring the disastrous effects of historical events upon Chinese people in general and young people in particular, but also their reminder to the world that history cannot be forgotten.

When Su Tong and Yu Hua wrote their coming-of-age stories, it had been close to two hundred years since the term *Bildungsroman*, as a literary genre, was coined in Europe in the 1810s. The social and historical background of the two Chinese authors' works is different from the era of humanitarian idealism of late eighteenth-century Germany, when *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* was written, and yet their stories resonate with the European *Bildungsroman* tradition in terms of their plot and characterization, their inwardness, their humanistic concern and their psychological and intellectual seriousness. However, in spite of these commonalities, Su's and Yu's stories

tragically differentiate themselves from the traditional European *Bildungsroman* stories by making romance absent from the journey of youth, and not allowing the young protagonists to achieve accommodation in society, or make peace with their reality in due course. In this vein, the anti- or tragic version of *Bildungsroman* in Su Tong and Yu Hua is close to the "Parodistic *Bildungsroman*," a term Martin Swales coined to describe Mann's *Magic Mountain*.³⁶⁹ In the following paragraphs, I will illustrate these Chinese *chengzhang xiaoshuo*'s commonality with and discrepancy from the traditional *Bildungsroman* respectively.

The *Bildungsroman* "depicts the formation of the hero up until a certain level of completion"³⁷⁰ with "a balance between activity and contemplation."³⁷¹ Here, activity is the accumulation of experiences, the ordeal of life. Contemplation is that inwardness and self-reflection that lead to the psychological and intellectual development of the young protagonists.

Both Su Tong and Yu Hua's stories, with *North Side Story* and *Cries in the Drizzle* as examples, fit the principal elements of the plot of the *Bildungsroman*: "childhood, the conflict of generations, provinciality, larger society, self-education, alienation, ordeal by love, the search for a vocation and a philosophy [of life]."³⁷² Both Chinese writers'

³⁶⁹ Martin Swales, *The German Bildungsroman from Wieland to Hesse*, p.125.

³⁷⁰ Dennis F. Mahoney has quoted Dilthey's later definition about *Bildungsroman* in his article "The Apprenticeship of the Reader: The *Bildungsroman* of the 'Age of Goethe'" in *Reflection and Action*, p.101.

³⁷¹ George Lukacs, *The Theory of the Novel*, Anna Bostock, trans. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The M.I.T Press, 1971, p. 135.

³⁷² Jerome Hamilton Buckley, *Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding*, p.18.

stories maintain a balance between "Reflection" and "Action."³⁷³

Su Tong's *North Side* tells of the protagonist Dasheng's experiences from the age of twelve to nineteen, when he dies. Yu Hua's *Drizzle* is the reminiscence of an adult of his boyhood from six to eighteen years of age, when he leaves home for university. In both authors' stories, the "conflict of generations" is reflected in the negative role models of the parental world, specifically in the relationships between father and son. A common picture emerges in Su Tong and Yu Hua's description of the adult world. The deep-rooted anti-Confucianism and anti-intellectualism of the Cultural Revolution led to the emptying of "the humanism of China's ancient propriety"³⁷⁴ across the whole of Chinese society and the loss of the function of education, "to propagate doctrines of the ancient sages, to transmit learning, and to dispel confusion" 传道,授业,解惑³⁷⁵ in school. In this social and historical discourse, adult society, represented by the father and teacher, cannot provide proper moral and cultural guidance to their children. The Chinese *chengzhang xiaoshuo* correspond to their European counterparts in that the growing children, such as Dasheng in Su Tong's *North Side* and Guanglin and Guoqing in Yu Hua's *Drizzle*, are fatherless, alienated from their fathers or even orphaned. The teenagers in these two works, after losing or being alienated from their fathers, search for a substitute parent or

³⁷³ James N. Hardin, ed., *Reflection and Action: Essays on the Bildungsroman*, Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina, 1991. In the introduction of this book, Hardin emphasize the balance between reflection and action of the *Bildungsroman* novel.

³⁷⁴ Michael Duke, "Reinventing China: Cultural Exploration in Contemporary Chinese Fiction," *Issues and Studies* (August 1989), p34.

³⁷⁵ Han Yu (韩愈 768-824), "Shishuo 师说," in *Selected Works of Han Yu* (Han Yu wen xuan 韩愈文选), edited by Tong Dide, Publisher?, 1980, p.52.

creed in the peer community.

Yu Hua seems to be more optimistic than Su Tong in his description of peer community. In Su Tong's story, Dasheng's peer community is as helpless and cruel as the parental society, and finally leads him to self-destruction; in Yu Hua's story, Guanglin's peer community is supportive, caring and guiding, in sharp contrast with the adult society. Therefore, Su Tong's young protagonists find themselves more alienated and helpless than those in the stories of Yu Hua.

In *North Side*, Dasheng is suspended between the world of school and the vulgar Toon Street lifestyle. He is able to fully recognize his alienation, which is caused by the death of his father, bitter relations with his mother, being expelled from school and disappointment with his friends. His peer community, represented by his friends — Hongqi who ends up in jail, Xude who elopes with a married woman, and Little Cripple who misguidedly becomes a youth model — offers Dasheng very little generosity or support. He finds that he cannot "invest his trust in anyone who is not an image of innocence."³⁷⁶ Seemingly there is no one he can turn to for guidance either from his parental or peer community. Dasheng must head forward by himself. He sets off on his lonely journey and becomes a solitary hero.

Setting out on a journey, either symbolically or in real practice, is a key element in traditional European *Bildungsroman*. The journey provides the young man with a larger

³⁷⁶ Robert Bly., *Sibling Society*, p.19.

society and serves as both an “agent of liberation and a source of corruption.”³⁷⁷

Through this journey, the young protagonist experiences all kinds of difficulties and finally achieves maturity. For example, in *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, Wilhelm's symbolic journey is his involvement within theatrical circles. During that period of time, Wilhelm experiences friendship, love, responsibility and the harshness of reality. In Dasheng's case, his larger society is the black gang. His goal is to organize his own gang in Toon Street, and become a true man by defeating the other gangs in the town. Dasheng finally fulfills his wish at the price of sacrificing his young life.

The youth world in Yu Hua's story is much more positive: it plays the role that should have been played by the parental world: providing support, comfort, warmth, understanding, even guidance to the frustrated adolescents. The friendships of the young protagonist, Guanglin, throughout his childhood, with various young men, provide him with necessary mental and physical support and guidance. Despite this, Guanglin cannot escape the fate of alienation. Guanglin's alienation derives from his being abandoned by both his biological and foster families. His friends Guoqing and Su Yu suffer similar abandonment, one ending up an orphan, the other dead. Because of the complete alienation from their families, the young men in Yu Hua's stories are forced to assert their independence much earlier than they should.

In *Drizzle*, the protagonist has two journeys: first away from the countryside where

³⁷⁷ Jerome Hamilton Buckley. *Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding*, p.20.

his biological family lives to the town where his foster family resides, and then from the town back to the countryside. His first journey starts at the tender age of seven, when he is adopted by the Wang family. This change of life brings him from the countryside to a much larger world. This journey from home is in some degree the flight from provinciality. He experiences much more than his brothers, who are left behind in the countryside. In the town, Guanglin attends primary school, enjoying the friendship of his classmates and a relatively affluent material life; meanwhile, he witnesses the brutal reality of the adult world: a husband's betrayal of his wife, a desperate man's bloody revenge and suicide, a father's ruthless abandonment of his son. Five years later, Guanglin sets out on his second journey, returning from the town to the countryside. This second journey occurs in adolescence and further alienates him from the adult world, which is represented by his biological family. His return is regarded as an unlucky sign by his father because their house catches fire without apparent reason on the day he arrives home. What he witnesses at this home is just the extension and countryside version of the family life he has experienced in his foster home in the town: the harshness and narrowness of peasant life, the father's betrayal of the mother, the father's mistreatment of the grandfather, the mother's helplessness, the parents' neglect of their children. During the same period at school he embraces deep friendship with Su Yu, who plays the role of the older brother, "caretaker, teacher, playmate and confidant."³⁷⁸

³⁷⁸ Philip F. Rice, *The Adolescent – Development, Relationships, and Culture*, p.44.

The two journeys between countryside and town show Guanglin the two sides of one coin: despite different economic and geographical settings, the degenerate, desperate and helpless adult worlds are the same.

The ordeal of love is a common element in *Bildungsroman* stories, such as David's innocent love of Dora in *David Copperfield*, Wilhelm Meister's love of Natalie in *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*. In Su Tong's and Yu Hua's stories, the ordeal of love is only reflected in the anxiety of young men's sexual awakening rather than in romance. Due to the highly political repressive and ascetic nature of the Cultural Revolution, this anxiety is aggravated by the lack of proper sexual education and guidance from the parental world. As a result, many adolescents developed a pathological, irrational fear of sex. These teenagers, caught between their natural sexual desire, misconceptions of sexuality and the generally oppressed atmosphere of the whole society, in many situations turned to violence to channel their thirst for sex and love.

In Su Tong's coming-of-age stories, sexuality is always accompanied by violence or its extreme form, death. For example, in "Roller Skating Away," Cat Head's self-gratification and subsequent intense sense of guilt and shame leads to his fatal road accident; in "Memories of Mulberry Garden," two young lovers, Crimson Jade and Hairy Head, die in a bamboo grove with the boy's bite marks left on the girl's face; in *North Side*, Hongqi, a quiet boy with beautiful eyes, rapes his beloved girlfriend, Meiqi, with the disastrous result that he is sentenced to prison for nine years and Meiqi commits

suicide. In the same story, the sexual experience of the young protagonist, Dasheng, is more disturbing: the ghost of Meiqi awakens Dasheng's sexual desire. Overwhelmed by shame about and fear of the wet dreams, he kills a cat that he believes is the incarnation of Meiqi.

In *Drizzle*, though the teenagers' sexual awakening is disclosed in a less violent way, it is equally disturbing and tragic. For example, the protagonist Guanglin's sexual awakening has its origins in the secret behavior of masturbating at night, and leads to his strong sense of guilt and impurity and his alienation from his close friend, Su Yu; Su Yu's frustration leads him to suddenly embrace a young woman on the street and consequently he is placed in detention for a year.

In a normal society, an adolescent's sexual awakening is normally accompanied by romance, meeting both their sexual and emotional needs. In both Su Tong and Yu Hua's stories, emotional romance is absent. Even though there are buds of genuine love between boy and girl, they are all short-lived. In *North Side*, the mutual attraction between Hongqi and Meiqi, instead of leading to a normal romance and marriage, only leads to the destruction of two young lives. In *Drizzle*, the genuine love between Guoqing and his sweetheart only incurs the mockery and strong opposition from the girl's parents. Eventually he embarks on a hopeless campaign to retaliate against the girl's parents. The older brother's admiration of his female classmate only brings him insult and alienation because of the girl's family's higher social and political status. Giving tacit consent to the

status quo, the brother withdraws to the countryside and climbs into a widow's bed, as did his father.

Taking romance and love away from the experience of teenagers' sexual awakening, Su Tong and Yu Hua reveal that in 1970s' China, the adolescent's sexual maturity is not accompanied by love, but by guilt, shame, violence and even death.

The trait that most differentiates these two Chinese writers' coming-of-age stories from traditional European *Bildungsroman* novels is the ending. Even though critics repeatedly emphasize that the *Bildungsroman* is about the journey of youth itself and that achieving a gratifying result is not the point, most traditional European *Bildungsroman* novels have a positive ending. Normally, at the end, the tension between "potentiality and actuality," which is central to the growth of the young hero, is released. For example, Whiliem Mester finally leaves the theatre, accepts the guidance of the Society of the Tower, and marries the Beautiful Amazon. The Society of the Tower is the means to foster Whiliem's intellectual and cultural ideals and ultimate point the way to a new society.³⁷⁹

In contrast, no young man from the stories of Su Tong and Yu Hua finds a happy end. Guanglin seems to be the only one with a promising future: he will leave home for university. Rather than taking this as an optimistic ending, I would rather see Guanglin, the implied author, as a witness and bearer of history. He has witnessed the suffering of

³⁷⁹ Martin Swales, *The German Bildungsroman from Wieland to Hesse*, pp.57-73.

his peers and degenerate desperate lives of his parental generation. He carries the responsibility of remembering this period of history and passing its lessons on to later generations.

In essence, *Bildungsroman* novels are developed around the tension between the young protagonist's potentiality and reality. This tension is the ordeal the youth has to cope with in order to achieve maturity. At the end of most *Bildungsroman* stories, the young protagonist finds an "accommodation" between the individual and the society. In other words, the two ends meet. The circle of life is sealed. In the stories of Su Tong and Yu Hua, the complexity of individual potentiality is revealed in the young protagonist's assertion of independence, his dissatisfaction with the status quo of his life, his ambition, his anxiety, loneliness, fear and alienation, his longing for warmth, tenderness and support. The reality he has to face is a chaotic society full of political suppression, the failure of school, the loss of humanism and cultural tradition, the lack of positive role models, the lack of support and guidance from his parental generation, and drifting and helpless peers. Under such circumstances, his sense of self-realization can never come to terms with his reality. His youth remains unfulfilled.

All the protagonist's his childhood experiences — his education, conflicts with the parental generation, his journeys, entries into a larger world, and the ordeal of love — do not help him to learn lessons, achieve maturity, make peace with reality or find accommodation in society; instead, these bitter experiences only lead him to destruction.

In this way, the two Chinese authors intend to demonstrate that in an abnormal era — the Cultural Revolution — young people cannot successfully step over the threshold of youth to reach adulthood. They are frozen between childhood and adulthood. Death is the ceremony of their adulthood.

The *Bildungsroman* demands a balance between activity and contemplation. Martin Swales has emphasized that “the great texts sustain the dialectic of practical social reality on the one hand and the complex inwardness of the individual on the other.”³⁸⁰ The process of a young protagonist achieving practical accommodation within society parallels his psychological and intellectual development. The young protagonist’s self-reflection and self-exploration of his potentiality is a significant concern of the *Bildungsroman* novel. In these two Chinese authors’ stories, the complex inwardness of the young protagonists is explored as the plots progress.

In *North Side*, what is important for our purposes is the way the novel explores the underlying tension of Dasheng’s persona. Dasheng is not an unthinking person. However, his self-examinations and his analysis of his situation are too simple, and too often he relies on convenient labels. At any given point in Dasheng’s life, there are more aspects to his personality than he is able to realize in any pursuit or course of action. For example, in his bizarre relationship with Meiqi either before or after her death, he never realizes-

³⁸⁰ Martin Swales, *The German Bildungsroman from Wieland to Hesse*, p.6.

that Meiqi, for him, is a cipher for feminine beauty and fragility, womanhood, physical vitality and spontaneous sensuality. Instead, each time after his wet dream, he only experiences feelings of anger, frustration and hatred because he, like everyone else living on Toon Street, regards the midnight visit of Meiqi's ghost as a revenge for her wrongful death. The wet dreams consume his energy and prevent him from fulfilling his life goal — becoming the leader of a black gang. He cannot see his inner thirst for tenderness and affection, his deep sympathy for a fragile beauty, and the even more profound implication that his joy coexists with darkness and death. Therefore, he performs the only action he knows of to prevent Meiqi's visit; he kills the cat, the incarnation of Meiqi.

Similarly, he only sees his father's death as a relief from physical and verbal abuse, but cannot see his own loss of faith in the values of home and family. When he searches for a martial arts master to teach him kungfu, he doesn't recognize his deep longing for a role model who could provide him with proper guidance. He complains of his friends' betrayal, cowardliness, degeneration and drifting apart, but he doesn't realize that his friends are struggling in their own dilemmas. He is someone who is both apart from his fellows and yet longs to be one of their members.

Su Tong, as a narrator, tries to highlight what his hero fails to recognize: Dasheng's quest for a fulfilling life is limited by the historical and political conditions of his time. Therefore, Su Tong provides another character, Old Kang, to help Dasheng reflect upon reality. Su Tong endows this character with cultural and historical significance. He makes

Old Kang the bearer and guardian of the fundamental values inherent in Confucian humanism and Chinese intellectual tradition. Having lived in two different societies, the “old society” before 1949 and the “new society” after 1949, Old Kang has witnessed the social and political changes in China, and clearly realizes the crisis of the time — the failure of education, the loss of traditional values, the rejection of Confucian moral codes. He knows very well the problems society is facing in general and the particular problems Dasheng and his teenager friends have to cope with. In a normal society, Old Kang would have been able to help Dasheng and his friends and provide them with necessary guidance and advice. Unfortunately, after 1949, Old Kang dropped to the bottom of the social ladder and has been deprived the right to speak. Even though he is aware of the general social atmosphere of anti-intellectualism and anti-humanism at that time, he still tries to educate people. Unfortunately, no one listens to him. He is destined to be a failed catcher. Dasheng, limited by his education, experience and intellectual complexity, cannot recognize the support and guidance offered by Old Kang. In this novel, Old Kang’s random comments about the status quo also reflect the author’s opinion of that era.

Dasheng is alienated throughout his adolescent years. The loss of his father at an early age, aloof relations with his mother, and disappointment with his friends bring him immense emptiness. This emptiness, in turn, drives him to strive for something to

brighten his life. Unfortunately, he wanders through his experiences with a false sense of where he is going and what he is achieving in the process. He believes that the black gang promises a fuller exploration and extension of his personality than anything vouchsafed by Toon Street. For him, the essence of the black gang is the physical, palpable enactment of becoming a real man.

Both practical Toon Street reality and the aspirations of organizing a powerful black gang are insufficient to sustain Dasheng's existence. He is simply unable to convert his inner feelings into practical, outward expression. Death is the price Dasheng pays for continuously divorcing his imaginative life from social reality.

In *North Side*, Su Tong emphasizes Dasheng's strong will and his endeavor to achieve self-realization both in action and reflection. In Yu Hua's *Drizzle*, the author focuses more on the philosophical exploration of the manifold themes of existence -- loneliness, fear of growth, human nature, death and fate. *Drizzle* is a discursive narrative, a re-construction of his childhood by an adult. The recollecting self celebrates precisely that modest human wholeness that is the interaction of world and self, of facts and imaginative allegiance.

Yu Hua chooses the first-person narrator as a convenient device to open the reminiscence. The choice of first-person narrator, both as a child and as an adult, makes the narrative more flexible. The child, the primary narrator of the story, is employed to

relate the concrete stories and scenes that can be observed through a child's eyes. The existence of adult narrator provides the vehicle by which the implied author can express his own outlook or ideas. In the reminiscences of his childhood, the adult narrator often inserts his adult opinions and feelings as well as his philosophical understanding of birth, death, love, friendship, time and the like. This is the implied author (second self) who is speaking. In addition, the adult narrator's reflections highlight the limitations of the child's self-examination and analysis. This adult narrator has the same function as the character Old Kang in Su Tong's *North Side*.

Drizzle is not the description of the successful formation of the hero's personality. Unlike Dasheng in *North Side*, who makes a goal for himself of becoming the head of a powerful black gang, Guanglin seems unclear about what he wants to be. The two important periods of his life — living with his foster family and his biological family — are both out of his control. This doesn't mean that he entirely lacks autonomy, however. He is a child of an imaginative and lonely disposition. He seeks release from brutal reality by withdrawing to his inner world for fantasy and construing the wholeness of being, destiny and death. After witnessing the death of so many people around him, he, as Hans Castorp in *The Magic Mountain*, "arrives at an understanding of humanity that does not simply ignore death or scorn the dark, mysterious side of life;" he accepts death, "but without letting it gain control of his mind."³⁸¹ He expresses his humanity by reacting to

³⁸¹ Martin Swales, *The German Bildungsroman from Wieland to Hesse*, p.106.

the deaths of his friends with sympathy and condolence. Guanglin's character is formed gradually through the confluence of his inner aptitudes and talents, and by external events. There is no final end to Guanglin's course other than a casual reference to his departure for university.

From the above analysis we can see the links between two Chinese writers' stories, *North Side Story* and *Cries in the Drizzle*, and the *Bildungsroman* tradition. In the first place, these stories are about a young hero searching for a fuller realization of himself than that vouchsafed by the world in which he grows up, even though there is no accommodation to be achieved at the end because of the grim reality of China in the 1970s. Secondly, the balance between practical living and the individual's creative inwardness is explored. The hero's course is shaped not simply by his all-important contacts with the social world of adults and peers, but also by his personal psychology, his self-reflection and complex inwardness.

In spite of commonalities with the *Bildungsroman* tradition, these Chinese stories have distinctively Chinese properties. The anti-, tragic and parodic sense of these Chinese stories of the traditional *Bildungsroman* is obvious. First: though these stories contain the main elements of the traditional *Bildungsroman* novel — "childhood, the conflict of generations, provinciality, the larger society, self-education, alienation, ordeal by love, the search for a vocation and a philosophy [of life]," these experiences do not

help them to achieve maturity as in the traditional *Bildungsroman*, but instead lead the young heroes to destruction. Second: the real social world, which is supposed to guide the protagonists and eventually accommodate them, proves chaotic and violent. This world does not allow them to see their way clear to a fulfilling relationship with human society. Third: the educative environment of the protagonists is not the world of parents and teachers, but rather the vulnerable and innocent peer community. Therefore, the “education” implied in the German *bildung*³⁸² does not really happen, or at least it is a negative or destructive education upon the generation who came of age during the Cultural Revolution.

³⁸² There is a lovely piece of conceptual history, or *Begriffsgeschichte* on this term by Reinhart Koselleck in the Chapter “On the Anthropological and Semantic Structure of Bildung” in *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts*, Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2002.

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