

Chinese Revolution and Chinese Literature

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Edited by

Tao Dongfeng, Yang Xiaobin,
Rosemary Roberts and Yang Ling

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P U B L I S H I N G

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INTRODUCTION

CONJURING UP THE SPECTER OF REVOLUTION

YANG XIAOBIN

1

A specter is haunting China—the specter of revolution—in the form of both residue and excess. Such an observation in the early twenty-first century would be more than evident if we look at the intriguing visions produced by the most influential Chinese artists today—Zhang Xiaogang, Yue Minjun, Wang Guangyi, Zeng Fanzhi, Liu Dahong, and Wang Jinsong, among others—whose representations of the transfigured, if not disfigured, images from the recent past astonish us with ghostly remnants.¹ Once a prevailing and principal concept not only in official discourse but even in daily life, *geming*, the Chinese term for revolution and a seemingly obsolete word in China today, has now turned into phantoms lurking through the crevices and apertures of the post-revolutionary and postmodern social space.

One cannot but look through these tiny peepholes to perceive how powerful “revolution” was in the past, when all valid literary representations of the outer world or the inner self were obliged to refer to this concept, as either an explicit historical background or an implicit spiritual passion. Regarding the latter issue, I would like to suggest that Chinese modernity, in which the concept of revolution played a dominant role at least until the end of the Mao era, cannot be understood without confessing its ecstatic nature. If I were to find a Lacanian term parallel to the Maoist term of revolution, it would certainly be *jouissance*.² No wonder modern Chinese literature often evokes historical trauma and is keenly obsessed with the death drive, in one way or another. In any case, the specter of revolution from the traumatic kernel has never ceased to haunt the cultural imaginations in modern China, even though revolution as a catchword has now been replaced by other concepts such as reform, market, development, or harmony. To a certain extent, these notions are

variations—or transformed recurrences—of the notion of revolution, as each of them functions to supplement the very idea of Chinese modernity, a supreme concept that encompasses and subsumes all other concepts. The impulse to revolutionize China has been no more than to change China in a politically radical or even violent way, which now finds its echo in the economically aggressive arena, while political harshness has not entirely vanished. Even the official ideology of “harmony” that seems to dominate the mainstream discourse is based on the strictly callous rule that suppresses inharmonious voices, in order to achieve the goal of socioeconomic progress.

In other words, to modernize China from its backwardness, or to save China from its sickness, it seems that one could not but resort to the revolutionary reservoir for elixir. This also holds true for literature: if the primary function of modern Chinese literature was to explore the road leading to Chinese modernity, revolution became a leitmotif which, widely developed and even glorified in mainstream literary works, overshadowed all other motifs. In the heyday of “revolutionary literature” eighty years ago, Guo Moruo even declared, “Literature should be praised as long as it is revolutionary and should be opposed as long as it is counterrevolutionary. We can deny the existence of the literature to be opposed . . . Then, literature is always revolutionary and the only kind of true literature is revolutionary.”³ Such a theoretical stance, indeed, represents the overriding voice of the left-wing Chinese writers who dominated the literary scene from the beginning of the last century to the end of the Cultural Revolution, during which latter period such a literary motif reached its climax. The motif of revolution has diminished drastically in the post-Mao era, even though the concept of revolution is still a conventionally valued and nominally valid one. At any rate, this does not mean that the impact of revolutionary spirit or revolutionary literature has been entirely expunged: revolutionary stories are still taught in school textbooks, revolutionary Peking operas still performed in theatres and revolutionary films still screened on TV. Critical reexaminations and literary rewritings of revolutionary literature have also become noticeable phenomena over the past two decades. The reverberating significance of revolution as both historical and literary ecstasies forces us to reflect on the persistent power of a revolutionary spirit that long existed and still exists, whether affirmatively, obliquely or ironically.

2

This volume has brought together essays by scholars from China and the West, in an effort to explore, analyze and interpret the revolutionary tradition in modern Chinese literature over the past century from various angles. If revolution is primarily understood as a way to change abruptly the historical trajectory of the nation by violent means, questions that demand special attention then include: what is the relationship between revolutionary impulse and amorous passion? What does the concept of gender identity mean in terms of revolution? How has history been represented, or revolutionized, in modern Chinese literature? How have different revolutionary narratives conceptualized history within their particular agendas? What are the intricate disparities and connections between personal and collective voices in addressing revolutionary history? How do different modes of revolutionary narrative offer different sociopolitical discourses? How has the modern literary tradition of revolution been reevaluated in recent cultural productions? and so on.

The essays collected in this volume are devoted to exploring these theoretical and textual complexities through various attempts to address to these questions. The first set of problems to be investigated, in Part 1, is related to the bodily or carnal dimension, especially the hidden implication of sexual passion, in revolutionary literature. Although the concept of revolution has played a significant role in the formation of Chinese modernity which is closely associated with bodily or sensual emancipation, bodily satisfaction has never been a literary theme to be positively developed. In any case, there is a covert motif/motive underneath the historical practice of revolution to be uncovered.

Zhang Hong's masterful analysis of the novel *The Song of Youth* by Yang Mo is intended to probe the sexual metaphor which props up the ostensible revolutionary discourse. By setting the novel in the context of the topoi of fairy tales, Zhang discovers the hidden desire behind the revolutionary impulse. As the sexually-laden exposition of political ideas and the politically-oriented writing of sexual love are interwoven in the novel, "bodily rhetoric" becomes the latent but predominant factor that determines the manner of revolutionary action. Zhang's keen observation does not stop here. He goes further to anatomize the other side of the issue, that is, how female desire and madness are disciplined, insofar as the extreme explosion of sensuality may also have the potential to challenge the standard institution of revolution.

Zhang Hong's sophisticated deconstruction of the sexual-revolutionary ardor in *The Song of Youth* is illuminating in its discovery of the dialectics

of personal desire and social ideals. Along the same lines, Charles Laughlin's reading of Jiang Guangci's fiction convincingly demonstrates that the sensual and sexual contents are the "driving force" of the revolutionary narrative. Laughlin boldly argues that the conventional formula of "revolution-plus-love" in modern Chinese literature may, in Jiang Guangci's fiction, be reformulated into "revolution-plus-sex" or at least "revolution-plus-desire" that deprives the revolutionary(s) emotion of its romantic overtones. While erotic elements are too obvious to miss in the works of Jiang's contemporaries such as Zhang Ziping, they are easily overlooked in the revolutionary fiction of Jiang Guangci, in which, as Laughlin illustrates, the revolutionary heroes rely heavily on their "biological needs." To Laughlin, Jiang's main contribution to the literary paradigm at the time is that he abolishes the conflict between social revolution and personal passion, because "revolution *is* love," or rather, revolution is a symptom of desire.

Victor Vuilleumier's analysis of poems by Lu Xun, Zang Kejia, Ai Qing and Guo Moruo endeavours to reveal the (dys)function of bodily power from symbolist poetics to revolutionary expressions. Lu Xun, Vuilleumier argues, portrays pictures of the "rupture between soul and body," in which the body is disintegrated while the soul is forever lingering without being able to reunite with its abode. This indicates Lu Xun's rejection of realistic representation: the soul as signifier and the body as signified are assembled into the poststructuralist displacement. But Lu Xun's legacy is transformed into depreciation of the individual soul and glorification of the robust body of the masses in Ai Qing's poetry. The revolutionary zeal thus reaches the pinnacle of "ecstatic" sensuality in the symbolism of a collectivized body. Thus, eventually, as Vuilleumier continues to demonstrate, the bodily images in Ai Qing's poetry only lead to the national symbol that allows no individual body. Such a critical analysis is traced back to the disclosure of the self-destructive elements in Guo Moruo's poetry, in which the explosive individual gives away his body to be subject to the absolute collective identity.

Accordingly, in revolutionary discourse, the female body in particular is no longer a corporal existence but an embodiment of historical value. The natural being of woman has been integrated into the nationalist symbolic and endowed with sociohistorical essence. Essays in Part 2 of this collection are more or less feminist critiques of the conception of women in literary expressions of revolution. The section begins with Liu Jianmei's study of late Qing fiction, in which the main issue hinges on how to represent women in the context of national symbolism. Liu juxtaposes two contesting strategies of representation: in Siqizhai's

Women's Rights, for example, female identity is monologically constructed as a symbol of revolution and subsumed into the nationalist discourse, whereas in Wang Miaoru's *A Flower in Jail* and Shao Zhenhua's *Chivalrous and Fair Ladies*, female identities are characterized not simply to signal nationalistic and revolutionary spirits, but also to illustrate the various sociocultural and psychosexual aspects of the women. In the former case, then, the gender issue is merely a subcategory of the national issue, and the sexual identity is but a secondary aspect within the revolutionary identity. In the latter two works, however, Liu finds the concept of female identities multiple, contestable, and susceptible to negotiation, as different characters represent different dimensions of women. Echoing themes touched on in Part 1, Liu emphasizes the awareness of bodily and sexual particularities of women in these two novels, in which the grand revolutionary discourse fails to exclude the trivial details of daily life. Liu's re-examination of the late Qing fiction that blends the public, revolutionary identity and the private, sexual identity of its women protagonists offers a starting point for us to observe gender identity issues in modern Chinese literature.

Li Li's critical reading of Lu Xun, Mao Dun and Zhang Tianyi's short stories corresponds to Liu Jianmei's thesis by questioning the ideological appropriation of the female body as a vehicle to serve the (male) intellectual agenda at the expense of women's own sensibility. To Li, female characters in Lu Xun's short stories, such as Xianglin's wife and Zijun, are figured in positions antagonistic to the progressive side of historical forces, so as to elicit social revolution. If Lu Xun calls for social change by showing women as the dark world to be enlightened, Mao Dun, as Li finds, utilizes the female as a revolutionary symbol. In so doing Mao Dun instrumentalizes the female body, though in a different way, for the sake of expressing the male intellectual's idealistic understanding of social revolution as natural mutation. But the concept of "mutation" in Zhang Tianyi's work obtains a different, and largely negative, meaning: Li argues that Zhang Tianyi anchors his grand revolutionary ideal by a derogatory representation of the female character's "mutation" of love and thus her bodily desire. In all three cases, therefore, female desire is transformed into a sociopolitical agent to articulate the (male) author's revolutionary desire.

Like Liu and Li, Yang Lianfen strives to reveal how revolutionary ideology affected the literary representation of the images of women in the 1920s. In the case of the woman writer Xie Bingying, femininity is articulately expunged in order to emulate the potent, or even violent, spirit of revolution, whereas to the other woman writer Bai Wei, femininity is

revolutionized, and female sex is used as “bomb” to attack, either through revenge or through sacrifice. Not only does Yang mention Jiang Guangci in a way correspondent to Laughlin, but in her critical scrutiny of Mao Dun’s writings about women, she reaches a conclusion that largely concurs with that of Li Li: Mao Dun, despite his ardent and vivid representation of women images, understands women only in terms of their revolutionary value. Likewise, in Ye Zi’s writings, revolution is found to appear as a “male culture” that allegorically or realistically manipulates the sexual features of women, whose sexual repression or liberation is always dependent on a grand historical power other than their own inner sensuality.

In a method quite different from the essays in Part 2 discussed above, Rosemary Roberts’s archetypal study of the “revolutionary model dramas” provides an illuminating perspective on the image of woman in revolutionary art during the heyday of the Maoist era. Roberts’s essay argues that the heroines of the “model dramas” are not just models for revolutionary ideology, but also variations of the traditional models of woman warriors, including Hua Mulan, Mu Guiying, She Saihua and Liang Hongyu. Therefore, the revolutionary discourse of liberation cannot escape from the conventional topoi that define the female identity in an unrevolutionary (if not counterrevolutionary) manner. Roberts astutely alludes that the preservation of traditional values is a secret aphrodisiac to arouse the audience’s enthusiasm for “modern revolutionary drama.” Such a deconstructive reading challenges the fundamental discourse articulated by revolutionary aesthetics, which is expected, but actually fails, to create a new cultural paradigm.

The questions in Part 3 concern the function of revolution as historical discourse and in historiographical representation. Chen Jianhua’s analysis of the revolutionary visions in Zhang Wentian’s and Zhang Chunfan’s “revolution-plus-love” novels is an attempt to reexamine the divergent voices during the early Republican era in relation to the dominant revolutionary discourse based on KMT ideology. Although both novels deal positively with the historical events of the Northern Expedition, they insinuate different understandings of revolution from their respective embedded ideologies: Zhang Wentian exemplifies the Communist discourse of anti-imperialism and anti-warlordism of the time; while Zhang Chunfan favors non-violence based on the principles of traditional elitism. In both cases, Chen argues, dissonant political voices are made possible by the widespread trend of print culture (especially in Shanghai in the late 1920s), over which the KMT censors were too powerless—at least far less powerful than its CCP successors—to have full control. As a

consequence of the development of urban culture, the concept of *geming* (revolution) in literary representations deviates from the official discourse. This study prompts us to reevaluate the relationships between the early Republic regime and the literary scene against the broad backdrop of sociohistorical conditions.

Like Chen Jianhua, Wang Ye attempts to show revolution not as a single, colossal discourse, but as a concept with various facades and layers. Wang's narratological study of the revolutionary fiction of the 1920s identifies four types of narrative modes that justify the significance of revolution. The quaternary division of revolutionary narratives—rebellion narrative, maturation narrative, anxiety narrative and heroic narrative—provides a useful tool to understand the different structures that generate different functions of revolution. Wang's critical perspective, nonetheless, does not stop at the description of four narrative modes, as he observes the stereotypical characterization of the labourers in rebellion narratives, the inhumane repression of personal, primitive impulses in maturation narratives, the ideologization of psychic conflicts in anxiety narratives, and the glorification and simplification of the legendary revolutionaries in heroic narratives. Wang's analysis raises further questions, such as how the four narrative modes originate and develop, for further exploration.

Despite their dissimilar narrative modes and diverse conceptions of revolution, both Li Jieren's and Liang Bin's novels contain, beyond the grand revolutionary theme, centrifugal components that deal with local or personal particularities, which are the focus of study in the following two essays. Kenny Ng's essay to some extent echoes my observation on the revolutionary craze by referring to the "carnavalesque mass behavior" demonstrated in "the most impressive passages" in Li Jieren's novel *The Great Wave*. In his detailed and brilliant reading of the novel, Ng shows how it has been neglected or deprecated by the critics and literary historians because of its suspicion of an absolutely justified idea of revolution. To Ng, nonetheless, it is precisely the work's ambiguous or even incomprehensible concept of revolution in quotidian life that makes it worthy of attention, as it offers a narrative distanced from the paradigmatic historiography of the revolutionary era.

Seeking to answer the question whether or not it is possible to find "subjective initiative" and "traces of the writing subject in a revolutionary mode of writing," Chen Xiaoming's re-reading of Liang Bin's novel *Keep the Red Flag Flying* strives to reveal the literary quality underneath its explicit political message. Chen illustrates how "the natural economic relations and human relations of rural China" and "personal experience, personal recollection and personal rhetoric" infiltrate the revolutionary

narrative, which has been read conventionally as a monumental exposition of the standard revolutionary formula. While a deconstructionist interpretation of the “red classics” is by all means a worthwhile endeavor, we are still left to wonder to what extent the personal elements destabilize the validity of the grand revolutionary idea, and how the ahistorical dimensions challenge the ideological scheme.

Such a challenge can arguably be found in the reworking of “revolutionary classics” in recent literary and artistic endeavours, a topic developed in Part 4. The contemporary cultural landscape in China, be it categorized as postmodern or post-Mao-Deng, post-socialist or post-revolutionary, is largely devoid of the idealistic and the utopian. Within such a sociocultural context, modern revolutionary “classics” have become a target for the youngsters to parody and satirize. Zhao Yong’s case study of the notorious internet video *The Chronicle of the Young Contestant Pan Dongzi of The Twinkling Red Star* (which spoofs a Cultural Revolution movie *The Twinkling Red Star*) explores the intricate relationships between popular subculture and mainstream culture, and between the commercial and the political. Zhao challenges the austere and reproachful voice from the cultural authorities over the spoof, arguing that the indignation is based on a debatable presumption that the source film is a “red classic,” a term problematic due to its market-oriented origin. Through the spoof-antispoof-pseudoapology process, the guerilla strategy of the spoof production/circulation succeeds in eluding attacks while at the same time, the ghostly replicas never cease to disseminate. As Zhao convincingly elucidates, the tension between the entertainment industry and the state propaganda machine has far from disappeared.

The widespread adoption of spoof and mockery as a mode of writing in today’s China is also the central topic of Tao Dongfeng’s essay on literature in the post-revolutionary era, which wraps up the whole anthology by summarizing three modes of “post-revolutionary writing”—the other two being “new enlightenment” and “new historicism.” Tao defines “post-revolutionary writing” not merely in terms of teleological chronology, but primarily in terms of reflective, and even deconstructive, spirit and style. At the first stage, what Tao calls “new enlightenment” fiction does not constitute a fatal challenge to orthodox revolutionary literary discourse, but offers a remedy with its humanistic quest. Not until the emergence of “new historicism,” Tao argues, do writers begin to question the grand, ossified law of History, and expose the violent and libidinal aspects of revolution in a de-rationalizing manner. But the most recent trend, owing to both consumerism and post-totalitarianism, has transformed writing on revolution from profound understanding to playful

pastiche. Tao illustrates how revolutionary signs are reshuffled to desacralize and demythologize the paramount political ideology, and how the political authority tolerates, delimits or punishes the (in)offensive pranks. Ultimately, at any rate, post-revolutionary writing cannot detach itself from the revolutionary past but must accept the destiny of being forever haunted by the revolutionary specter within itself.

3

The publication of this collection of essays owes special thanks to Professor Tao Dongfeng, who organized the “International Conference on Chinese Revolution and Chinese Literature” in Beijing, October 26-29, 2007, sponsored by Capital Normal University and *Literary Review*. Several essays in the current volume were selected from papers presented at the conference while the remaining essays were solicited from contributors known for their scholarship in the field.

To the authors of this volume, revolution (in history and in literature) is conceptualized neither as an unquestionably progressive and creative force for a new world, nor an absolutely pejorative concept that necessarily leads to sociopolitical turmoil and tragedy. Insofar as “post-revolutionary writings” cannot but reappropriate the revolutionary *spirit* as their unavoidable and inseparable traumatic kernel, studies in revolutionary literature and culture, too, must go through the zigzag experience of revolution in order to scrutinize its complex implications. In this sense, critical examinations of Chinese revolution can be regarded as part of the “post-revolutionary writings” inclined to probe the revolutionary legacy in a deconstructive way.

In other words, an effective engagement in the pursuit of the historical significance of revolution and revolutionary literature does not give ultimate answers, but explores their inherent problematics. As revolutionary history is still essential to the dominant state ideological construct in China and predominant in the collective cultural memory, the task of confronting the specter of revolution is far from finished, no matter how hidden and elusive it is in the profit- and consumption-driven contemporary era.

Notes

¹ For a detailed and theoretical analysis of their works, see my essay on Chinese avant-garde art: Yang Xiaobin, “Zhongguo qianwei yishu zhong de hongse jiyi youling” [Specters of red memory in Chinese avant-garde art], *Zhongguo wenzhe yanjiu jikan* 31 (September 2007).

² My argument owes much to Slavoj Žižek’s theory of enjoyment and politics, even though his conception of revolution is far more utopian than critical.

³ Guo Moruo, “Geming yu wenxue” [Revolution and literature], in *Geming wenxue lunji*, Shanghai: Shenglushe, 1928, 9.

PART I:

**MODERNITY AND THE REVOLUTIONARY
PASSION/BODY**

CHAPTER ONE

EROS AND POLITICS IN REVOLUTIONARY LITERATURE

ZHANG HONG

The publication of *The Song of Youth* (*Qingchun zhi ge*)¹ came at the right time. It would have been impossible for the novel to be published, let alone become a bestseller and a literary “classic,” had it been written at any other time. The novel, written and published during the period when the state carried out the movement of “socialist transformation of the intellectuals,” describes how a petty-bourgeois intellectual voluntarily transformed herself into a communist fighter under the Party’s guidance and instruction. Therefore, it is no wonder that the book became well-known as a vivid model for the ideological remolding of intellectuals, especially young intellectuals. Even today, the book is still listed by the cultural authorities as one of the required readings for the younger generations to establish a communist worldview.

As a history of the spiritual growth of revolutionary youth, *The Song of Youth* is certainly a “model” for emotional expression and political consciousness. In fact, the character Lin Daojing became a model for one or even several generations of revolutionary youth. Because the novel is grounded in a classic prototype, it incorporates the production mechanism for the “discourse of eros”—especially that for the female—in revolutionary literature, as well as the fundamental rules of “revolutionary aesthetics” that constitute the secrets of the revolutionary propaganda industry as it finds expression in literature and art.

Revolutionary “Cinderella”

1. The Dubious “Blood Lineage” of the Intellectual

The ingenious arrangement of the family background of the heroine Lin Daojing in *The Song of Youth* is significant. As a rule, in revolutionary

literature, the petty intellectual emerging from the old society usually originates from the so-called “exploiting class” (landlord or bourgeoisie, or in other words, the rich). A story of an intellectual born into a purely bourgeois family and growing up to become a communist seems to infer that a member of the “unrevolutionary” upper classes can easily be transformed to acquire the class consciousness of the proletariat. This apparently does not correspond to the political ideology of proletarian revolution. Therefore the author has to play tricks with the character’s blood lineage. In the novel, the writer cleverly arranges the heroine to have a dual lineage: her father is from the bureaucratic landlord class and her mother from the peasant class. The duality in Lin Daojing’s family background bears a certain symbolic meaning—the intellectual’s dual political identity, implies a close blood relationship with the exploiting classes. Thus, the transformation of intellectuals is an important necessity, and the process is perhaps perpetual, as he/she cannot change his/her blood relationships. The transformation of one’s ideas is fairly difficult and a change in one’s blood relationships is clearly impossible. What intellectuals will face is thus a true revolution, a thorough, incessant revolution from soul to body to remold themselves.

The author of the novel fully understands the Party’s revolutionary ideology of blood lineage: Through the association with blood relationships, class consciousness which is an acquired social consciousness becomes a natural attribute—like one’s bodily features—determining one’s fate. The revolutionary transformation of ideology is actually the process of replacing the natural kinship consciousness with revolutionary class consciousness.² In this sense, revolution is the reform or removal of one’s natural property—the fate of the integration of soul and body. Lin Daojing realizes this after her revolutionary “baptism.” She has constantly to confess her dual blood lineage:

I’m the daughter of a landlord and a peasant woman. So I’ve white bones as well as black. (257)

The landlord class—that exploiting class—has branded me with a white mark, a mark deeply engraved upon my soul. (312)

This is why the petty-bourgeois intellectual must stir up revolution deep inside the soul, in order to eliminate the old “fate” by renewing his/her blood and achieving rejuvenation. To Lin Daojing this is not an easy task. She needs to excavate the revolutionary gene inherited from her mother so that a struggle between the two different bloodlines from different classes may take place. This is a class struggle inside her body.

The story of Lin Daojing's mother in the novel seems to be a clumsy copy of Cao Yu's play *Thunder Storm* (*Leiyu*). The plot about a maid being seduced by the master and then deserted is also quite a cliché in literary history. Moreover, *The Song of Youth* reuses some scenes from *Thunder Storm*. For example, the maid was deserted (or escaped from) the master's house on a wintry night. Similar plots were deployed in many revolutionary literary and art works, such as the opera *The White-Haired Girl* (*Bai mao nü*), and became widely accepted due to their success.

It is interesting to see how different writers handle the subject of "seducing and deserting." Leo Tolstoy's *Resurrection* tells the story of a similar subject: Duke Nekhledov seduces the young maid Ekaterina Maslova, but the difference is that the story is just a prelude to moral instruction or spiritual salvation in Tolstoy's eyes. He treats the affair from the angle of the moral outlook on sex in the Christian doctrines which uphold the legitimacy and sacredness of marriage and regards extramarital sex as immoral and licentious. Tolstoy even believes that any sexual behavior that is not for the sake of reproduction should be regarded as illicit. Nekhledov therefore commits a double sin. Nevertheless, through the guidance of a higher commandment "Love," the sinful soul can be redeemed through confession and resurrected through love. Personal hostility and class animosity can be reconciled because of love. That is the real meaning of Tolstoy's "resurrection." Another example is Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, in which the subject is translated into a social tragedy of conflicts between sexes. As tension reaches the climax, the maid Tess finally kills her master Alec d'Urbervilles to escape from his sexual enslavement and clear away the physical and mental humiliation.

The Song of Youth, like other works of revolutionary literature and art, has to mark the theme of "seducing and deserting" with a stamp of class struggle. As we mentioned above, Lin Daojing's paternal lineage is of the exploiting class and maternal lineage of the labouring class. Such an arrangement is necessary because it is hard for us to imagine an opposite pattern. Male aggressiveness and their dominant position in sexual roles are easily recognized to be connected with power and authority. In revolutionary literature, the theme of sexual conflict has been almost uniformly rewritten as the theme of class conflict. Sexual inequality is concealed by class inequality and sexual conquest is actually a metaphor for political conquest. The fate of the insulted and humiliated women is only a symbolic code for class oppression, and is noticed by revolutionaries only in this way.

2. Cinderella's Childhood

Almost all revolutionaries in revolutionary literature seem to have an unfortunate childhood. Lin Daojing is no exception. The unfortunate childhood offers a psychological basis substantial enough to explain the strong revolutionary consciousness that is acquired in the future. However, it would be far-fetched to consider Lin's childhood "unfortunate," because her childhood experience is distant from the experience required for a standard revolutionary, in both quality and intensity. She lived in a somewhat inharmonious family and had spiritual oppression during her girlhood while a true revolutionary must suffer some kind of child abuse, so that the emotional intensity, like strong class hostility, needed for revolution can be generated. Nevertheless, for a female intellectual, spiritual oppression suffered in childhood might be fatally traumatic.

The prototype for Lin's childhood experience comes from Charlotte Brontë's novel *Jane Eyre*. The novel provides the richest fantasy of woman's rights in a society in which men dominate. The heroine Jane Eyre has a clear-cut personality: unyielding, self-respecting, full of rebellious courage. These characteristics stem from her childhood and teenage experiences of losing parents, relying on relatives for support, being deserted by relatives, being abused and punished unfairly in a convent, having her personality and desires oppressed, and so on. Her traumatized mind is eager for comfort and love—true and equal love. If not, she is willing to give up everything. *The Song of Youth* is a sedulous copy of *Jane Eyre* in this regard. Lin's hope for equal love is the same as that of Jane Eyre. For the sake of consistency, the author creates a childhood experience for Lin Daojing similar to that of Jane Eyre's and exaggerates her experience of maltreatment. However, the source of oppression for Chinese women is different from that in Western countries in terms of religious background, since the heroine in *The Song of Youth* has no convent to enter. Of course she could be sent to a Buddhist nunnery but if the author did so, it would sound inauthentic to Chinese readers. Therefore, the author creates a very important character—the stepmother, whose role, though not described in detail, is significant to the heroine's growth and indicates that the oppression of Chinese women comes mostly from the traditional family pillared by feudal ethics.

The archetype of this story can be found in *Cinderella* from *Grimm's Fairy Tales*. Cinderella looks like an ugly duckling when she is a little girl and is maltreated by her stepmother. She has to sleep in the kitchen and spends the day dirty and disheveled since the stepmother does not allow her to enter the rest of the house. By contrast, the little Lin "was beaten for the least offence, she slept with the servants, and was not allowed in the

main rooms unless specially required. She spent her time playing in the streets with the waifs who went about collecting cinders from the garbage heaps.” (9) It is a pure reproduction of the Cinderella story. It is, of course, a story of **revolutionary “Cinderella.”**

The struggle between the daughter and the stepmother is a war with a long history inside the family. Such stories can easily be found in folktales as well as pulp fiction by romantic writers, such as Qiong Yao, from Hong Kong and Taiwan. It is a primitive war for the right of reproduction, telling the story about the oppression of the desires of a young woman by a weak and withered old woman. The fairy tale of Cinderella has the conclusion for such stories: the young woman, with the help of the fairy’s magic power, gets wonderful dresses (actually the glamour of youth and life). In an instant, the once hidden beauty radiates, and when she comes to the palace for the party, her splendor lightens the palace and the prince’s heart. They fall in love and after a few twists and turns finally live happily ever after.

The Cinderella story can be regarded as an “allegory of growth,” which represents young women’s physical and psychological immaturity and helplessness, their fears of strange things in the outside world (adulthood) and family life, as well as their dreams about the future. We can also find a “formula for female desire” in the Cinderella story and other similar stories: desire for eros—oppression of desire—imaginary satisfaction of desire. The most exemplary tale of this type is the story of *Snow White*: a beautiful girl is expelled from the normal family setting and exiled to the rim of human society—the forest, where she has to be close to the seven distorted men (seven dwarfs) in fantasy so as to enjoy the status of princess among them. When she is deprived of the right to interact with ordinary people, her compensating eros cannot suffice. She is subjected to the magic power of the evil queen (a transformation of the evil stepmother) and falls into a pseudo-death. In other words, the oppression of eros is so strong that it threatens life.

However, *The Song of Youth* has transformed the female experience in the “allegory of growth” in a revolutionary way. The image of the stepmother is more importantly a symbol of the exploiting class. Her maltreating the stepdaughter is in fact a transformation of maltreating the offspring of the laboring class. The family tragedy about a stepmother maltreating her stepdaughter has been transformed into a tragedy of class oppression: the spiritual oppression of the laboring class by the exploiting class. Thus, the rebellion against the family by the youngster is interpreted as class rebellion with revolutionary meaning.

Genuine and Sham “Prince Charming”

1. Enchantment and Disenchantment

Even if the rebellion against her family can be done by a woman herself, it is nonetheless not easy for a woman to be herself. We have not yet found any successful examples of self-completion by women in any classical works. Against the background of male power, self-completion by women remains reliant on favourable external conditions.

Snow White must wait for the advent of a true man (prince) after she is struck by the queen's magic and falls into pseudo-death. Only when the prince utters the word “Love” can the magic be dispelled. In this story, desire for love is a woman's life. The meaning of a woman's life is an acquired one—she must depend on the man in the fantasy to liberate herself from the oppression of the “self.” The splendor of Prince Charming can be found in the image of Rochester in *Jane Eyre* and Rhett Butler in *Gone with the Wind*. Similarly, to some extent the images of Jane Eyre and Scarlett are transformations of Cinderella. Just like all the Cinderellas, Lin Daojing expects her own Prince Charming.

The “formula of female desire” is dealt with in *The Song of Youth* in an extreme way. The novel depicts Lin's despair of the old life. She escapes from the oppressive family and comes to a remote costal village, lingering on the beach all day long as a typical literary symbol of youthful depression. But she still cannot divert herself from inner loneliness, and on a wet and windy night is ready to commit suicide. Though the reasons for suicide seem quite insufficient, she throws herself into the sea and is subsequently rescued (it even seems that she jumps in in order to be rescued). This is the stereotypical plotline of a popular love story.

In a story about women, the “suicide and rescue” mode has a significant psychological implication. Death here appears to be only symbolic, or you may say it is merely a symbolic death. The “suicide and rescue” narrative mode implies the abandonment of her own body, which is the carrier of her old life. **It is the result of woman's abhorrence of her own body, while the abhorrence stems from cultural traditions' degradation and demonization of woman's body.**

On the other hand, the “suicide and rescue” narrative can be regarded as a metaphor for the female “coming of age ceremony.” The deprivation of part of the body is in a sense an indispensable procedure for a woman to enter adulthood, that is, from virgin to woman. Yu Yongze, one of the male protagonists in the novel, is crucial in assisting the girl Lin Daojing to complete this initiation ceremony. His bravery has rescued Lin from the threat of death and also helps to fulfill Lin Daojing's dream of Prince

Charming. Just like in any Cinderella story, the prince has come and the following part shall be devoted to sweet romance and happy family. This denouement meets the young girl's utopian anticipation of the future life.

Yu Yongze's qualifications to be Prince Charming are the qualities of the modern intellectual: knowledge, romantic passion (he is called "poet and chevalier" in the novel) and liberal ideas. All of these are part of the cultural spirit of enlightenment in the May Fourth era. Enlightenment was a magical tool used by the May Fourth generation to disenchant the traditional culture. It made the young people, especially young women, pursue personal liberation, rebel against the traditional family, and seek freedom of love and free choice in marriage. All of these are the standard mode of behaviour of the so-called "new youth" and also became a primary theme for the new literature of the May Fourth era.³

The other side of the image of Yu Yongze is his embodiment of individualism, supremacy of love and self-realization. It is shown that he is highly attentive to daily personal life. For example, he pays much attention to his own career and future, enjoys the warmth and comfort of the family, and so on. However, all of these are precisely the reasons why he finally loses his attraction in Lin's eyes. In her mind, this is the out-and-out mediocre philosophy of the petty-bourgeoisie.

It struck Daojing, as she stared at his lean dark face and small bright eyes, that Yongze was neither handsome nor cultivated. (78)

The realization that Yongze was not the fine character she had thought him was the worst blow of all. The chivalry and poetic quality which had made him seem superior in her eyes to all others had at last faded and vanished. He had proved to be selfish, vulgar and petty-minded, concerned only with the trivial affairs of life. (99)⁴

The change in Yu's fate is also an indicator of the shift of the cultural spirit of the time, signifying that a certain part of May Fourth culture was declining and vanishing. Lin's attitude represents the spiritual tendency of quite a few left-wing intellectuals: the defiance and criticism of the May Fourth spirit. Nevertheless it must be pointed out that the change in Lin's attitude originated in the response of the author, Yang Mo, to the ideological struggle against the influence of Hu Shi's thoughts in the 1950s, and was not in response to the spiritual change of direction of young intellectuals in the 1930s. In the novel, the author repeatedly stresses Yu's ideological background in relation to, as well as his admiration of, Hu Shi. Therefore, the breakup between Lin and Yu is a breakup between an intellectual of New China and Hu Shi—that is the

non-left-wing division of May Fourth thought.

Nonetheless, although this Prince Charming is negated in the novel, the “fable of maturation” is still deployed. The revolutionary Snow White gains a new fantasy about man. The qualities that Yu possesses are devalued and the elements that once attracted Lin have become something despicable overnight, as if struck by magic. The disenchanter turns out to be both the object of and the sacrifice to enchantment at one blow. Revolution is working its own magic on the heroine, through the abolition of personal and family values and the degradation and denial of daily, personal life.⁵ It inspires her new desire and passion, as well as conjuring up a new fantasy and expectation of man. Yu’s image is fading. He is a sham Prince Charming, or at least a trite, outdated one. And the genuine Prince Charming must have a different appearance. He must be untouched by common foibles and be enveloped in a mystic halo. Revolution, especially the glamorous, legendary underground work, satisfies the new requirements.

It is necessary to tell the genuine Prince Charming from the sham one, just as it was in many fairy tales and folktales about genuine and sham princesses or kings. Nevertheless, the technique for judgment is to be acquired through learning and it has to do with political sensitivity. Political nature is the primary index for the judgment.

2. The Political Nature of Sexual Choice

Over a long period of time, reading of literature for Chinese youngsters was limited to education in the revolutionary tradition. *The Song of Youth* certainly offered to meet that requirement, but that was not the main reason for its popularity. Compared to other revolutionary literary works, *The Song of Youth* offers something more. For example, it provides for young people a model of freedom in sexual choice, which is what the youngsters used to lack. Judged from this perspective, *The Song of Youth* more or less preserves some remnants of the New Culture of the May Fourth era. The faint breath of freedom was invaluable, though later on it became the very reason that the book was forbidden by the more hard-core “revolutionaries” for its petty-bourgeois sentiment.

The Song of Youth attempts to suggest a rational way for women to achieve liberation: that is, to attain gender equality and to establish women’s status by aligning oneself with powerful elements of society and class. However, the powerful elements of society and class are necessarily manifested through men. In a society centred on male authority, women’s choice of their social identity is always first a sexual choice. In other

words, different targets of sexual choice will affect women's social identity. On the other hand, views about sex in society and culture and the sexual targets of different social identities will also affect women's sexual choices.

In the revolutionary literary works of the 1920s and 1930s, the dilemma of women's choice of their social identity is expressed through the choice of sexual target, which is intensively embodied in the popular genre "revolution and love." In such stories, the "new women" often strive for personal liberation through sexual freedom and social liberation through revolution.

In the revolutionary literary works written from a female perspective, revolution has become a kind of special love story—a choice for women between the revolutionary and the non-revolutionary or counterrevolutionary. The performance of different political parties in the arena of love is also the contest of those political forces for spiritual fertility. The glamour of sex and the glamour of politics present a relationship of mutual transference. On the one hand it is the demonstration of political ideology by means of sex and love, while on the other hand, it is the rewriting of sex and love by means of political discourse. The females in revolutionary literature all pay varying degrees of attention to the male body. Revolutionary literature has its own symbolic codes for representing bodily features, so that men's different body characteristics become the mark of different political identities. Judged from this point of view, revolution is in fact "body politics," which can be found in the construction of intellectual images in revolutionary literature.

As mentioned above, the social stratum of the intellectual has a dual identity. In the revolutionary's eyes, they are politically untrustworthy and their life is distant from the workers and peasants. Mao Zedong made a well-known comparison between intellectuals and workers/peasants, which to a great degree decided the fate of several generations of intellectuals in China. As he points out,

I came to feel that compared with the workers and peasants the unremoulded intellectuals were not clean and that, in the last analysis, the workers and peasants were the cleanest people and, even though their hands were soiled and their feet smeared with cow-dung, they were really cleaner than the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois intellectuals.⁶

This is the dialectics of body. The necessary precondition is the separation of soul and body, which constitute the two opposite sides of the dialectic. In accordance with such a dialectic, the human body is most likely a false appearance, an uncertain "signifier," while the "signified"

often comprises the adverse side of the signifier, at least for intellectuals. “Handsome, fair-complexioned young man” becomes the sign of “hypocrisy” and sunburned face the sign of “honesty.” At that time the intellectuals in China often felt ashamed of their physical features—fair-coloured skin and frail physique. The word “revolution” (*geming*) had restored its original meaning at the level of body: the appearance (*ge* means “skin” and the whole external features) decides its possessor’s fate (*ming* means “destiny,” or the essence of life).

In *The Song of Youth*, the author stresses the physical differences in bodily characteristics when describing intellectuals with different political identities from a woman’s (and at the same time a revolutionary’s) perspective. For example, Lu Jiachuan, Luo Dafang, Jiang Hua and those who have been converted to proletarian ideology feature a tall, strong physique and radiant eyes. Villains, such as Dai Yu and Wang Jianfu, feature swollen eyes and a “donkey’s face.” The most interesting description is that of the petty-bourgeois intellectual Yu Yongze who has not yet been converted:

Lu Jiachuan looked quietly at Yongze’s bony, stooping shoulders—in his agitation he had not even troubled to take off his hat and the shadow of his head on the wall was like a large black mushroom, his lanky body representing the stalk . . . the electric light, dim at this time of night, made his long face appear more haggard and gaunt than ever. (192-93)

This is ingenious body rhetoric. Yu’s body is related to a low-ranking plant—a mushroom. However, the intention of using such a simile does not lie in the similarity between things but an innuendo leading to a certain value judgment: political as well as moral. The image of “black mushroom” will naturally arouse a kind of mental annoyance and perhaps even evoke an association with poison. This is one of the most fundamental rhetorical techniques. The physical features of the men decide not only the heroine’s sexual choice but also her political choice. Or, in other words, **the heroine chooses her political road by way of sexual choice.**

Class consciousness enables the author to have the physiognomic ability to be able to tell men’s class essence from their appearance. Lin Daojing has learnt superb skills of physiognomy in the process of revolutionary struggles. For example, once she comes across a passerby in the street and she asserts that this man is a communist. The reason is that communists have “many special characteristics in common. The young man who just passed looked much more serious than ordinary people.” Her friend Wang Xiaoyan hits the nail on the head—“Since when have

you become a physiognomist?”(375).

“Physiognomy” has played a great magic role in revolutionary literature. We can define the strange logic as: **politics pays much attention to physical features**. “Body” in revolutionary literature is not simply a substantial existence and does not belong to the “subject” (the individual) itself. Body is a highly ideological symbol. Therefore, it has become a target for political power to control and convert. In the “revolutionary model dramas,” physiognomy is combined with the conventions of the facial mask of traditional local operas, and the ancient magic is raised to an unprecedented height.

From “Jane Eyre” to “Joan of Arc”

1. On the Road to Damascus

Any class or social group which shares common values and interests has their own need of “Saints.” There is such a story in “The Acts of the Apostles” in *The New Testament*: A young Roman named Saul, who hates Christians, has been tracking and persecuting them everywhere. One day, on the road to Damascus, “suddenly there shone round about him a light from heaven: and he fell to the earth” (ACTS 9.3-4). In a bemused mood, Christ appears to him, and gives him guidance to a bright road. Inspired by the “Holy Spirit,” Saul transforms into “St. Paul,” a zealous Christian. He travels around the world to spread the Gospel of Christ.

The Song of Youth is one of the most typical “sanctification myths” in revolutionary literature and art. It displays the process of completion of the image of a “saint.” After she is acquainted with revolutionaries such as Lu Jiachuan, Lin Daojing abandons her middle-class boyfriend Yu Yongze, as well as her own exploiting class family origin. At the same time, she also abandons the “Jane Eyre” image and turns toward the long path of growing into the revolutionary “saint.” Step by step, the female student Lin Daojing transforms into a “St. Lin Daojing.” The second part of the novel can be seen as a story about how “Jane Eyre” is converted to “Joan of Arc.”

“Encountering a guide on the road” is always a key link in the context of the saint’s pilgrimage. It has equal importance in revolutionary literature and art, as a basic plot in the revolutionary “sanctification” story. Due to her bourgeois origin, our heroine Lin Daojing is eager to have such a guide. When the deeply confused Lin meets the revolutionary named Lu Jiachuan, her will to have a guide becomes much stronger. She says to Lu: “Well then, Brother Lu, show me how to join the revolution!” (187). Of

course, Lu will satisfy her request. He shepherds her on the way to revolution by telling her to turn to “the revolutionary Bible” in her search for truth and inspiration.

The “guidance” motif in *The Song of Youth* (and similar works) is shown as a metaphor. A metaphor brings some variables, because it is not directly expressed. *Red Detachment of Women* (*Hongse niangzijun*),⁷ one of the “revolutionary model dramas,” goes even further, as it eliminates the metaphorical layer so that the “guidance” motif emerges directly to manifest “guidance” explicitly. A well-known scene in *Red Detachment of Women* is called “Changqing points the way.” The escaped slave woman Wu Qinghua (named Wu Qionghua in another version) is lost in a vast jungle. The jungle is symbolic, in which “road” becomes a problem. So the heroine is like a lost lamb. She needs someone to point the way and, of course, her need is met.

As a result of her pain, she faints and falls to the ground (again!). Then, the sacred guide Hong Changqing (the name can be translated almost directly as “long live the red hero”), the Communist Party representative of the Red Army, appears to her. The stage is suddenly lit with dazzling red lights, after which the “guiding” show is enacted. Especially in the ballet version, the actors’ physical shapes are full of symbolic meaning and, along with artful use of spotlights, make the “guiding scene” a theologically meaningful fable.

There is always a female guide in western “bourgeois” literature and art, such as Dante’s and Goethe’s poems. Such a female guide is man’s fantasy of woman in the context of bourgeois culture, a manifestation of man’s desire. The guide turns out to be love, for the spiritual sublimation in bourgeois literature and art is originally driven by eros. In proletarian literature and art, the gender pattern is exactly the reverse. It is a male named Hong Changqing who leads the way, serving as the supreme leader for the Red Detachment of Women.⁸ A man plays the central role in the guiding scene, stirring up the heroine’s expectations of the future. He designs a bright and blessed future for women. This is the basic thematic mode in many works of Chinese revolutionary literature and art.

However, the two classes, the bourgeoisie and proletariat, share a common way to imagine the guidance scene—“guide” as a “love.” For example, Lin Daojing’s emotional reaction to her “guide”—the Party’s representative Lu Jiachuan—is a woman full of “feelings of love.”

“How brave he is, and how resourceful!” The thought of Lu Jiachuan’s exploits during the March the Eighteenth commemoration as well as on May Day rouse her deepest admiration; indeed, other and more complex feelings had entered into her attitude towards him. She could not analyse