Xiangchou, Nostalgia, and Solastalgia: Environmental Distress in 21st Century Chinese Ecofiction

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the significance of *xiangchou* (乡愁, usually translated into English as "nostalgia" or "homesickness") in contemporary Chinese ecofiction. The concept of *xiangchou* has been a significant feature of Chinese pastoral aesthetics, underpinning utopian ideas of rural life. *Xiangchou* remains active in contemporary Chinese environmental discourse, but this thesis argues that it is being contested and reconfigured in Chinese ecofiction, particularly that which has appeared since the turn of the millennium. In particular, this thesis argues that the widespread experience of environmental distress during China's rapid industrialization has created the conditions for "solastalgia" – a term coined by the environmental philosopher Glen Albrecht to describe homesickness caused not by exile, but by the destruction of one's environment. The registration of solastalgia in Chinese ecofiction has destabilized *xiangchou* as an anchoring concept in the Chinese rural imaginary.

The thesis selects examples of ecofiction which dramatize three key dimensions of ecological catastrophe in contemporary China: shrinking biodiversity (i.e. extinction), deforestation, and pollution. These case studies feature works by established writers such as Jia Pingwa, Ye Guangqin, and Alai, as well as emerging writers such as Jiang Rong, Chen Qiufan, and Hao Jingfang. Even though these works vary in their tone and settings, they are all united by an underlying concern with the consequences across human and more-than-human communities of the rapid urbanization, industrialization, and modernization in contemporary China.

By positing *xiangchou* (nostalgia) and solastalgia as a key dialectic in Chinese ecofiction, this thesis engages with issues of environmental injustice (cross-species, inter-ethnic, rural-urban, and transnational) in a globalizing China. In particular, what is distinctive in this thesis is the attempt to maintain both Chinese and Western critical vocabularies. The project is informed by affective ecocriticism and is part of a larger movement to globalize ecocriticism.

A Note on the Referencing Style in this Thesis

In this thesis, I follow MLA (Modern Language Association) referencing style while also using footnotes to explain the meaning of Chinese terms when necessary. For names of Chinese literary works mentioned, I use English translation plus Chinese original words and publication dates. For academic works (of which titles can be wordy), I provide English translations in the main texts while keeping the Chinese original easy-tractable in Bibliography.

For the source texts referenced in the Chinese original, if there is an existing English translation, I quote from its English translation and provide the text numbers in the main texts and English source in Bibliography. For Chinese source texts without existing English translation, I either: (1) translate it myself and provide the Chinese original in footnotes; (2) translate it myself and provide the page numbers of the texts instead of providing all Chinese original to avoid redundancy (For example, excerpts in Jia Pingwa's *Remembering Wolves*).

1. For the Chinese names in this thesis, I use Family name + Given Name as the sequence in Chinese original, for example:

Jia Pingwa Ye Guangqin Chen Qiufan Hao Jingfang

2. Exceptions are kept when these authors use their names in the English sequence (Given Name + Family name), for example:

Chia-ju Chang Lily Hong Chen David Der-wei Wang Chih-tsing Hsia Ken Liu

3. One exception is Alai (penname of Yang Yongrui, a Tibetan Chinese author).

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AUTHORSHIP DECLARATION: CO-AUTHORED PUBLICATIONS

This thesis contains work that has been published.

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Introduction

> Attached to the land and unwilling to move – this is the nature of the common people.
>
> (安土重迁，黎民之性；骨肉相附，人情所愿也。)
>
> *The Book of Han* (*Hanshu* ~89 AD), by Ban Gu (32–92 AD)

> Let the city merge into the Great Nature, let the residents see mountains and waters, let people remember *xiangchou*.
>
> (让城市融入大自然，让居民望得见山　看得见水　记得住乡愁。)
>
> *The People's Republic of China Central Urbanization Working Plenum documents* (2013)

> […] we have now entered the "age of solastalgia," where our emotional compass is pointing in the direction of chronic distress at the loss of loved "homes" and places at all scales. There is already a global pandemic of depression in humans. (11)
>
> *Earth Emotions: New Words for a New World* (2019), by Glenn A. Albrecht

My thesis investigates *xiangchou* (nostalgia) as a socio-ecological discourse in Chinese ecofiction in the new millennium. Ecofiction, or environmental fiction, refers to "fictional works that address the relationship between natural settings and the human communities that dwell within them" (Levin 1122). In Chinese, ecofiction is equivalent to *shengtai xiaoshuo* (生态小说), and its rise is a cultural response to the ecological crises in contemporary China. This thesis examines a selection of fictional works published after 2000 to understand the ramifications of ecological discourse in recent Chinese fiction and within Chinese culture more generally. The "ecological turn" (*shengtai zhuanxiang*) in Chinese culture was first visible in writing in the 1980s. Yet, although environmental literature emerged in the 1980s and the 1990s, it is not until after the turn of the century that ecofiction gained serious momentum and public significance.[1]

[1] In an interview entitled "A Historical Review and an Outlook of Contemporary Chinese Ecological Literature (*Dangdai shengtai wenxue de lishi huigu he qianjing zhanwang*)," Wang Shudong divides Chinese ecological literature into three stages, taking the 1980s as its "initiating stage

This thesis concentrates on fiction and draws on the genre's particular "revolutionary" implication in the modern Chinese state. As the prominent Chinese intellectual and social reformist Liang Qichao (1873–1929) declared: "If one intends to renovate the people of a nation, one must first renovate its fiction" (74)[2], a "revolution of fiction (*xiaoshuo geming*)" was elevated to the level of national rejuvenation in the early twentieth century. Here I take on the "novel" potential of fictional narrative to tease out the ethico-political values of ecofiction to decenter the human in literary narratives, and hence to challenge the obstinate anthropocentric social mentality. Although nonfiction, such as reportage, plays a vital role in writing about ecological crises, the imaginative resources available to fictional writing, especially the novel, allow it to challenge the anthropocentrism embedded in the ideology and cultures of modern societies. As Jim Dwyer notes: "Fiction not only speaks to both the head and heart more directly than nonfiction, but it also speaks more deeply about them" (7). Because the environmental crisis is a "crisis of imagination" and a crisis of culture, fiction has a unique capacity to propose new imaginative possibilities.[3]

While commonly translated as rural nostalgia or homesickness, *xiangchou* (乡愁) has complex meanings in the Chinese context. Most directly, the concept of *xiangchou* comes from the ancient agrarian "attachment to native land" (*antu zhongqian*), a human–land bond long ingrained in East Asian societies. In this sense, *xiangchou* is an example of what the Chinese American humanist geographer Yi-fu Tuan (1930–) termed "topophilia" – a universal human–place attachment – which is invoked by many environmentalists to endorse emplaced knowledge and human accountability to indigenous ecologies.[4] This partially explains why *xiangchou* occupies a significant place in contemporary Chinese ecofiction, but the concept has wider socio-political implications. Because rural China (*xiangtu zhongguo*).[5] is seen as quintessentially "Chinese," *xiangchou* also facilitates a collective Chinese national

(*fasheng jieduan*)," the 1990s as its "developing stage (*fazhan jieduan*)," and the post-2000s as its "prosperous stage (*fanrong jieduan*)." This periodization is echoed in Huang Yi's *An Ecocritical Study of Contemporary Chinese Ecofiction* (*Zhongguo dangdai xiaoshuo de shengtai pipan*), and Huang argues that eco-writing has been leading fiction, especially rural-themed fiction, since the turn of the century (23).

[2] "欲新一国之民 不可不先新一国之小说" in Liang, Qichao's 1902 essay "On the Relationship Between Fiction and the Government of the People" ("论小说与群治之关系"). Liang's proposal to "revolutionize fiction" was soon concurred by his contemporaries, which ushered in an era of the booming of fictional writing, translation, and publication in the early twentieth century. The "revolution of fiction" elevated the position of fictional narrative in Chinese literature and inject a socio-political cogency into fiction as a genre. For further research on fiction in early modern China, see Forges. "The Uses of Fiction: Liang Qichao and His Contemporaries" in *The Columbia Companion to Modern Chinese Literature* (2016) and Wang, Biao, and Li Jikai. "*Xiaoshuo geming*" in *Encyclopedia of China.*

[3] Regarding climate change, Amitav Ghosh wrote in *The Great Derangement* (2016): "The climate crisis is a crisis of culture and thus of imagination," Although Ghosh only foregrounds climate change as "perhaps the most important question ever to confront culture in the broadest sense" (9), I would add that the environmental crisis is a crisis of culture and of imagination, especially in contemporary Chinese context given its severity, and scale.

[4] Although Ursula Heise does not agree with Beery, she is aware that Topophilia "is often alluded to by ecologically oriented thinkers and writers" (37). Studies about the intersection between topophilia and environmentalism are not rare – see examples such as Thomas et al. (2011), and Olwig (2019).

[5] *Xiangtu zhongguo* (rural China) is the title of a representative work by Fei Xiaotong (费孝通), a forerunning Chinese anthropologist. The concept becomes widely known and accepted as a characteristic of traditional Chinese society.

identity that is informed by the agrarian tradition and the Confucian family–state isomorphism (*jiaguo tonggou*). Finally, following the success of the contemporary mainlander-Taiwanese poet Yu Guangzhong's *Xiangchou* (*Nostalgia*, 1972), *xiangchou* is also commonly used to address the relationship between Taiwan and mainland China..[6]

However, in an era of rapid urbanization, industrialization, and environmental degradation, a tension arises between an idea of the rural hinterlands blighted by backwardness, and the connection to place and tradition that *xiangchou* names. As David Der-wei Wang notes in his seminal research on the "imagined nostalgia" (*xiangxiang de xiangchou* 想象的乡愁) which runs through twentieth-century Chinese fiction and film, this nostalgia is "as much a spontaneous overflow of personal feeling as a convention of writing, overdetermined by literary and nonliterary factors" (Wang 112). Although Wang uses nostalgia and *xianchou* interchangeably, I would like to keep *xiangchou* distinct and culturally specific. *Xiangchou* evokes a millennium-old lyrical tradition in which Chinese scholar officials (rather than peasants) conceive "the mountains and waters" (*shanshui*) and "the fields and gardens" (*tianyuan*, the rural) as the spiritual home. A representative figure of this poetic tradition is Tao Yuanming, dubbed as "the poet of poets", is known for his pioneering poetry of georgic retreat and his allegorical ideal world of simplicity – the Peach Blossom Spring (*taohua yuan*), which remains a "source of inspiration" for Sinophone poets and writers in the thousands of years to come. (Lu, *The Ecological Era* 2, 51) The literary lineage of *xiangchou* reminds us that it is not just a socio-environmental emotion but also a convention of writing. It is not just a "structure of feeling" (Raymond Williams) but also a "structure of rhetoric" (Stuart Tannock) with a powerful affective and political appeal. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Xi regime, initiating the project of "ecological civilization" (*shengtai wenming* 生态文明.[7]), also urges Chinese people to "remember *xiangchou*" (*jizhu xiangchou* 记住乡愁) amid rapid, massive urbanization. In the official recuperation of *xiangchou* discourse, the prototype of a green rural China glistens in the vista of a modernized, urbanized "new China."

Despite its local context and connotations, in many ways, *xiangchou* does bear strong resemblance to the English words "nostalgia" and "homesickness", which also have strong ideological dimensions. As Raymond Williams' foundational work *The Country and the City* reveals, the "escalator" of nostalgia transported its passengers to a "timeless" pastoral in a reaction to the changes of the Industrial Revolution (9). Nostalgia was not simply escapist or conservative, as it could also function as a counter-discourse to the teleology of history and preserve

[6] This is most notably registered in *Xiangchou* (乡愁 *Nostalgia*), a poem by a contemporary Taiwanese poet Yu Guangzhong (1928–2017). Unable to return to his native hometown in Fujian Province because of the political tension, Yu wrote movingly: "Nowadays/*xiangchou* is a narrow, narrow strait/I am on this side/the mainland on the other side".
[7] It is an initiative proposed by President Xi Jinping in 2007.

revolutionary possibilities that might resist the repressive forces of modernization[8]. In Heideggerian phenomenology, modern humans suffer from structural homesickness directly brought by modernity itself. For Heidegger, in poets like Friedrich Hölderlin, poetic language and poetic insight offer a pathway to restore an authentic being-in-the-world (*Poetry, language, thought*). While nostalgia (nostos + -algia) means "homesickness," its spatial implications are now overshadowed by temporal meanings. In Chinese, it is also sometimes translated as *huaijiu* – literally, longing for the past.

Key thinkers who have examined the relationship between nostalgia and modernity include but are not limited to Raymond Williams, Martin Heidegger, Svetlana Boym, and Walter Benjamin. Nostalgia also intersects with the ecocritical critique of modernity, particularly its analysis of pastoral nostalgia (Buell *Environmental Imagination*; Glotfelty et al. *Landmarks*). While it is often synonymous, or nearly so, with nostalgia, in this thesis, I use "*xiangchou*" instead of anglicizing it into "nostalgia" when I need to preserve the distinctly Chinese aspects of *xiangchou*. *Xiangchou* helps us bring out the historical and cultural nuances that would otherwise be suppressed, and preserving these distinctions helps unravel the eco-discourses in contemporary China. This, in turn, also contributes to pluralizing environmentalism(s) in the global context.

The very emergence of ecofiction as a discernible genre in China suggests that the environmental crisis has already fundamentally shaped contemporary Chinese society, culture, and human conditions. This emergence is also marked by a "mutation" in *xiangchou* as a narrative mode. This has been necessary because the traditional paradigm of *xiangchou* fails to capture the experience of psychophysical displacement inflicted by the "slow violence" (Rob Nixon) of environmental deterioration. In particular, processes such as extinction, deforestation, and pollution lead to a painful feeling of alienation and psychic displacement which has been termed "solastalgia". Solastalgia, or "homesickness at home", is a term proposed by the Australian environmental philosopher Glenn Albrecht. Albrecht first used the word in 2003 to delineate the environmental injustice suffered by Aboriginal

[8] In this thesis, I use the term "modernization" as "[t]he transformation of culture and society brought about by embracing a combination of new ways of thinking and new technology." (Buchanan) "Modernization" as a descriptive term captures changes in the material, economic, political and social orders and institutions in recent centuries. However, it is inherently problematic to imagine modernization as a homogenous, linear or evolutionary process, nor fall too readily into binary oppositions that perpetuate hierarchies between "primitive" and "modern", as well as that of "non-western" and "western". A key feature of modernization, or modernity, is the centrality of secularized rationalism. As Kalberg puts it: "Aa a far-reaching model, modern Western rationalism unveils and articulates pivotal aspects and underlying dimensions characteristic of all modern societies". (Kalberg 39) In Western societies, the radical change brought by modernization have had aesthetic and philosophical effects in the form of modernism and postmodernism. In the Chinese context, one can at least distinguish five stages of modernization which correspond with five distinct Chinese modernities. There is firstly the early modernization in the late Qing Dynasty (proposed by David Der-wei Wang in *Fin-de-Siecle Splendor*), which is followed by an era of revolutions and enlightenment, marked by a series of movements, including the 1911 Revolution, the 1919 May Fourth Movement and the New Culture Movement between the 1910s- 1920s. This era of modernization is heightened by the rise of a modern urban culture (as analyzed in Leo Ou-fan Lee in *Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China,* 1930–1945), and is then swept by Socialist modernization (the 1950s to 1970s) or the era of Mao Zedong. Lastly, there is marketized modernization that swept through China following the Reform and Open-door Policy in 1978.

communities as a result of the mining industry in the Upper Hunter Valley, New South Wales, and he notes that non-Indigenous people also suffer from solastalgia due to acute environmental changes ("Solastalgia: A New concept" 44; 53). Solastalgia has been recently translated into Chinese as *xiangtong zheng* (乡痛症 lit: hometown-ailing symptom), which reflects the Chinese experience of displacement in the current era, with rampant environmental degradation and environmental injustice ingrained in the rural–urban dichotomy. Zheng Xiaoqiong, a notable "migrant-worker poet" (*dagong shiren*), has suggested that the rural–urban disparity has altered the traditional structural opposition between "hometown" and "other towns". For Zheng, this ancient distinction, which helped shape the conception of *xiangchou*, has given way to a much sharper contrast (and inequality) between cities and rural villages. As she explains: "For our generation, for urban migrants born in the rural regions, *xiangchou* is not just geographical, it is also a painful feeling of spiritual rootlessness and disillusionment.".[9] Indeed, the visceral pain Zheng experienced as a rural migrant worker is beyond nostalgia, and it is at this affective limit that solastalgia arises.

This experience of internal displacement is a very distinctive theme in contemporary Chinese ecofiction, with its representations of traditions and ecosystems that are subject to destruction, degradation, and pollution. In this thesis, I suggest that the affect of solastalgia offers a critical context through reconsidering the aesthetic inertia of *xiangchou* in the context of Anthropogenic toxicity, mass extinction, plastic overflow, and extreme weather conditions. In contemporary Chinese ecofiction, what stands out is that while the discourse of *xiangchou* is re-cast in new ways, the nostalgic *object* it evokes (i.e., the "home") is both present and absent.

Ge Fei's *Spring End in Jiangnan* (春尽江南 2011), the third and last book of Ge Fei's "Jiangnan trilogy,".[10] is an ambitious project that captures an epic, tragic and sweeping history of the Jiangnan region in the twentieth century. Jiangnan (South of Yangtze River Region).[11] has long been celebrated as a prosperous center of China, boasting serene Water Towns, classical elegance, and a temperate climate. Since the Tang Dynasty, the Jiangnan

[9] "实际上，当城市化越来越推进，我们的乡愁本身含义也在改变着，如果说中国传统的乡愁是"故乡"与"他乡"之间的情感，那么到了我们这一代年青人，比如像我一样，从乡村到城市的年青人，乡愁更多是"乡村"与"城市"之间的情感产物，如果古人之身在异乡怀念他乡的怀乡之情是一种乡愁，是一种缅怀故里的思乡之愁，那么对于我们这一代，出生在农村，后来进入城市，不仅仅只是地理上的乡愁，更是价值观的改变、精神无根与失落产生的疼痛之愁。" Zheng, Xiaoqiong. "An Interview with Xiangchou (2015)" (郑小琼. 一个关于乡愁的访谈)

[10] The Jiangnan Trilogy won the Mao Dun Literature Prize in 2015. It consists of *Peach Blossom Paradise* (人面桃花 2004), *Mountains and Rivers into my Dreams* (山河入梦 2007), and *Spring End in Jiangnan* (2011). Book one was recently published in English. It is a "meditation on revolution, idealism, and utopianism" (from the Preface in the English edition).

[11] According to Li Changsheng, South of Yangtze River region, in the early twelfth century, became both the economic and cultural centre of Imperial China. The economic centre moved towards the South in around 600 in Imperial China, and the turn reached to a height in Tang Dynasty, especially after the An Lushan Rebellion (755–763), and in the fall of the Northern Song Dynasty (1127). Although the boundary of Jiangnan has undergone changes throughout the time, its concept remains consistent. Nowadays, Jiangnan refers to the region in the South of the middle and lower Yangtze River. It includes Shanghai, Northern Zhejiang Province, Southern Jiangsu Province, South-eastern Anhui Province, North-eastern Jiangxi Province, and other places.

region has inspired generations of literati, and the poetic image of Jiangnan in misty spring drizzle (*yanyu jiangnan*) is a favorite motif for artists and poets. However, in Ge Fei's "Jiangnan" trilogy, the poetic associations with this place have become precarious:

> In mid-March, on gloomy, drizzling days, Spring struggles to arrive. Near the lake in Boxian Park, a giant weeping willow tree drapes its fringe-like branches, their color turning from goose-yellow to emerald-green. Outside the window, causeways crossing the lake are visible in the misty panorama. Along the riverbank, yellow winter jasmines, white pear flowers, pink apricot blossoms, and rouge cherry blossoms take turns to bloom. If you ignore the stench from the chemical factory, if you disregard the dust haze in the sky and the garbage filling the river, and if you constrain your vision to the small patch of green in the park, this Spring seems no different from the Springs in the past.。[12]

This passage begins with a stock rehearsal of the poetic vista of Jiangnan: misty spring, and riverbank with weeping willows and apricot blossoms. However, reality intervenes, and the poetic association turns out to be aesthetically and ethically untenable. Because one cannot insulate oneself from the stench, the haze, or the garbage-filled river, the misty Springtime scene fails to sustain the poetic image of Jiangnan. Such moments of "lyricism in an unlyrical time" reverberate in *Spring End in Jiangnan*, which traces the trajectory of urbanization in China during the twentieth century.

0.1 The Case Studies

This thesis uses a group of texts as case studies of *xiangchou*, nostalgia, and solastalgia in contemporary Chinese ecofiction. I have chosen texts not just because they all ostensibly express concerns about major environmental issues through (counter-)narratives of *xiangchou*, but also because these texts foreground how environmental injustice is connected to social injustice. To examine the ecological turn in fictional writing, I have selected both high-selling popular texts and texts that are less well known by the wider public, some by established writers and

[12] "三月中旬，在连绵的阴雨中，春天硬着头皮来了。伯先公园河沟边巨大的柳树，垂下流苏般的丝绦，在雨中有鹅黄变成了翠绿。窗外笼了一带高高低低的烟堤。临河的迎春花黄灿灿的；粉白的刺梨和早杏，以及碎碎的樱花，如胭脂般次第开放。如果忽略掉伴随着东风而来的化工厂的刺鼻的臭味，如果对天空的尘霾，满河的垃圾视而不见，如果让目光局囿在公园的这一小块绿地之中，这个春天和过去似乎也没有什么区别。" (Ge Fei, *Spring End in Jiangnan* Chapter 4 "Night and Fog")

others by emerging authors. My texts target three particular facets of the global environmental crisis: extinction, deforestation, and pollution. To consider the question of extinction, I examine Jia Pingwa's *Remembering Wolves* (2000) and Jiang Rong's *Wolf Totem* (2004) while also drawing on texts such as Li Kewei's *Chinese Tiger* (2007) and Ye Guangqin's "Big Fu the Tiger" (2001). For the representation of deforestation, I consider Alai's monumental six-novella "Hollow Mountain" series (2005–2009). Finally, on the issue of pollution, I look at three science fiction texts: Chen Qiufan's novel *Waste Tide* (2013) and his earlier short story "The Smog Society" (2006), along with Hao Jingfang's "Folding Beijing" (2012). To provide a context for each of these three central issues (extinction, deforestation, and pollution), I begin each chapter with an ecological vignette from contemporary Chinese news and current affairs. These news stories help illustrate the public influence of these environmental issues and provide a backdrop in contemporary reality for the emergence of Chinese ecofiction.

While the texts considered in this thesis do express nostalgia for a nature that has disappeared, they are by no means simple indulgences in idyllic pastoralism. Rather, in many ways, the *xiangchou* expressed in these texts is challenged or disabled by insistent environmental degradation. What I argue in this thesis is that the eruption of ecological crisis transforms nostalgia into solastalgia. Solastalgia entails a realization of slow violence, a violence that is delayed and dispersed, but debilitating across time and space. This displacement is experienced by species, individuals, and communities on the periphery of the socio-economic and political orders. While each of these chapters tackles certain ecological challenges, they also address issues of environmental injustice that run between human and nonhuman species, between Han Chinese and ethnic minorities, between rural and urban populations, and between the Global North and South.

By positing *xiangchou*, nostalgia, and solastalgia as key dialectics in Chinese ecofiction, my thesis approaches issues of environmental injustice in a globalizing China with both Chinese and Western vocabularies. As China has become economically integrated into the global system, and as the Chinese population and the scale of its economic production are significant in the global ecological situation, Chinese ecocriticism should also be reoriented with both a "sense of place" and a "sense of planet," to follow Ursula Heise's terminology. My thesis considers environmental problems not just as an issue within a nation, but as specific manifestations of what Timothy Morton names the "hyperobject" of planetary ecological crisis.

By delineating the connections between Chinese modernization (as socio-cultural transformation) and ecological degradation, I want to move beyond the approach of viewing these matters as simply a problem with the Chinese political system or culture. As Val Plumwood argues: "The ecological crisis is the crisis of a cultural

'mind' that cannot acknowledge and adapt itself properly to its material 'body', the embodied and ecological support base it draws on in the long-denied counter-sphere of 'nature'." (*Environmental Culture* 15) With the approaches of affect theory and new materialism, I lay emphasis on the material existence of humans and nonhumans represented in these works. I accordingly attempt to reveal the complexity of cross-species, cross-ethnic, cross-regional, and cross-national environmental injustice. On the other hand, I insist on keeping the Chinese concepts of *xiangchou* (and *huaijiu*, a closer equivalent to "nostalgia" in its present meaning) to engage in Chinese poetics and politics. Nevertheless, this consideration of *xiangchou* exists in constant dialogue with western nostalgia and its critiques of modernity, even while their respective vocabularies have untranslatable cultural and political connotations that remain specific to local eco-cultural and historical realities.

My thesis begins by asking: What does contemporary Chinese ecofiction have to offer the global corpus of ecofiction? In proposing the concept of *xiangchou* as central to Chinese ecofiction, I further ask what bioregional imaginations, ecological discourses, and cultural effects do these texts configure? Several more particular questions attend this issue: what functions does the discourse of *xiangchou* have in the contemporary Chinese environmental imagination? How does *xiangchou* take shape in contemporary Chinese ecofiction and how does *xiangchou*, as a discourse, shape a writer's interpretation of specific ecological issues? How do these ecofiction develop or challenge the discourse of *xiangchou* in the context of ecological crisis? What does the discourse of *xiangchou* contribute to contemporary Chinese environmentalism, and what are its limitations? Finally, I ask whether the "earth emotions" (Albrecht) of *xiangchou* and solastalgia help reconfigure environmental vision in the contemporary Chinese context.

0.2 Ecocriticism and Contemporary Chinese Ecofiction

Ecocriticism, or environment-oriented literary studies, emerged as a recognized research field in the United States in the mid-1980s. It took its main orientation from the environmental movement that gained momentum in post-WWII America. Works such as Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac* (1949) and Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) influenced the emergence of consciously ecological writing and led to the recognition of ecological writing within literary criticism. The "first significant ecocritical study" (Buell, Heise, Thornber 418), Joseph Meeker's *The Comedy of Survival: Studies of Literary Ecology* (1972) proposed to study the "biological themes and relationships which appear in literary works" (9). At this early point, literary critics had not yet come to a consensus on the terms – in this respect, ecocriticism lagged behind other fields in the emerging environmental humanities, such as

environmental philosophy, environmental anthropology, and environmental history. The term "ecocriticism" is believed to have been coined by William Rueckert in the article "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism" (1978), in which he examined forms of writing which "translated literature into purgative-redemptive biospheric action" (85).

Scholarly collaborations and university courses in environmental literature finally grounded the study, and the 1990s saw an exponential expansion of ecocriticism (Gloefelty, Fromm, viii). In 1992, the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) was founded in North America, and it remains the largest research community in the field, with chapters in Europe, Asia, and Oceania. ASLE's journal, *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, was established in 1993. In another key intervention, seminal ecocritical works, such as Lynn White Jr's "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis", Harold Fromm's "From Transcendence to Obsolescence: A Route Map", Ursula Le Guin's "The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction", Glen A. Love's "Revaluing Nature: Toward an Ecological Criticism", and Scott Slovic's "Nature Writing and Environmental Psychology" were collected in *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996), edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm.

As Anglo-American ecocritics began to examine the representation of nature in literature, they developed new insights about the entwinement of humans and the natural environment. Notably, revisionist readings emerged of British Romanticism (e.g., William Wordsworth) and American nature writing (e.g. Henry David Thoreau), including foundational works such as Lawrence Buell's *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (1995) and Jonathan Bate's *The Song of the Earth* (2000).

More recently, Buell, Heise and Thornber have divided the growth of ecocriticism into three "waves" (417–418). First-wave ecocriticism (in the 1990s) primarily stressed human-place connections by rediscovering nature-embracing texts, with many of them drawing upon "deep ecology" proposed by the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess, and phenomenological philosophy of Heidegger, Bachelard and Merleau-Ponty. After the turn of the century, a second wave of ecocriticism appeared that highlighted social aspects of environmental ills and the transnational implications of place-attachment. Ursula K. Heise's *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet* (2008) is a foundational work. Within this second wave, postcolonial ecocriticism and ecofeminism also propelled scholars to expand their horizons towards environmental justice across race, gender, species, and cultures. Key works include Rob Nixon's essay "Environmentalism and Postcolonialism" (2005), Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin's *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* (2006), Elizabeth DeLoughrey's *Routes and Roots: Navigating Caribbean and Pacific Island Literatures* (2007), and anthologies such as *Caribbean Literature and the Environment* (2005), edited by

Elizabeth DeLoughrey, Renée Gosson, and George Handley. The influence of the second wave persists today in works such as Rob Nixon's *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011), Ursula K. Heise's *Imagining Extinction* (2016), and Ariel Salleh's *Ecofeminism as Politics: Nature, Marx and the Postmodern* (2017).

Consistent with the pluralization of ecocriticism worldwide, the third wave of ecocriticism has emerged through cross-pollination with new materialism, affect theory, queer theory, and posthumanism. Influential works from this wave include Stacy Alaimo's *Bodily Natures* (2010), Rosi Braidotti's *Posthumanism* (2013), Heather Houser's *Ecosickness in Contemporary U.S. Fiction* (2014), Robert Azzarello's *Queer Environmentality: Ecology, Evolution, and Sexuality in American Literature* (2016), and *Affective Ecocriticism: Emotion, Embodiment, Environment* (2018), edited by Kyle Bladow, and Jennifer Ladino. Today, the critical inquiry into literature and environment has become an important vector in the regeneration of humanities studies, by asking how we define the human and how we (as humans, as life) might imagine and survive the Anthropocene – a time of planetary ecological crises, deepening inequality, and radical technologization. These inquiries intersect with, and in some instances catalyze, the emergence of new literary genres, such as climate fiction.

In many ways, ecofiction is synonymous with environmental fiction (see Buell's definition of environmental literature) or nature-oriented fiction (Patrick Murphy),[13] but ecofiction emphasizes that a basic understanding of the mutual-connectedness of ecosystems should be integral to the narrative. As Donna Seaman puts it, ecofiction engages "the reader's sensitivity to the work's illumination of the basic tenets of ecology" (15). The naming of ecofiction reflects ecocritics' attitude towards Anthropocentrism. As Cheryll Glotfelty notes, "*enviro-* is anthropocentric and dualistic," yet *eco-* emphasizes the interdependence and the integration of all living and non-living existence in the ecosystem, of which humans only constitute a part (xx).

According to Jim Dwyer's *Where the Wild Books Are: A Field Guide to Ecofiction* (2010), the term "ecofiction" was used for the first time in an "Ecofiction" anthology compiled by John Stadler and published in 1971 in New York, and it included an array of American literary pieces ranging from Edgar Allen Poe and E.B. White to Isaac Asimov. For Dwyer, one widely accepted principle for ecofiction is that the author should consciously "promote environmentalism among the general public" (6). In my selection of texts, a reflection of the social and cultural causes of ecological degradation emerges as a distinctive characteristic of contemporary Chinese ecofiction, and in many ways, these texts form the most challenging critique of Chinese modernity. As Li Qingsong, a leading ecofiction writer wrote, it is industrial modernization that led to the burgeoning of ecofiction: "Ecoliterature is a

[13] See Buell *The Environmental Imagination*, 6; and Murphy *Further Afield*, 28–29.

type of literature produced in the modern era, just as vocabularies such as 'aircraft carrier', 'drone', 'computer', 'cellphone', 'online shopping', 'Wechat', 'Alipay'…never appear in *The Classics of Poetry*" (Li 8–9).

Contemporary Chinese ecofiction, as a response to eco-cultural and socio-political reality, mirrors the radical social changes, conflicting visions of modernity, and sense of displacement that have been China's experience over the past century. The emergence of Chinese ecofiction is concomitant, for instance, with the criticism of Maoist modernization after the fall of Red Utopianism in the late 1970s. Some of the earliest works of ecofiction, such as Kong Jiesheng's *Giant Wild Jungle* (大林莽, 1984), Zhang Kangkang's novella *Sandstorm* (沙暴, 1993), and A Cheng's *King of Tree* (树王, 1985), were written as reflections upon the social and environmental degradation brought about by the Cultural Revolution. Then, in the reform era – when the drive was toward marketization, as registered in the catchphrase "development is the absolute goal" (*fazhan shi diyi yaowu*) – ecofiction had to find its own language to resist this powerful new mode of exploitation. In the 1980s and 1990s, Chinese environmental writing was primarily nonfiction known as "ecological reportage literature" (*shengtai baogao wenxue*) and ecological prose essays (*shengtai sanwen*). The end-of-century witnessed the flourishing of reportage on eco-crises in China, including Sha Qing's *Beijing Out of Balance* (北京失去平衡, 1986), Xu Gang's *Wake up, Loggers!* (伐木人, 醒来! 1988), Wang Zhian's *Worries on the Land of our Nation* (国土的忧思, 1990), Zhe Fu's *China Files* (中国档案, 1998), Chen Guidai's *Warnings from Huai River* (淮河的警告, 1999). These authors touched on multiple issues, including water pollution, poaching, deforestation, and the public health effects of industry (Gao, Yan 25).

While Chinese ecofiction did appear sporadically in the 1980s, the work from this time continued to be influenced by the injunction of "literature for humanity (*ren de wenxue* 人的文学)" (Li, *Eco-ecthical Spirit* 21). First proposed by Zhou Zuoren (1885–1967) in the May Fourth movement, this mantra placed works about nonhuman existence very much at the periphery. A good example is Zhe Fu (1955–), a writer who shifted to ecological reportage literature after initially writing ecofiction, including the novella *The Woodpecker* (啄木鸟, 1984) and the novels *Black Snow* (黑雪, 1988), *Toxic Kiss* (毒吻, 1989)[14], *Heavenly Hunt* (天猎, 1994) and *Earthly Hunt* (地猎, 1994). However, sensing that readers tended to treat the ecological elements of his fiction as merely metaphorical or symbolic, Zhe Fu shifted his focus to ecological reportage literature in the late 1990s. Today, Zhe Fu is one of the most accomplished writers of ecological reportage literature in China, yet his earlier ecofiction has been largely

[14] *Toxic Kiss*, a story about chemical toxicity, was adapted into a movie in 1992.

forgotten by scholars and the reading public.

Nobel-prize winning author Gao Xingjian is another early exponent of ecological writing, particularly his three-act play *Wild Man* (野人, 1985) and the novel that won him worldwide acclaim, *Soul Mountain* (灵山, 1990). Both works were prescient meditations on ecological degradation and human alienation. Meanwhile, it is also worth mentioning that eco-poetry has been developing since the 1980s, led by poets such as Yu Jian (1954–), Tu An (1923–2017), Zhai Yongming (1955–), Wang Xiaoni (1955–), Shen Wei (1965–), Zang Di (1964–), and Zheng Xiaoqiong (1980–). Finally, the 1980s witnessed a variety of articles that focused on environmental degradation (and its associated social ills) in magazines such as *Dushu* (*Reading*) and *Yishu guangjiao* (*Art Panaroma*) (Yang, "Environmental Dimensions" 188).

The term "environmental literature" (*huanjing wenxue*) was first used in Chinese in 1984 by Gao Hua, the chief editor of *Green Land* (*Lüdi*), a magazine affiliated with *Zhongguo huanjing bao (Chinese Environmental Newspaper*). In response to the *21 Agenda* at the 1992 Earth Summit, Gao Hua, and senior writers such as Wang Meng (1934–) initiated the "Chinese Environment and Literature Association" (*Zhongguo huanjing wenxue yanjiuhui*,[15] CELA, 1992–) and founded *Green Leaves* (*Lüye*, 1992–), China's first literary magazine dedicated to environmental literature (Huang, "Contemporary Fiction" 18–19). *Green Leaves* has become a flagship green forum, actively encouraging environmental literature with calls for papers and writing competitions (Li, Gao 8). Since the mid-1990s, environmental humanities have burgeoned, and CELA, as an official organization affiliated with both the Environmental Bureau and the Chinese Writers' Association, has played an active role in promoting nature-oriented writing. In 1995, CELA hosted a symposium called "Humans and the Great Nature", which connected environmental writers and scholars from the mainland, Taiwan, and overseas to discuss environmental writing and its role in propagating environmental consciousness.

The emergence of ecological writing and criticism in China was influenced by the translation and introduction of Western environmental literature, including classic works such as Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, Henry David Thoreau's *Walden Pond*, and Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac*. On the other hand, the awakening of environmental discourse has also been conditioned by Chinese intellectual and spiritual traditions, especially Taoist and Chan Buddhist teachings. More urgently, the rise of ecological literature is clearly a cultural response to

[15] The Chinese Environment and Literature Association is associated with the Chinese Environmental Bureau, and it was renamed the "China Environmental Culture Promotion Association" (中国环境文化促进会) in 1998. Different from ASLE (which consists predominantly of academics and some writers), CELA is mainly joined by writers who are interested in or concerned about environmental issues.

the intensified environmental issues that became more and more acute by the end of the twentieth century. Apart from widespread environmental degradation, several major environmental disasters alarmed intellectuals, the government, and the general public. For instance, in 1993, Northwest China was hit by the "Fifth-of-May Black Storm", regarded as "the worst-ever sandstorm in 54 years in the PRC era," which gave the very word "sandstorm" a new and sinister connotation. Since this event, Chinese scientists and research institutions have conducted comprehensive scientific investigations of sandstorms, and the government has also initiated various measures to curb desertification in Northwest China (www.weather.com.cn). Another turning point was the Yangtze River Flood in 1998, a natural disaster exacerbated by human causes. The severity of the flood forced the government to address deforestation and begin reforesting the mountains in the upper reaches of the Yangtze River (www.gov.cn). The 2003 SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) outbreak, the first pandemic of the twenty-first century, was also a wake-up call. The SARS outbreak led many Chinese scholars and bloggers to commence a national discussion on Chinese food culture and animal welfare issues (Wei, *Green Canon* 69). These three eco-disasters and a string of lesser events in the 1990s and 2000s were central to the development of Chinese environmental consciousness.

Environmental themes became central in the work of major writers such as Guo Xuebo, Chen Yingsong, Alai, Ye Guangqing, Chi Zijian, Jia Pingwa, and Zhang Wei. Chen Yingsong's "Shennongjia" series stories include "The Last Dance of the Leopard (豹子最后的舞蹈, 2001)," "Why the Jays Crow (松鸦为什么鸣叫, 2002)," "Clouds Brush over the Precipice (云彩擦过悬崖, 2002)"[16] and "The Wagging Grass (独摇草, 2003)." The stories by Ye Guangqin, such as "Big Fu the Tiger (老虎大福 2001)," "Muke the Mountain Spirit (山鬼木客, 2005)," and "Qiansui the Black Fish (黑鱼千岁, 2005)" reflect upon extinction and human–animal conflict. Ye's stories compel the readers to reflect upon anthropocentric assumptions through detailed depictions of the moments of encounter between animals and people. Apart from Chen and Ye, other works to appear in the 1990s and early 2000s were Fang Ming's *The Swan Song* (大绝唱, 1999)[17], Hu Fayun's *Old Hai Disappears* (老海失踪, 1999), Du Guanghui's *Oh, my Hoh Xil* (哦, 我的可可西里, 2001) and *Wolves from Hoh Xil* (可可西里狼, 2010), Jia Pingwa's novel *Remembering Wolves* (2000), Chi Zijian's *Last Quarter of the Moon* (额尔古纳河右岸, 2005), Yang Zhijun's *Mastiff of the Plateau* (藏獒, 2005) and *Collapse around Qinghai Lake* (环湖崩溃, 2007), Liu Qingbang's *Red*

[16] All these stories were first published in *Zhongshan* magazine.

[17] *The Swan Song* won the First National Environmental Literature Prize (*quanguo huanjing wenxue jiang* 全国环境文学奖) in 2003.

Coal (红煤, 2006), Zhang Wei's *Song of the Hedgehog* (刺猬歌, 2007), and Alai's six-volume "Hollow Mountains" series (2003–2007). Not only were many more works being published, but they were also receiving wider attention, both popular and academic. Controversial as it was, Jiang Rong's *Wolf Totem* (2004), a semi-autobiographical novel mourning and eulogizing the Mongolian wolves, was an unprecedented hit. It sold millions of copies in China, won the Man Asian Literary Prize (2007), and was translated into over 30 languages.

In the emergence of ecofiction which gathers pace in the new millennium, three significant features stand out. First, animal stories become prominent in this turn. While many works are identified and read as children's tales, such as works by Chen Yingsong, Fang Ming, Yang Zhijun, and Gerelchimeg Blackcrane,[18] their significance exceeds the young readers. Among these flourished animal stories, a "call of the wild" becomes visible. For example, *Wolf Totem*, an iconoclastic book, openly repudiates anthropocentrism, and *Remembering Wolves* confronts people with the ethical quandary of balancing the existence of wolves in proximity to human communities. A second feature is that the ecological turn has been led by writers from (or close to) Chinese ethnic minorities, such as Alai (Tibetan-Chinese), Ye Guangqing (Manchurian), Guo Xuebo (Mongolian), Bao'erji Yuanye (Mongolian), and Jiang Rong (Han Chinese, writing about the inner Mongolian grassland). Some of the earliest ecological works fit this pattern, including the Tibetan ethnic writer Tashi Dawa's novelette *Souls Tied to the Knots on a Leather Cord* (1985) and Tujia ethnic writer Li Chuanfeng's *the Last White Tiger* (最后的白虎, 1989). Guo Xuebo is widely known for his "Gobi Desert eco-fiction (*damo shengtai xiaoshuo*)," notably *The Wolf Boy in the Desert* (大漠狼孩, 2001), including stories he previously published in literary magazines, such as "Sand Fox (沙狐)," "The Goshawk (苍鹰)," "Sand Burial (沙葬)," and "Weeping Sandhills (哭泣的沙坨子)." Guo himself acknowledged that as he was writing "Sand Fox" in 1985, he was only depicting the real living conditions of people and animals in his hometown, and notions of "ecological literature" had not yet occurred to him (www.chinawriter.com.cn). As Ding Fan noted, Guo's awareness of ecology and reflection on Anthropocentrism became clearer as his literary career developed (1714).

The influence of minority ethnic ecology and culture is also seen in Ma Yuan (Han Chinese, 1953–), a representative "avant-garde" (*xianfeng*) writer whose literary career draws on profound inspiration from the multi-ethnic regions in Southwest China. Ma Yuan stopped writing in 1991, but recently returned with the novel *Cow Demons and Snake Spirits* (牛鬼蛇神, 2012), which is praised as showing a "clear environmental consciousness."

[18] Gerelchimeg Blackcrane is a prolific writer especially writing children's literature, many of his stories are about animals.

(Gatherer, 121) Clearly, in Ma Yuan's ecofiction, ethnic culture provides strong alternatives to the episteme of enlightenment modernity.

The third feature of Chinese ecofiction is its indebtedness to the "root-seeking" writers' cluster in the late 1980s. It is quite clear that representative root-seeking writers or writers who favor rural themes, such as Han Shaogong, Alai, Chi Zijian, Jia Pingwa, and Zhang Wei, all embarked on eco-themed writing. Some key root-seeking works, such as Li Hangyu's *The Last Fisherman* (最后一个渔佬儿, 1983), have subsequently been reread as ecofiction, and the ecological resonance of the Daoist ideal of following nature's way (or *Dao* 道) has become clearer (Wu Jingming 86). Similarly, A Cheng's *King of Tree* can now be regarded as among the earliest of Chinese ecofiction. These writers have tended to value the georgic country life as a way out of "urban illness." For example, Han Shaogong wrote: "Isn't a life mingling into the mountains and waters the freest and cleanest life? Isn't a life that is close to soil and cereals the most trustworthy and authentic life?" Although he lived in cities for about thirty years after his "rusticated youth" (*zhiqing*) years, Han reflected that "the city has become more and more alienating for me, since when I cannot tell" (*South of the Mountain, North of the Water* 3). The root-seeking writers also saw a relationship between nature and *xiangchou*. Zhang Wei, whose works celebrate the wilderness (*yedi*) was also eloquent in speaking about *xiangchou* in his manifesto "Merging in the Wilderness" (*rongri yedi*):

> I walked along a lonely, less-trodden path that leads to my hometown. Who doesn't have a hometown? […] Today I suddenly realize that even as a person grew up, migrated to somewhere else, in bustling cities, or overseas, they still insisted that their hometown lies in the middle of the land, and their whole world derived from that small patch of land.
>
> […]
>
> The homeland leads to the purlieu of wildland, where there is a key, an entrance, and a gate. Vines twining around my hand and feet, bushes block my way, are they keeping a passer-by or a returning soul? I stoop, listen, and press my chest close to the land, feeling myself pulsing warmly. At this moment I am finally relaxed, for I am accepted with true leniency. (296–7) 。[19]

[19] "我沿了一条小路走去。小路上脚印稀罕，不闻人语，它直通故地。谁没有故地？故地连接了人的血脉，人在故地上长出第一绺根须。可是谁又会一直心系故地？直到今天我才发现，一个人长大了，走向远方，投入闹市，足迹印上大洋彼岸，他还会固执地指认：故地处于大地的中央。他的整个世界都是那一小片土地生长延伸出来的。" […] "故地指向野地的边缘，

Both Han and Zhang give voice to a *xiangchou* that is quite close to literary convention (Wang, "Imaginary Nostalgia" 112). This relationship between *xiangchou* and nature, that was a feature of root-seeking writing in the 1980s, is replayed in the radically different work of the science fiction writer Chen Qiufan (1981–), especially in his masterpiece *Waste Tide* (2013), which I consider in Chapter Three of this thesis. *Waste Tide* is a posthuman cyberpunk novel set in a fictionalized Guiyu county in China's coastal South. Tackling the issues of toxic electronic waste, the story combines anthropological details with cybernetic imagination. Yet, it is just as much a story about the counterpoint between homecoming and loss of home. The two main protagonists are Chen Kaizong, an American Chinese who comes back to Guiyu to search for his childhood homeland, and Mimi, a female rural migrant worker who suffers from homesickness and solastalgia in the heavily polluted "other-land" of Guiyu. However, as I analyze in Chapter Three, Chen Qiufan's nostalgia is no longer the same rural nostalgia that Han Shaogong can revisit; rather, *Waste Tide* represents the failure of nostalgia amidst the slow violence of the Anthropocene. Along with Chen Qiufan, other sci-fi that considers environmental degradation includes Han Song's *The Red Ocean* (红色海洋, 2004) and *Subway* (地铁, 2010), and Liu Cixin's short story "Wages of Humanity (赡养人类, 2005)". At the beginning of Liu Cixin's "The Three-body Problem" trilogy (三体), the female protagonist reads Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* while working in the mass logging campaigns of the Cultural Revolution.

Another of the writers I consider in this thesis, Alai, also offers a contrast to the nostalgia that Han Shaogong expresses. Alai's six-novel "Hollow Mountain" series focuses on a Tibetan ethnic village far from either the Han Chinese or Tibetan cultural centers. In Alai's narrative, the ethnic conflict (Han-Tibetan) is real but is less significant than the rural–urban inequalities. Writing from the Khams Tibetan regions, the geographical topos that inspired James Hilton's Oriental Shangri-La.[20] (which continues to charm both Westerners and Han Chinese), Alai attempts to demystify the idyllic imagination projected on the ethnic village, for he realized how such projections can aggravate the social and ecological exploitation of the local villagers. Alai's books confront the readers with overlooked questions about the subjects, scales, and dimensions of nostalgia..[21] As Chapter Two will discuss, each of the six novels represents historical moments in Ji Village that are tied to ecological catastrophes: deforestation,

这儿有一把钥匙。这里是一个入口，一个门。满地藤蔓缠住了手足，丛丛灌木挡住了去路，它们挽留的是 一个过客，还是一个归来的生命？我伏下来，倾听，贴紧，感知脉动和体温。此刻我才放松下来，因为我获得了真正的宽容。" (296–7).

[20] Shangri-La was at first an imaginary Tibetan village in James Hilton's 1933 novel *Lost Horizon.*

[21] Alistair Bonnett's concept of the "scales of nostalgia" helps us understand what forms of loss are treated as weightier than others; this calls forth the issue of power struggles between different social classes [Bonnett. The Geography of Nostalgia 10].

mass hunting of forest animals, landslides, and the disappearance of a sacred lake.

Another significant contemporary ecofiction is Zhao Defa's novel *Anthropocene* (人类世, 2016), which attempts to address the multifaceted changes of the Anthropocene. The protagonist, Sun Can, whose name is a transliteration of 'Samson' from the Old Testament, is a caricature of the Anthropocentric persona. As a self-made businessman who had been born destitute, Sun Can is devoured by his materialist desires and greediness, and his success turns out to be disastrous to the environment and the common good.

Along with adult fiction, ecological themes have been important in recent children's literature. Zhang Wei's *My Feast in the Wild* (我的原野盛宴, 2020) narrates a boy's childhood story in the forests. Xu Lu's *Searching* (追寻, 2019) is a story about the extinct Yangtze River Dolphin. Finally, I would also like to note the environmental concerns in recent creative nonfiction, such as in Liang Hong's anthropological record of her home village in *China in a Village* (中国在梁庄, 2010). While Liang Village is losing both its young population and idyllic aura to the cities, environmental degradation also accompanies poverty and social degradation in the villages. Whether in fiction or nonfiction, the idyllic rural imagination is uprooted from most Chinese villages, even though the urban "concrete jungles" have already disappointed the writers.

0.3 "Varieties of Environmentalism" and Chinese Ecocriticism

The "ecocritical insurgency,"[22] initiated by academics from the English-speaking world, has become a global phenomenon. During the process of globalizing ecocriticism, scholars have realized that environmental concerns are often very different for developed nations and developing ones. In 1997, the Indian historian Ramachandra Guha and the Catalan economist Juan Martinez-Alier coauthored a book entitled *Varieties of Environmentalism: Essays North and South*, which described an "environmentalism of the poor" in which the environmentalist movement in developing countries and regions converged with struggles for social justice. They exemplify "environmentalism of the poor" with movements such as the Nigerian environmentalist protest led by Ken Saro-Wiwa against the multinational company Royal Shell for its profiteering oil extraction and the long-term damage inflicted on local ecosystems and societies. Stemming from "social conflicts over access to and control over natural resources," environmentalism of the poor articulates the "perceptions and valuations of nature among subordinated social groups" (xxi). These movements reveal the social injustice that is often part and parcel of the

[22] Lawrence Buell used this term as the title of an article published in *New Literary History* in 1999.

exploitation of nature in developing countries or regions: "In the Southern movements, issues of ecology are often interlinked with questions of human rights, ethnicity, and distributive justice." (18) Moreover, fights for survival against environmental exploitation "have also prompted a thoroughgoing critique of consumerism and of uncontrolled economic development" (18).

As one of the earliest works in the postcolonial environmental humanities, *Varieties of Environmentalism* provided timely environmentalism for a global society founded on colonial legacies in the thrall of profit-driven neoliberal capitalism. In recent years, this alternative environmentalism has been further developed by Rob Nixon in his groundbreaking book *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011). Nixon pinpoints the overlooked long-term effect of environmental ruthlessness: "Violence, above all environmental violence, needs to be seen – and deeply considered – as a contest not only over space, or bodies, or labor, or resources but also over time" (8).

The "empty-belly environmentalism" (Guha and Martinez-Alier) of the poor compels scholars to rethink the serious environmental debt and injustice accrued during colonialization over the past few centuries, and its lasting reverberations. In this respect, a range of postcolonial ecocritical works has emerged in the new millennium. These works highlight that environmental injustice and social injustice are two sides of the coin that are global environmental crises. *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* (Huggan and Tiffin 2006) untangles concepts such as "development" and "sustainability" as well as highlighting the issues of entitlement, to bring in non-white and indigenous people's perspectives about what were considered environmental texts, such as the pastoral genres. Postcolonial ecocritical studies bring in a range of texts and set them in context such as works by Ken Saro-Wiwa, J.M. Coetzee, Arundhati Roy, Alexis Wright, Patricia Grace, Jamaica Kincaid and many more. The aim of postcolonial ecocriticism is to decolonize the ecofiction canons dominated by white (and predominantly male) authors. Drawing upon works such as *The Dreaded Comparison: Human and Animal Slavery* (1988) by African author Marjorie Spiegel, and Australian scholar Val Plumwood's *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (1993) and *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason* (2001), postcolonial ecocriticism also unites with animal justice and ecofeminist theories to offer environmentalism from these human and nonhuman communities that are more affected by eco-degradation.

Meanwhile, in *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global* (2008), Ursula K. Heise calls for a "sense of the planet" in Western ecocriticism, which was also a response to the emerging postcolonial ecocriticism at the time. For Heise, ecocriticism finding postcolonial theories was indeed a delayed encounter ("Globality" 638). While ecocriticism from non-Western contexts helps to pluralize environmentalism

by offsetting the insularity of the bio-regionalist preoccupation, works written in languages other than English and from places peripherized by global capitalism have only really begun to emerge in the last decade or so. As Scott Slovic points out in the preface to *Ecocriticism of the Global South* (2015), an anthology co-edited by Scott Slovic, Swarnalatha Rangarajan, and Vidya Sarveswaran: "mainstream environmental discourse, particularly in the field of ecocriticism, has until recently been institutionally and epistemologically centered in the United States and the United Kingdom" (1–2). Because of this, ecocritical studies usually "operate from the point of view of First-World scholars, speaking *on behalf of* subalternized human communities and degraded landscapes," and lacking in scholarly voices culturally grounded in the Global South (Ibid. 1–2). Also, it is worth noting that "the Global South" is a somewhat clumsy geographical shorthand, and ecocriticism from the Global South should be broadly conceived as ecocritical studies emanating from the subaltern position. The anthology does not just feature ecocritical studies of texts from what is conventionally considered "the Global South" – such as India, China, Sri Lanka, the Caribbean, and Latin America – but also investigates ingrained environmental injustice that runs through places beyond these limits, such as Northern Ireland and New Zealand. The fact that non-Anglophone works and scholars from non-Western contexts remain under-represented shows that more effort to pluralize ecocriticism is needed.

Postcolonial ecocritical scholarship reveals that to combat regional and global crises, scholars cannot evade questions of environmental injustice, especially the "slow violence" deeply coded in the global economic order. Under the current framework of neoliberal capitalism and industrial transfer, developing countries are following the "pollute first, clean up later" model to boost their economies, and are obliged to accept high-pollution, labor-intensive industries from developed nations. As Huggan and Tiffin argue, one of the "central tasks of postcolonial ecocriticism" is "to contest – also to provide viable alternatives to – western ideologies of development", an ideology that is employed to justify the economic and political activities in favor of developed countries (29). Because of the deep colonial legacy and persisting power struggles, "responses to global environmental and social injustices are as much a part of the future as of the past" (Estok 221). Although East Asia is often omitted from studies of European colonial history, in historian Mark Driscoll's new book, *Climate Caucasianism and Asian Ecological Protection*, the Opium Wars mark both a shift from a Sinocentric trade system to a Eurocentric one, and a key event in the planetary carbon spike. Driscoll contends that "the Anthropocene is more correctly called the beginning of Climate Caucasianism, as Anglo-American capitalists transferred massive amounts of wealth from the Sinocentric trading area to a carbon-vomiting capitalism dominated by the US and the UK." (209)

To approach the environmental plight of the Global South (or the "Southerner communities" within the Global North), scholars must have a certain understanding of not just the ecological realities but also the ecological visions in the South. For example, how do communities conceptualize the human relationship with the environment? How do these differences influence their attitude towards nonhuman beings and the ecosystem? What lessons do these alternative views of nature and human existence proffer for the globalizing world confronted with planetary ecological crises in the Anthropocene?

Thus, to approach contemporary environmental issues one can hardly escape from postcolonial ecocritical theories and the Global North–South disparity. Among the many regions and places in the Global South, China is a special case in that it is both the world's second-largest economy (by GDP in 2022) and a developing nation. Since the late 1970s, China has undergone a period of rapid economic development and nowadays exceeds even the United States when measured by purchasing power parity.[23] This has led the former American president Donald Trump to insist that China has become a "rich country," although this proves less convincing when China's huge population is considered (it is ranked 79th globally when measured by per capita income). Nevertheless, the significance of China as a global ecological actor is indisputable because of its huge size, population, and integration into the global economic system.[24] Indeed, China's recent economic boom has been coupled with catastrophic ecological consequences. The rapid rate of its industrialization has been a major exacerbating factor, accomplishing in three decades a process that took the Western world around three hundred years. Today, about forty years from the inauguration of the Reform-and-Open-Door policy (since 1978), most of China's population has been lifted out of dire poverty, and in this crucial respect, Chinese people have undoubtedly benefited from the global economic order. However, the nation is now beleaguered by comprehensive ecological crises: air pollution (especially the high level of PM 2.5 fine particulate matter in winter), deforestation, species extinction, desertification, water pollution, and acid rain, to name just some of the more pressing issues. As "the World's Factory," China is marked by a colossal demand for natural resources. Although many of the manufactured goods go to developed countries, they are then returned as waste to the developing world. While this situation is now changing in China due to the banning of waste importation, the problem is often just being diverted to other

[23] According to the World Bank, China has grown into the world's biggest economic entity if measured by gross domestic product measured by purchasing power parity (GDP ppp) in 2013 ["International comparison Program," The World Bank 2013].
[24] In 2021, China's nominal GDP per capita remained among the developing countries, ranking number 81 (measured by nominal GDP per capita) or number 100 (measured by GDP ppp). Although China's land size (9.597 million km²) is close to that of the United States (9.834 million kms), it is by far the world's most populated nation (about 1.4 billion, 18% of the world's total). It is followed by India (1.38 billion) and the United States (329.5 million) ["List of Countries by Per Capita." Wikipedia.org. 2021; "World Development Indicators." The World Bank, 2020].

places in the Global South.

Because of China's significant place in global production systems, Chinese ecocriticism has a unique role to play in the critique of the cultural values which allow these systems to perpetuate environmental harm. However, China's different political system has complicated attempts to consider its environmental accountability. In recent times, the Chinese government has invoked its own version of environmental discourse through phrases such as "harmony between human and nature" (*ren yu ziran hexie*) and "Ecological Civilization (*shengtai wenming*)."[25] Moreover, China has attracted increasing scholarly attention to its environmental challenges, governance, actions, and activism. Books such as *China and the Environment: The Green Revolution* (2013), edited by Sam Geall, can serve as an entry point for readers interested in environmental activism in China. Yifei Li and Judith Shapiro's *China Goes Green: Coercive Environmentalism for a Troubled Planet* (2020) offers timely analysis of both the merits and shortcomings of environmental governance in China, which they call "authoritarian environmentalism." As China becomes more integrated into the global economic system, its socio-political responses to the ecological situation become more urgent. Equally, its cultural representations of the environment and its understandings of development, modernization, and human–nature relationships are also significant in the search for a global ecological solution. Given that China is one of the oldest continuing civilizations, one that has over nearly 3,500 years weathered numerous natural disasters, war, and political upheavals, as well as Western imperialism (Chang 6), Chinese environmental humanities are crucial to unpacking the lessons traditional Chinese culture teaches about resilience and co-existence.

Although environmental culture and ecological writing had already emerged in the 1980s, it was not until around the turn of the century that ecocriticism became a field of literary studies in Chinese universities. In 1997, Jilin People's Press introduced a series of Western environmental books to Chinese readers for the first time, such as Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac*, Alan Durning's *How Much is Enough*, *The Limit to Growth* by Donella H. Meadows et al., and *Only One Earth: The Care and Maintenance of a Small Planet* by Barbara Ward and Rene Dubos. Jilin People's Press also republished Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* (the first Chinese edition appeared in 1949) and Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (first introduced to China in 1979) (Li, "Echoes from the Opposite Shore" 842).[26] These works inspired Chinese intellectuals to start considering environmental crises. In October 1999, an "Ecology and Literature" conference was held in Hainan Province. It was chaired by Han Shaogong, a representative root-

[25] The "ecological civilization" came out at the 17th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) in 2007 and was written into the CPC constitution in 2012 (see Chia-ju Chang 5).
[26] This section referred to Li Chen's review in "Echoes from the Opposite Shore," Appendix: Table A3, 842.

seeking writer of the late 1980s, and was attended mostly by writers, including Wang Meng, Mo Yan, Tie Ning, and Ge Fei. The event generated a report entitled "South Mountain Summary: Why Should We Talk About Environment – ecology?" (2000) Calling upon people to rethink the profit-driven developmentalism that took hold of China's modernization, "South Mountain Summary" acts as a manifesto that signals a self-conscious ecological turn among mainstream Chinese writers.

Meanwhile, Chinese philosophers and scholars have turned to traditional Asian philosophy and aesthetics for insight. For instance, Ji Xianlin (1911–2009), China's leading expert in indology, paleography, and classical history, published an article entitled "A New Interpretation of 'The Unity of Human and Heaven'" ("*Tianren heyi" xinjie* "天人合一"新解), a quintessential concept for the traditional Chinese cosmology and world view. Ji borrowed from the late Chinese philosopher Qian Mu (1895–1990), who highly praised Human–nature unity as fundamental to Chinese traditions. Ji argues that Asian cultures (particularly Indian and Chinese cultures) contribute philosophies that value the companionship between humans and nature. In response to the global environmental crises caused by the Western mode of "conquering nature," Ji argued that the world needs to learn from "the holistic thinking in Oriental cultures" (16).

Similarly, in 1994, an "ecological aesthetics" was proposed and developed by the Chinese scholars Zeng Fanren and Cheng Xiangzhan at Shandong University and Xu Hengchun at Tianjing Academy of Fine Arts. At Soochow University, the literary scholar Lu Shuyuan called for "*shengtai wenyi xue*" (ecological literary and art theories). Lu Shuyuan's *Ecological Literary and Art Theories* is a seminal work of Chinese ecocriticism, modeling ecological critique based on Chinese traditions that might operate on a par with imported Western ecocriticism. In the book, Lu proposed the concept of "spiritual ecology" (*jingshen shengtai*) as a distinctive Chinese mode of discussing ecological issues. Along with the formation of research clusters in the late 1990s, several foundational works were published at the turn of the century, including the "Ecological Culture" series of monographs published by Shaanxi People's Education Press in 2000,[27] and Li Wenbo's *Land Poetics: Preface to Ecological Literature Studies* (2000). The "Ecological Culture" series included six books by scholars from philosophy, humanities, law, and economics studies. Among them, Yu Changmo's *Ecological Philosophy*, Xu Hengchun's *Ecological Aesthetics*, and Lei Yi's *Ecological Ethics* have become foundational works for Chinese ecological philosophy.

The term "ecocriticism" was explicitly introduced into China in 2001, with the "Globalization and

[27] The series books include *Ecological Philosophy* by Yu Changmo, *Ecological Ethics* by Lei Yi, *Ecological Economics* by Wang Songpei, *Ecological Law* by Chen Maoyun and Ma Xiangcong, *Ecological Aesthetics* by Xu Hengchun and *Ecological Literary and Art Theories* by Lu Shuyuan.

Ecocriticism" symposium hosted by Tsinghua University. The symposium was organized by Wang Ning as part of the annual conference for Chinese and American comparative literary studies and was attended by many leading literary scholars, such as Chen Xiaoming, Wang Yichuan, Zhang Xudong, Ye Shuxian, and Zhao Baisheng. In 2001, Wang Ning translated a selection of papers from the journal *New Literary History*, which included Jonathan Bate's "Culture and Environment: From Austen to Hardy" and Dana Philips's "Ecocriticism, Literary Theory, and the Truth of Ecology."

The first comprehensive introduction to Western ecocriticism in Chinese was written by Wang Nuo at Xiamen University, whose *Euro-American Eco-literature* (*Oumei shengtai wenxue* 2003) is now canonical among Chinese ecocritics. Wang Nuo introduced the most important scholars such as Cheryll Glotfelty, Jonathan Bate, and Lawrence Buell into China. Since then, Chinese ecocriticism has become increasingly popular, first among scholars in foreign and comparative literature studies and then this extended to contemporary Chinese literature studies. Ecocriticism has thus been a recognized research field in China since the beginning of the twenty-first century.

There has been a steadily growing graduate research output in ecocritical studies, including Anglo-American ecocriticism, eco-aesthetics, eco-ethics, contemporary Chinese environmental literature, films, and more. Among the emerging publications, it is worth noting Zhu Xinfu's *Studies of Ecological Thoughts in American Literature* (2006), Wang Nuo's *Anglo-American Ecocriticism* (2008), and Hu Zhihong's *Study of Western Ecocriticism* (2005). These works laid the groundwork for ecocriticism in China by introducing Western philosophical backgrounds, research methods, and landmark works. After 2000, several Western and Asian scholars were invited to give lectures or courses in China, including Scott Slovic, Simon Estok, Greta Gaard, Greg Garrard, and Patrick D. Murphy (Chang 10). While ecocritical studies of texts from non-Western contexts have also emerged in recent times, such as Yang Xiaohui's *Study of Contemporary Japanese Ecoliterature* (2013), Meng Xiayue's *Study of Ecoliterature in Latin America* (2016), Anglo-American texts have remained dominant in China.

Meanwhile, ecocritical studies based on Chinese cultural traditions and devoted to Chinese literature were also emerging. As noted, Lu Shuyuan has been a pioneer in this regard. Lu inaugurated a journal called *Spiritual Ecology Communication* (*Jingshen shengtai tongxun* 1999–2009), which played an important role in the development of ecocritical theories in China. In 2012, the journal was re-launched as *Ecological Aesthetics and Ecocritical Communication* (*Shengtaimeixue yu shengtai piping tongxun*). In 2006, Lu Shuyuan published *Space for Ecocriticism* (*Shengtai piping de kongjian*), which showcases how "*shengtai piping*" (ecocriticism) can be applied to texts ranging from Chinese classics, such as *Book of Songs* and Cao Xueqin's novel *Dream of the Red Chamber*, to world classics such as Greek mythology

and Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, to modern Chinese literature. Lu Shuyuan is also known for his ecocritical approach to Tao Yuanming (365–427), one of the most revered hermit-literati poets (known as "the poet of poets"). In *Tao Yuanming's Spectre*, a monograph that won the 6th Lu Xun Literature Prize for the best literary criticism in 2014, Lu celebrates Tao Yuanming as "an Oriental prophet of the meta-question of humanity" (2). Lu explores Tao's poetics and natural philosophy using both traditional Chinese philosophy and Western theorists such as Jacques Derrida and Martin Heidegger. The book was translated into English as *Ecological Era and Classical Chinese Naturalism: A Case Study of Tao Yuanming*, in 2018.

Apart from classical Chinese works, emerging scholars have increasingly based their Ph.D. research on contemporary Chinese ecological literature. Wei Qingqi was among the first scholars to approach contemporary Chinese literature with an ecocritical approach in his Ph.D. thesis *Towards the Green Canons: An Ecological Study of the New-Era Literature* (2004, supervised by Wang Ning). The thesis discussed several issues that are emerging in post-reform China, including Anthropocentrism, vegetarianism, and the re-evaluation of science. Wei identified "nature writing" as "deep green writing" and proffered analysis of works by three major nature writers – Xu Gang (1945–), Zhang Wei (1956–), and Wei An (1960–1999). Particularly salient to the time was a chapter he dedicated to online blog writings which emerged after the 2003 "SARS" outbreak. Wei argued that these blogs marked a significant turning point in which Chinese people began to question the Anthropocentrism in their purported "Gourmet" culture (69). Wei Qingqi further developed his green revolution of Chinese literary canons in *Green-Clad Scholarship: An Interpretive Study of Ecocriticism* in 2010, in which he also included his interviews with Lawrence Buell and Scott Slovic.

Since 2007 there has been a burgeoning of ecocritical works on Chinese literature. Wu Jingming's *Towards Harmony: Variations on Human and Nature: An Outline of Chinese Ecological Literature* (2007) is a capacious consideration of environmental consciousness in twentieth-century Chinese literature. Wu approached important modern Chinese writers, such as Lu Xun, Lao She, Ye Shaotang, and Xu Zhimo, as well as more recent ecological reportage literature, rusticated youth literature (*zhiqing wenxue*).[28], and root-seeking literature (*xungen wenxue*). In *Study of Contemporary Chinese Ecological Literature* (2008), Zhang Xiaoqin selected a corpus of Chinese ecoliterature which was divided into five types: 1980s and 90s environmental reportage; nature writing (Wei An, Zhangwei, and Han Shaogong); works on ecological crises (such as fiction by Alai and Du Guanghui, and Yu Jian's poems); emerging

[28] Works written by urban writers who went through the "Down to the Countryside Movement" during the 1950s to 1970s, rusticated youth literature (*zhiqing wenxue*) came out in bulk in the early 1980s.

"Voice for Nature" writers (such as Chen Yingsong and Shen He); and lastly ecofeminist writing (Cheng Yi, Ma Lan, Bi Shumin, and Zhou Tao).

Other influential works of Chinese ecocriticism include Lei Ming's *Seeking the Root of Crises: The Hidden Keynote of Modernity Critique* (2009), Chen Jiaji's *Insurgence and Construction of Animal Narratives in Chinese Literature* (2011), and Hu Yanlin's *the Ecological Condition of Literary Modernity: The Dimension of Nature in Twentieth-Century Chinese Literary Modernization* (2012). Both Lei and Hu approached Chinese literature with "modernity" as a key critical lens. While Hu's work investigates the representation of nature in modern Chinese literature, Lei's study of Chinese ecofiction draws strongly on Ulrich Beck's theory of "Risk Society." Lei Ming highlights the emergence of ecofiction by writers based in Northwest and Southwest China, noting that the "'green' trend" comes from the more rural regions rather than the modernized, urbanized South-eastern provinces: "Certainly writings about the ecological crises has an affinity with the home-soil, that is why the writers based in China's vast West begin to turn to ecological topics" (185).

Lei Ming is not the only scholar to recognize the influence of home-soil writing on Chinese contemporary ecofiction. Huang Yi has proposed the category of "home-soil ecofiction" (*xiangtu shengtai xiaoshuo*) in the monograph *Ecocriticism of Contemporary Chinese Ecofiction* (*zhongguo dangdai xiaoshuo de shengtai pipan* 2014), where she claimed that "all ecologies are primarily based on home-soil and are natural, that is to say, the primitive ecology is home-soil" (20). Huang also published a series of articles on writers such as Jia Pingwa, Chi Zijian, and Alai, which are collected in *Ecocriticism of New-era Home-Soil Literature* (*xinshiji xiangtu xiaoshuo de shengtai piping* 2016). While Lei and Huang are right to notice this connection between ecological concern and "home soil," at times their approach might also reinforce a certain nostalgia – which I am contesting in this thesis.

While ecocriticism has developed strongly in China, Chinese ecofiction and ecocriticism have only recently begun to attract attention in the Western academy. The international conference on "Literature and Environment" in Wuhan in 2008 was a landmark event in this respect. The conference was co-organized by Nie Zhenzhao and Lily Hong Chen. It grew from a successful collaboration across institutions such as Central China Normal University, the Foreign Literature Society in China, and ASLE. The conference was attended by more than two hundred scholars from mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Southeast Asia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. As Chinese ecocriticism has become stronger, there has also been more cooperation between mainland scholars and those from Taiwan. The landmark in this development was the "Cross-Strait Ecoliterature" symposium (2011–2019), which was co-organized by Xiamen University, Tamkang University, ASLE-Taiwan,

Renmin University of China, Tsinghua University, and Shandong Normal University. The symposium alternated between universities on the mainland and Taiwan.

In Western academia, Karen Laura Thornber has helped pioneer Anglo-American studies in East Asian eco-literature. Her *Ecoambiguity: Environmental Crises and East Asian Literatures* (2012) is probably the most influential work of East Asian ecocriticism. *Ecoambiguity* investigates an array of ecofiction from East Asian countries and regions, focusing on mainland China, Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan. Following Thornber, English-language scholars have started to show interest in ecocriticism in the Chinese context. In 2013, Scott Slovic wrote a short online article called "Landmarks in Chinese Ecocriticism and Environmental literature" for the Chinese Academy of Social Science, which sought to bring to English readers some of the developments in Chinese ecocriticism, such as "spiritual ecology" and eco-aesthetics. In 2013, Asian-based scholars Simon C. Estok and Won-chung Kim edited an anthology on *East Asian Ecocriticism*, which included some 14 articles from this region. The anthology included three articles from mainland Chinese scholars, including Yang Jincai's review of the development of Ecocriticism in China, Lily Hong Chen's ecocritical reading of a series of stories by Chen Yingsong, and Cheng Xiangzhan's essay on the keystones of ecological aesthetics.

The anthology, *Ecoambiguity, Community, and Development: Toward a Politicized Ecocriticism* (2014), edited by Scott Slovic, Vidya Sarveswaran, and Swarnalatha Rangarajan, also included articles which focus on cross-ethnic environmental and social injustice in China, written by scholars based in the United States. These included Karen Thornber's "Plundering Borderlands North and South," Gang Yue's "Tibet, a Topos in Ecopolitics of the Global South," and "Red China, Green Amnesia: Locating Environmental Justice in Contemporary Chinese Literature" by Cheng Li and Yanjun Liu. Eric Gerard Dalle's Ph.D. thesis *The Ecological Turn: Positioning the Natural World in Post-Mao Fiction and Film* (2012) is an early ecocritical study of contemporary Chinese texts, including literary texts by Wang Anyi and Han Shaogong in the late 1980s and cinematic works by Jia Zhangke and Dai Sijie in the early 2000s. Despite naming it an "ecological turn," Dalle acknowledged that the project was more about revealing the "philosophical impact an ecocritical reading of post-Mao narrative produces," for these works are less about "reactions to ecological catastrophes per se" than reflections on historical and political violence (197).

In 2014, *ISLE (Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*), the journal of ASLE, dedicated a special issue to Chinese ecocriticism. Wang Ning's Preface to this issue ("Global in the Local: Ecocriticism in China") stated that ecocriticism had become "one of the most promising and cutting-edge critical approaches" in China. Wang also mourned the fact that, due to a lack of translation from Chinese to English, Chinese ecocriticism

remains little known internationally (741; 746). Important contributions to this issue of *ISLE* include Wei Qingqi's "The Chinese Construction of Ecofeminism in a Cross-Cultural Context", Song Lili's "On the Pathos of Chinese Environmental Writing about the Yellow River" and He Chengzhou's "The Wolf Myth and Chinese Environmental Sentimentalism in *Wolf Totem*." There were also articles by emerging scholars based in the United States, such as Li Chen's "Chinese Ecocritical Studies as a Transpacific Dialogue Delayed" and Luo Junjie's "An Ecocritical Interpretation of Three Premodern Chinese Novels." Li Chen's article critically reviewed Chinese ecocriticism by comparing it with American ecocriticism.

Another ground-breaking work on Chinese environmental humanities is *Environing at the Margin: Huanjing as a Critical Practice* (2019), an anthology edited by Chia-ju Chang. In this book, Chang recuperates two concepts from traditional Chinese thought – *huanjing* (environing) and *ziran* (nature, self-so). Chang's project aimed "to investigate multiple forms of exclusive socio-environmental practices at the margins." For Chang, "marginality is conscious or unconscious, historical or contemporary" (13). Furthermore, Chang's work sought to "theorize [an] environmental ethics of inclusion or ethics of care at the margin: to examine various viewpoints, voices, and methods of 'taking-in'" (13). Chang's definition of Chinese environmental humanities is inclusive, encompassing ecological humanities in and on Sinophone regions but also "environmental humanities perspectives on Chinese culture" (7). With "environing" at the margin as the critical method, Chang aims to bring the voices of Chinese ecological theories into dialogue, as she believes that as contemporary China leads global climate actions, global academia "will prove to be under-realized" by dismissing the voices of Chinese studies and scholars in and beyond China (5).

It is worth mentioning that among the expanding Chinese environmental humanities, the ecocinema study is also a robust research field, and some of the most notable scholarly works include anthologies such as *Chinese Ecocinema in the Age of Environmental Challenge* (2009) edited by Sheldon H. Lu and Mi Jiayan, and *Ecology and Chinese-Language Cinema: Reimagining a Field* (2019) edited by Sheldon H. Lu and Gong Haomin. Meanwhile, the expanding impact of environmental humanities set in Asian context is also seen a broad-ranging MOOC course entitled "Asian Environmental Humanities: Landscapes in Transition," which came out in May 2018. Organized by Prof. Andrea Riemenschnitter at the University of Zurich, the project brought together scholars across institutions and fields (such as philosophy, social sciences, history, and the arts) in Chinese, Japanese, Indian, and religious studies, including ecocritical scholar Dr. Kiu-wai Chu (specialized in ecocritical Asian and Sinophone cinema studies). The course includes modules on landscapes in China, India, and Japan, regarding their cultural representations,

transformations, degradation, and other issues. The course has been a huge success, enrolled in by over nine thousand people (till March 2022) (www.coursera.org/learn/asian-environmental-humanities).

More recently, reviews of Chinese ecocriticism have begun to appear in English, such as Wei Qingqi's "Chinese Ecocriticism in the Last Ten Years" in *The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism* (2014), and Douglas Scott Berman's "Chinese ecocriticism: A survey of the landscape." A number of Chinese scholars, especially bilingual scholars such as Lily Hong Chen, Cheng Xiangzhan, and He Weihua have also started to publish their articles in English-language journals. Cheng Xiangzhan published his article on Chinese eco-aesthetics in English, such as "Ecosophy and Ecoaesthetics: A Chinese Perspective." Meanwhile, *Ecocriticism of the Global South* included Zhou Xiaojing's article, "Scenes from the Global South in China: Zheng Xiaoqiong's Poetic Agency for Labor and Environmental Justice," which explored how environmental and social injustice work hand in hand under the rural–urban dichotomy in contemporary China.

Emerging scholars such as those working on Chinese New-wave science fiction and speculative fiction have also contributed to ecocriticism. A recent book-length publication is *Ecocriticism and Chinese Literature: Imagined Landscapes and Real Lived Spaces* (2022), edited by Riccardo Moratto and others. The book began with the Chinese classical literary concept of *qingjing* (情境) developed by Wang Guowei (1877–1927), situating ecocritical approaches within the Chinese literary and cultural context. The anthology published a range of articles, including studies of modern Chinese poetry by Feng Zhi and Fei Ming; ecocritical analyses of contemporary ecopoetry, science fiction, and fiction (including Can Xue and Zhang Chengzhi); and analysis of works by Sinophone writers outside the mainland (including Wu Ming-yi, and Ng Kim-chew). These studies were from emerging and mid-career bilingual and bicultural scholars who work in both Chinese and Western contexts.

0.4 Nostalgia, *Xiangchou*, and Solastalgia: Theoretical Framework

Nature nostalgia runs so thoroughly through environmentalist literature that Jeremy Davies wrote: "nostalgia becomes a utopian environmental and social programme" (264). Indeed, nature nostalgia has become a widespread phenomenon in the era of environmental crises, and contemporary Chinese ecofiction is no exception to this. In contemporary Chinese fiction, expressions of rural nostalgia are often mingled with a nostalgia for a vanished relationship to nature, especially as widespread urbanization has swallowed up swathes of rural land and its intermingled ecosystems, such as wetlands. The symbol of the idyllic countryside was also persistent in modern, urbanized Britain (Williams, *The Country and the City* 289), and indeed this is a pattern visible wherever

industrialization takes its course. As Fred Davis puts it, "nostalgia thrives on transition, on the subjective discontinuities that engender our yearning for continuity" (49). Yet, the things which we are nostalgic for and the ways we frame nostalgic feelings are different, and it is those differences that interest comparative literary and cultural studies.

In this section, I will introduce and compare several similar emotions – *xiangchou*, nostalgia, and solastalgia – to understand what these feelings reveal about the relationship between humans and the more-than-human world. To help particularise these emotions, it is useful to use affect theory and the way that it distinguishes between feelings, emotions, and affect. Developed as a concept in cognitive psychology by Silvan Tomkins in his three-volume work *Affect Imagery Consciousness* (1962, 1963, 1991), affect was promoted as a key term in cultural analysis by Brian Massumi. Drawing on Baruch Spinoza, Henri Bergson, and Guiles Deleuze, Massumi defines affect as an intensity that escapes from conscious reflection (31). Although affect is usually loosely used as synonym for "feeling" and "emotion," Massumi argues it is the pre-cognitive, physiological intensity that is yet to be lost or processed into feelings and emotions. In their introduction to *The Affect Theory Reader*, Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg write: "Affect is an impingement or extrusion of a momentary or sometimes more sustained state of relation *as well as* the passage (and the duration of passage) of forces or intensities" (1). This abstracting of affect from feeling and emotion allows them to be named more precisely. Rei Terada, for instance, writes: "By emotion we usually mean a psychological, at least minimally interpretive experience whose physiological aspect is affect. Feeling is a capacious term that connotes both physiological sensations (affects) and psychological states (emotions)" (4). Eric Shouse reinforces this distinction: "Feelings are personal and biographical, emotions are social, and affects are prepersonal" (Shouse). Introducing the concept of affect also helps us reconfigure eco-existence, because "intensity is immanent to matter and to events, to mind and to body and to every level of bifurcation composing them and which they compose" (Massumi 33). Affect offers a non-anthropocentric basis for understanding human attachment with the living environment and to other species, in that affect pertains to "the body's capacity to affect and to be affected" (Seigworth and Gregg 2).

Turning then to the affective terms at the center of this thesis, we can see that while *xiangchou* and nostalgia are both terms with a deep cultural history, solastalgia is a very recent coinage. Solastalgia is "the pain or distress caused by the ongoing loss of solace and the sense of desolation connected to the present state of one's home and territory," it is "the existential and lived experience of negative environmental change" that "manifests as an attack on one's sense of place." (Albrecht, *Earth Emotions* 38) The sense of place is also well registered in the

history of nostalgia as an emotion. Nostalgia, from the Greek *nosos* (return to the native land) and *-algos* (suffering, grief), was proposed in 1688 by Johannes Hofer (1669–1752), a Swiss physician, to diagnose a wasting cerebral disease among Swiss soldiers serving abroad that could become life-threatening if without a return to their native land. This "grief for the lost charm of the Native Land" (Hofer 381) named a human–place emotional bond in the language of the Enlightenment movement. In the early twentieth century, the word gained its "milder present-day connotations of wistful longing for a past time."[29] If we translate nostalgia into Chinese, we will get two concepts: *xiangchou* (lit: hometown-melancholy) and *huaijiu* (lit: yearning for the past). While *xiangchou* comes closest to the English word "homesickness", it does not tend to connote the "sickness" that the English term keeps from the original seventeenth-century coinage. On the other hand, the term *huaijiu* is not directly connected to geography, articulating instead the temporal, retrospective temptation that modern humans seem especially prone to, and is close in meaning to the English term nostalgia. As a result, nostalgia is more often translated as *huaijiu* (yearning for the past) than as *xiangchou*, while homesickness is translated as *sixiang bing* (*sixiang*: missing home; *bing*: sickness), which is less used than *xiangchou*. The socio-cultural particularity about *xiangchou* (instead of *huaijiu*) is that it reveals the structure of feeling in the basic unit of social organization of traditional Chinese society, one that is based on the Confucian family-lineal relationship. *Xiangchou* has always been a structure of feeling culturally and socially embedded in the Chinese imagination.

All these terms have been given an urgency with the onset of modernity. In her influential work, *the Future of Nostalgia* (2001), Svetlana Boym develops George Lukacs' comment about how the "transcendental homelessness" features modern experience in the early Twentieth century, and she further elevates nostalgia as central to approach modernity with three "scenes of reflective modern nostalgia": Baudelaire's poetic representation of urban transience in Paris, Nietsche's philosophical "eternal returning" to the Alpine wilderness and the universe, and Benjamin's observation about history and violence through the eye of the angel of History. (22) Significantly, Boym highlights the changing concept of time – from a pre-modern cyclical temporality to the modern progressive, linear one. In China, although *xiangchou* is increasingly subsumed by a modern temporality in China (the Gregorian Calendar was introduced into China in the late nineteenth century and gradually overrode the Lunar Calendar as the dominant calendar), the term still preserves an emphasis on the "sense of place"

[29] According to the Credo etymological dictionary, its initial record was identified from the botanist Joseph Banks's journal (1770) kept when he joined Captain Cok's round-the-world voyage: "'now pretty far gone with the longing for home which the Physicians have gone so far as to esteem a disease under the name of Nostalgia'" ["nostalgia." *Word Origins*, *Credo Reference*.]

(Tuan)[30] that exists in non-modern cultures.

Etymologically, *xiangchou* consists of 乡 (*xiāng*, rural hometown, native land) and 愁 (*chóu*, sadness, sorrow), which is similar to nostalgia. The difference lies in that *chou* is an emotion rather than a medical symptom. According to *Explaining Graphs and Analysing Characters* (*Shuowen Jiezi*), an ancient Chinese dictionary from Han Dynasty, *chou* is synonymous to 忧 (*yōu*, distress, worry), and also sounds similar to 秋 (*qiū*, Autumn).[31] While *qiū* seemingly only functions as a radical for sound with no semantic function, "autumn" has indeed been integral to the *chou* experience. In Chinese lyrical poetics, the feeling of *chou* is associated with two temporal scenarios, the twilight, and the autumn. According to Qian Zhongshu (1910–1998), "twilight evokes *chou* feelings (*minse qichou* 暝色起愁)" is an archetypal mode in Chinese poetics that can be traced back to the earliest poetry collection, *Book of Songs* (*Shijing* 诗经) (173). As well, *Chou* 愁 appears 35 times in *Songs of the South* (*Chuci* 楚辞), the other major fountain of classical Chinese lyrical poetry. The etymology of the term *chou* is explained by Wu Wenying (1200–1260): "What composes this *chou* feeling? 'Tis autumn falling on my wanderer's heart."[32]

Chou is used in diverse ways in Chinese literary history, but it is mainly employed to express the sorrows of separated lovers, to capture the loneliness of a traveler, or to portray the solitary serenity of the countryside. These usages "all point to one common theme: longing for returning" (Hou Yan 176). In the traditional Chinese lyrical tradition, "*xiangchou* is not merely sorrow but also spiritual feasting and poetic longing" (Zhang Tanfeng 3). Unlike "sick" in "homesickness", or "-algia" in "nostalgia," the *chou* emotion in Chinese is not indicative of pathology, but it reveals how a person can be "moved" and "affected" by time, seasons, and an environment in which they are emplaced. In this sense, *xiangchou* conveys what affect theory frames as the porosity between mind and body, human and place.

The *xiang* in *xiangchou* is the object and the cause of the *chou* feeling. *Xiang* is the basic unit of premodern Chinese rural society and the word functions as a synonym for home. The concept was elevated into an idea of an arcadian home for retreat and escape in the writing of Tao Yuanming (365–427 AD) and later literati. At the same time, the "peach blossom spring" (*taohua yuan*) becomes the archetypal utopian image of China's arcadia or Shangri-La, preserved in the story of a fisherman's visit to an idyllic wonderland founded by people who escaped from

[30] Yi-fu Tuan famously distinguishes "sense of space" and "sense of place", that the former is produced with scientific measurement and mathematical abstraction of a locale, while "place" brings out the human emotional, cultural, and historical attachment to a specific site over time with experience. (See more in Yi-Fu Tuan's *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*.)

[31] "6888 心部: 愁: 憂也. 从心秋聲." ("Shuowen Jiezi Juan shi." 说文解字 卷十.)

[32] "何处合成愁? 离人心上." (*Mengchuanggao juansi*. 夢窗稿 卷四. *Drafts on Dreaming beside the Window*: Vol. 4.) The translation is mine.

political turmoil:

> […] a broad, flat area with imposing houses, good fields, beautiful ponds, mulberry trees, bamboo, and the like. The fisherman saw paths extending among the fields in all directions and could hear chickens and dogs. Men and women working in the fields all wore clothing that looked like that of foreign lands. The elderly and children all seemed to be happy and enjoying themselves.[33]

In many ways, this peaceful peach blossom Shangri-La is an anarchist idyll akin to the Taoist ideal society, and the peaceful scene it depicted has become both a Chinese version of utopia and an archetype for ideal nature–human coexistence. As philosopher He Lin (1902-1992) wrote, together with *shanshui* in Chinese landscape poetry and painting, the peach blossom spring "can be considered as that nature which glows in souls. It epitomizes the oneness of Nature and man rather than a blurring of their boundaries, or hostility between them." (122, qtd. in *The Ecological Era* 35-36) While *xiangchou* about rural villages (framed as peach blossom spring utopias) is a common emotion in classical Chinese lyrical (*shuqing*) literature, this rural image has persisted into modern Chinese literature. The "return to a native home" has been a common motif in modern Chinese literature over the twentieth century (Meng, Chen).[34] Indeed, the orthodox configuration of Chinese modernization is as the transformation of a premodern society into a modern society that is predominantly urban, industrial, and individualistic. In *From the Soil* (*Xiangtu Zhongguo* 1947), the pioneering Chinese anthropologist Fei Xiaotong (1910–2005) noted that being rural was seen as an essential characteristic of traditional Chinese identity. Yet, on the other hand, being rural was also a mark of backwardness.

Indeed, in the early twentieth century, a rural/urban dichotomy emerged, whose terms also corresponded to the traditional (with more negative connotation)/modern and Chinese/Western antitheses. The situation reflected the transformation of the classical dynastic historical mode into "a new mode of historical consciousness," as Leo Ou-fan Lee has noted. In this respect, we see a pattern similar to that noticed earlier in Svetlana Boym's analysis of nostalgia. Early twentieth-century Chinese nationalism also saw the emergence of *xiangtu wenxue* (native

[33] Translated and proofread by Rick Davis and David Steelman. *Peach Blossom Shangri-la* (*Tao Hua Yuan Ji* 桃花源记) By Tao Yuanming. October 26, 2008, https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/2090/pg2090.html. Accessed 3 Feb 2022.

[34] Meng Fanhua divides the major writing stream into three phases: home-soil literature (xiangtu wenxue), rural-themed fiction (nongcun ticai xiaoshuo 1940s–1970s), and "new home-soil literature" (xin xiangtu wenxue 1980s–). [Meng. "Century-long Chinese Mainstream Literature," 94–100.] Likewise, Chen Xiaoming also discussed the tradition and realism in "rural narrative" (*xiangcun xushi* 乡村叙事) in his monograph *A Concise History of Contemporary Chinese Literature* (*Zhongguo dangdai wenxue jianshi*) (418–463).

soil literature), even while the May Fourth intellectuals saw the urban as a symbol of enlightenment and modernity, and advocated for reform and transformation in rural China (Denton 20). Despite this, for many writers, the cities soon became a place of disillusionment and alienation, and the rural re-emerged as their source of identification and longing. Modern Chinese writers are thus a complex amalgam of "intellectualized urban country folk" (Zhang, *The City in Modern Chinese Literature* 17). For them, rural China was a place of ignorance and fossilized Confucian-patriarchal rituals, yet at the same time an idyllic paradise preserving the essence of Chinese culture. Indeed, if Hsia Chih-tsing was right in perceiving modern Chinese writers as afflicted with an "obsession with China," then it is equally fair to say that most modern Chinese writers are also afflicted with an "obsession" with their rural hometowns. As David Der-wei Wang notes, narratives of the native soil are crucial to understanding modernization and its discontents in modern China:

> The past half-century has seen many debates over the formal and conceptual adequacy of the elusive native soil discourse: Mao's advocacy of an earthy discourse suitable for "the people" in the forties; Taiwan writers' promotion of a native soil movement in the late sixties and seventies; and mainland writers' desire to search out their "roots" again in the eighties. Each started as a literary campaign yet developed into a cultural/political battle. The debates between and about them constitute one of the most complicated intellectual strains in modern and contemporary Chinese literature. (3)

Based on the literary works produced during these literary movements over the twentieth century, especially the root-seeking literature, Wang proposed his influential concept of "imagined nostalgia" (*xiangxiang de xiangchou*), which questioned the "ontological assumptions often associated with the concept of nostalgia." (112)

Wang's concept of an "imagined nostalgia" is important to keep in mind when we consider why *xiangchou*, as a literary discourse, is so important in contemporary ecofiction. Of the modern Chinese writers that influenced the ecofiction of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, Shen Congwen's (1902–1988) idyllic aesthetics provided a green vision, expressed in his essay collection, *Sketches on a Trip to Hunan* (*Xiangxing Sanji*, 1934): "They lived by the code of nature, with all the other entities, living or inanimate, which radiate or dissolve with the changing of the seasons, and follow the rising and setting of sun and moon" (English translation qtd. in Nie, 66). Many of the root-seeking writers can also be regarded as pioneering ecofiction. Some of these, such as A. Cheng and Jia Pingwa, also openly admit their indebtedness to Shen Congwen (Wang, "Imaginary Nostalgia" 123).

However, in Huang Yi's study of contemporary Chinese ecofiction, she distinguishes rural ecological fiction (*xiangtu shengtai xiaoshuo*) from root-seeking writing:

> The root-seeking writers in the 1980s were confronted with a "native soil" that was still intact, and they wrote about the Chinese ethos with hopes and dreams about the future; however, the economic change and ethical transformation since the 1980s have rendered the native soil broken, and no longer "complete." (42).[35]

Huang's comment exemplifies the persistence of *xiangchou* discourse in the ecological narratives and imagination of contemporary China, which has also been emphasized in the Xi regime's "remembering *xiangchou*" (*jizhu xiangchou*) rhetoric. In this thesis, I develop a critique of *xiangchou*, seeking to retain something of the way it values place, without falling victim to its utopian enchantments. In particular, I seek to ask: How might an atemporal and a-spatial *xiangchou* still capture the eco-reality of contemporary China? Moreover, is it still viable to cast the villages of rural China as green sanctuaries for urban residents? With reference to recent Chinese ecofiction, I want to investigate both the limits and ongoing possibilities of *xiangchou* as a discourse.

0.5 Significance of the Study

This thesis provides an affective and comparative ecocritical reading of contemporary Chinese ecofiction, offering an original synthesis of ecocriticism, China studies, affect studies, environmental humanities, and comparative literary and cultural studies. In a period of (post-)pandemic isolation and de-globalization, it is more pressing than ever for the global community to search for collective solutions to the planetary environmental crises. In this context, this thesis responds to a need for humanities scholars to play a more active role in mutual understanding between communities with different "naturecultures."[36] Within this, Western-centered environmental humanities need to be complemented by alternative knowledge and traditions. My thesis attempts to understand contemporary Chinese environmental conditions through recent Chinese ecofiction, and by drawing on Chinese terms and concepts in partnership with the terminology of Western ecocriticism. My work joins that of other Chinese

[35] "上世纪80年代的'寻根'一代面对的是'完整的乡土'，他们心怀对未来的憧憬和梦想来书写坚韧的民族气质和清洁的道德精神；但是上世纪以来的经济变革和文化伦理蜕变已然使乡土变得残缺，而且再也'圆满'不起来。"

[36] Natureculture is a term Haraway first uses as rectification of dualism. Drawing on anthropologist Marilyn Strathern's theory on reproductive technologies, Haraway argues that the model of nature and culture as polarized categories should be transformed to capture their contingency and inseparability. (See Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto*, 2001, 9.)

ecocritical scholars, such as Chia-ju Chang's evocation of "*huanjing*" (environing) as a method, and Yinde Zhang's recent adaptation of philosopher Wang Fuzhi's (1619–1692) concepts of *qingjing* (情景 scene) and *qingjing* (情境 situation) (xiv–xvii). My thesis is also an attempt to bring Chinese ecological narratives, and their specific scenes and situations, into the Western scholarly conversation and, in this way, it adds to the emerging pluralization of ecocritical thinking and environmentalism more generally.

My thesis answers its research questions by examining texts that tackle specific environmental issues – extinction, deforestation, and pollution. These texts serve as case studies for me to approach some of the most alarming environmental issues and their socioeconomic, cultural, and ideological roots. These texts have been selected for the way they illustrate and engage with environmental degradation. My thesis does not attempt to nominate or sanctify "the perfect ecofiction" but rather to explore the socio-ecological entanglement embodied in key contemporary Chinese texts.

In Chapter One, which deals with extinction, I focus on two texts that revolve around the extinction of wolves – Jia Pingwa's *Remembering Wolves* (2000) and Jiang Rong's *Wolf Totem* (2004). Even though these two texts are very different in their styles and settings, they both dramatize the consequences of Chinese modernization through the figure of the disappearing wolf. Both novels deploy the conservation of wolves to cure the nation of its modern "illnesses". Both texts subvert the conventional Chinese cultural conception of wolves as malevolent vermin and instead represent wolves as the essence of wilderness and vitality that determines the national destiny of China. Moreover, in both texts, *xiangchou*, nostalgia, and solastalgia are in complex dialogue. In *Remembering Wolves*, nature nostalgia intermingles with rural nostalgia and solastalgia in the form of a "photographic safari" (Sontag), as the hero attempts to photograph the disappearing wolves. In *Wolf Totem*, the protagonist incorporates the wolves into a pastoral nostalgia to mitigate Chinese modernization. In that novel, nomadic pastoralism is a substitute for the traditional Peach Blossom Spring of rural *xiangchou*. Interestingly, although both stories draw on the reality of species extinction, this concern is accompanied (and sometimes overshadowed) by socio-ideological concerns.

Chapter Two focuses on Alai's "Hollow Mountain" series (2005–2009), which explores how the process of deforestation entangles with modernization, historical violence, and loss in a Gyalrong Tibetan village. Delineating "the landscape of hometown(s)" and the discourse of "the root of China" in Alai's narratives, the chapter argues that this series of work fundamentally challenges the *xiangchou* discourse by counterintuitively identifying Ji village as an epitome of Chinese rurality. By untangling the politics and poetics of nostalgia in the

stories, Chapter Two also reveals Alai's effort to destabilize the sanctity of a static "hometown." The work imagines the villagers' effort in home-seeking and community reconstruction at the time of deforestation-induced disasters.

Chapter Three considers the issue of pollution, which has become an increasing problem in modern China. While extinction and deforestation have taken place in the countryside, air pollution is a problem that affects the millions that live in China's expanding cities and towns. The texts discussed here are all from the genre of science fiction and provide critical examinations of the price of the nation's economic development. Chen Qiufan's novel *Waste Tide* depicts the consequences of global e-waste, revealing the "slow violence" (violence that is apprehended as normal change) entrenched in the current global trade in harmful waste. In a similar vein, Chen's story "The Smog Society" considers the adverse effect of air pollution on people's psychological wellbeing. Hao Jinfang's story "Folding Beijing" links urban waste issues with social class rigidity in a futuristic Beijing, where an underclass of people struggles for survival.

The ecofictional texts considered in this thesis take environmental issues as a lens to reflect upon the consequences of China's modernization project that has proceeded with increasing rapidity since the middle of the Twentieth century. In mapping these consequences, these texts broadly identify two major causes of eco-degradation in China. One cause is the anthropocentrism and political errors in the Mao era, where populist political campaigns led to anti-intellectualism and bad management. The more recent cause identified is the inception of consumerism, labor exploitation, and the unequal global economic system that have typified the Chinese situation in the reform and post-reform eras. Despite their differences, all these texts share a common concern with Chinese modernization and environmental injustice. This ethical concern links to how the texts employ the rhetoric of *xiangchou* to critique socio-ecological inequalities. *Xianchou* emerges – sometimes as nostalgia, sometimes as solastalgia – when individuals or communities find themselves overwhelmed by radical environmental change. The texts in this thesis actively employ, reconstruct, or challenge *xiangchou* narratives in their depiction of alienated experiences induced by environmental degradation.

With respect to the divergence between the Global Northern and Southern modes of ecocriticism, my project sees an opportunity for synthesis in China's exceptional situation as both a rich and poor nation. China's situation, uneasily straddling the first and third worlds, helps reveal that ecological degradation is a complex socio-ecological matter. Certainly, Chinese ecofiction and its scholarship has its own embedded biases. As Li Cheng notes, "mainland ecocritical scholarship presents an obvious middle-class, urban, Han Chinese status quo bias" (831). On the other hand, as Ralph Litzinger and Fan Yang have observed, Western commentators often fall into what they

call "the Yellow Eco-Peril rhetoric," in which contemporary China is viewed as "a polluting and polluted Other" and "a threat to the planet's sustainability" (211). Laura Karen Thornber's ground-breaking work on East Asian ecological literature and culture argues that East Asian cultures are characterized by a high degree of "ecoambiguity"; that is, the ambiguity that exists between rural and natural worlds. Thornber argues that "ecoambiguity appears more prevalent in literature from East Asia than in other textual corpuses" (3). Also, Mark Elvin, an influential environmental historian of premodern China, concluded that "more than any premodern northwestern Europeans, the Chinese were driven by a desire for the rational mastery of the world" (62). China, both historically and in the present moment, does share many common environmental challenges with other nations, and such comparisons are highly fraught. What my thesis seeks to do is to use environmental humanities to understand ecological issues with adequate local, global, historical, and critical knowledge. My thesis approaches contemporary Chinese ecofiction from the Chinese perspective and with its own terms, but I also draw on theories in affect studies, new materialism, and environmental justice studies to present how environmental issues are configured in China and how ecological issues are entangled with China's historical, cultural, and political situation.

Finally, my research aims to move beyond the "literature for humanity" supremacy in Chinese literary studies. "Literature is the study of humanity (*wenxue shi renxue*)" is a significant motto of literary theorist Qian Gurong (1919–2017) in 1957, which conveys a view to define literature in humanistic terms. Repudiated as a heresy to the hegemonic socialist realism during the Cultural Revolution, Qian's theory was later rediscovered and embraced by mainland intellectuals after the thawing of the Mao era. Qian's humanistic view of literature was influenced by Soviet literary theorists such as Maxim Gorky, but its more significant inspiration was the Chinese intellectual Zhou Zuoren's (1885–1967) essay "Literature for Humanity"[37](1918). (Chen, "the Assessment of Contemporary Chinese Literature" 24) Both Zhou's and Qian's humanistic literary theories were of groundbreaking significance in Twentieth-century Chinese literary history. However, when it comes to the representation of ecological crises, to reaffirm "literature of (and *for*) humanity" becomes problematic in that such reiteration tends to presume the opposition between the human supremacy and biocentrism,[38] and leaves no way

[37] According to Wen Rumin, Zhou Zuoren's slogan "literature for humanity" is a humanistic view of literature shared by the early modern intellectuals in their call for modernizing the Chinese culture, but Zhou himself later moves away from this artistic ideal for he is not satisfied with the utilitarianism and moral burden contained in the ideal. (25)

[38] The "literature for humanity" view takes Western humanism as its critical resource without due criticism of its anthropocentrism, as Li Chen critically notes that many contemporary Chinese ecocritical scholars are "narrowly concentrated on the biocentric and anthropocentric dichotomy" (Li, "Echoes from the Opposite Shore" 831). Christopher Kar-lin Tong, on the other hand, observes that mainland Chinese ecocritical studies largely follow the dogma of dialectical distinction between "humanization of nature" (*ziran de renhua*) and "naturalization of human" (*rende ziranhua*), and the entrenched human-centredness has not really been epistemologically challenged. (28–29). These dialectical concepts are proposed by notable philosopher Li Zehou (1930–2021). The "humanization of nature" refers to both human contemplation and transformation of the material environment, and "naturalization of human" means human co-existence with nature. [Li, *Huaxia meixue sijiang*, 294–303. Qtd. from Tong, 28–29.]

out of the egoistic trap of anthropocentrism epitomized by the "Vitruvian Man".[39] My thesis attempts to deconstruct the idea of the "human" that sits underneath the Enlightenment humanistic approach, and I draw on the inter-corporeal potentials of affect that are mobilized in ecofiction to evoke nonhuman agency.

[39] In Rosi Bradotti's development of critical posthumanism, she draws on ecofeminism and post-colonial theories to rectify the problematic aspects of modern humanism, mainly: anthropocentrism, androcentrism, and anglocentrism. Bradotti sees the image of the Vitruvian man as the epitome of the Enlightenment ideal of "humanity," which must be challenged and revised. [See Bradotti *The Posthuman*]

Chapter 1 – The Chinese Tiger, the Mongolian Wolf: Extinction and Its Narratives

> There is no singular phenomenon of extinction; rather, extinction is experienced, resisted, measured, enunciated, performed, and narrated in a variety of ways to which we must attend. (2)
>
> *Extinction Studies: Stories of Time, Death, and Generations* (2007), by Deborah Bird Rose, Thom van Dooren, and Matthew Chrulew

> It is a nostalgic time right now, and photographs actively promote nostalgia. Photography is an elegiac art, a twilight art. Most subjects photographed are, just by virtue of being photographed, touched with pathos. An ugly or grotesque subject may be moving because it has been dignified by the attention of the photographer. A beautiful subject can be the object of rueful feelings, because it has aged or decayed or no longer exists. All photographs are memento mori. (15)
>
> *On Photography* (1973), by Susan Sontag

While animals are very much marginal in twentieth-century Chinese literature, the new millennium has seen "an animal turn" in literary fiction that features animals as protagonists "in their own right". (Haiyan Lee 145–146) This is reflected in the emergence of ecofiction about extinction, such as Ye Guangqin's "Big Fu the Tiger" (2001), Chen Yingsong's *Last Dance of the Leopard* (2004), Li Kewei's *the Chinese Tiger* (2007), and Du Guanghui's *Wolves from Hoh Xil* (2010). In the ecofiction of extinction, charismatic megafauna, which historically stirs in people intense feelings of fear, awe, or revulsion, now carries the cultural perception of the finality of species decline and are hence nostalgically associated with the "end of Nature" itself. Although extinction writing has appeared since the late 1980s, it is not until the early 2000s that it becomes phenomenal. Through the writers' attempt to rectify the conventional cultural conceptions of charismatic megafauna, an ecological turn in post-2000s Chinese fiction is brought forth.

This chapter investigates the social, cultural, and biopolitical crisis of declining biodiversity through a comparative reading of post-2000s extinction narratives. Focusing on two novels that imagine the extinction of wolves – Jia Pingwa's *Remembering Wolves* (怀念狼 2000) and Jiang Rong's *Wolf Totem* (狼图腾 2004) – the chapter explores the environmental imagination about "undomesticated Nature," as symbolized by charismatic megafauna.

I select two notable ecofiction texts about the imagined extinction of wolves while also drawing on the example of the South China tiger, a species driven to "functional extinction" due to purposeful, state-led hunting during China's modernization. Beginning with nationwide, much-discussed news about the feral South China tiger, the chapter introduces readers to the social context of China in the early 2000s. While the extinction of the South China tiger proves a disappearance that is of wide public concern, ecofiction about the tigers and wolves is also becoming an influential phenomenon.

The chapter consists of four parts. Part One serves to introduce both the socio-ecological background of species extinction and Jia Pingwa's *Remembering Wolves*. With the example of a set of fabricated photos of the South China tiger, the section sets the scene to understand the changing attitude towards extinct (of decreasing) megafauna species in turn-of-century China. Part Two approaches the extinction narratives in *Remembering Wolves* through the narrator, Gao's root-seeking pilgrimage, and the paradoxes of animal photography. Gao's unfulfilled return to the native, together with the failure of photography in species conservation, can be seen as the failure of *xiangchou* and the rise of solastalgia in the context of accelerated urbanization and modernization. This part explores how the novel unravels what it deems as dual crises – of society and of ecology – through the extinction of wolves. Following this, Part Three brings in *Wolf Totem* to understand how the issue of extinction can be also interrelated with the political, biopolitical, and geopolitical discourses in contemporary China. In Part Four, through a comparative reading of both stories, this chapter further explores the post-Mao utopianism and the *xiangchou* and nostalgia narratives related to charismatic megafauna, and how species extinction may act as a counter-discourse to Han Chinese hegemony, progressive modernity, and anthropocentrism.

1.1 Extinction and Extinction Narratives in Post-millennium China

1.1.1 Extinction as a Social Event

In an era of accelerated species extinction, claims of spotting lost species in the "wild" can escalate into significant social events, notes Ursula Heise in *Imaging Extinction* (39). Such events also occurred in mainland China, though with distinct "Chinese characteristics," and an intriguing case was the counterfeited photograph of a South China tiger (*Panthera tigris amoyensis*) in 2007. In October that year, Zhou Zhenglong, a 52-year-old farmer (and former hunter) in Zhenpin County, Shaanxi Province, claimed to have photographed a living South China Tiger in the forests. He was soon rewarded by the local Bureau of Forestry Affairs with 20,000 yuan, because the existence of tigers also served to endorse the officials' track record in forest protection. Zhou was exalted as a "valiant hero"

who doggedly traced the "disappeared" South China tiger, an animal "no less precious than the giant panda." His photos were taken as "stimulating news" that "not only strongly prove the South China tiger is not extinct in China but also indicate a high chance that a small breeding population exists in the region". (*Beijing Morning Post*) The news also mentioned that previously, the last sighting of a South China tiger was recorded in Hubei Province in 1983, although Western scholars such as Ronald Tilson said that no feral South China tiger has been witnessed since the 1970s..[40] However, many netizens raised their eyebrows at the photos, and it soon escalated into a frenzied nationwide discussion, which is also an early case of online democracy in China. Eventually, Zhou's "discovery" was proven bogus when a netizen reveals a similar tiger image from a 2002 edition of Spring Festival picture 2D print, and the officials from the local Bureau of Forestry Affairs were also punished for abetting of Zhou's fraudulent deeds.

Figure 1.1 Partial Enlarged Detail of Zhou Zhenglong's photograph of the South China tiger

In hindsight, the photographic (re)discovery of feral South China tigers had already played out (though fictionally) in Li Kewei's *the Chinese Tiger*, an ecofiction published earlier that year. The novel begins with a surprising photographic capturing of a female South China tiger, which motivates both Chinese and international conservationists around the possibility of mating the tiger, despite facing harassment by poachers. Both Li's novel and Zhou Zhenglong's online fiasco, consciously or unwittingly, play out a photographic "necromancy" (招魂, or "calling back of the dead") of extinct megafauna in post-2000s China as a response to the collapse of biodiversity from the twentieth century. Claims about witnessing extinct species were not unusual, either in or beyond China, especially with "flagship species" such as Yangtze River Dolphins, the Hokkaido wolf in Japan, or the ivory-billed woodpecker in North America. To Ursula Heise, claims about witnessing "ghost species" serve to "express a deep-felt unease over the consequences of modernization," and extinction of species, especially charismatic ones, becomes "integrated into cultural history" as a symbol of crises (38–39). Here in post-millennium China, ecofiction works based on apex predators, such as the South China tiger and wolves, brought national attention to a species made extinct by humans, such as R*emembering Wolves*, *Wolf Totem*, and "Big Fu the Tiger". I propose that it is in

[40] Earlier in May 2007, the Global Tiger Forum (GTF) organized an International Tiger Symposium in Nepal and published a report that contended that "there is no confirmed evidence of the presence of South China tigers in the wild". In 2008, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List listed the South China tiger as "critically endangered (possibly extinct in the wild)".

narratives about animals that were conventionally feared, if not derogated, that an "ecological turn" is outlined.

Strictly speaking, wolves are not extinct. Nowadays, while Shaanxi Province (the setting of *Remembering Wolves*) is still considered an extant habitat for wolves,[41] Inner Mongolia also boasts a considerable number of wolves (although both stories end up with the extinction or elimination of wolves). However, the South China tiger is almost certainly extinct outside zoos. Despite a record of over 4,000 South China tigers in the 1950s (Tilson et al. 40), there has been no confirmed sighting since the 1970s.[42] The global decline of the tiger (*Panthera tigris*) is an iconic representative of what Elizabeth Kolbert named "the Sixth Extinction" in the deep history of life on Earth – this one caused by humans. If we look at the species map, the distribution of tigers has seen a fundamental collapse during the twentieth century. China, where all the extant tiger species originated (the South China tiger is the stem tiger for the other subspecies),[43], is on the brink of a tigerless future[44] (see Figure 1.2).

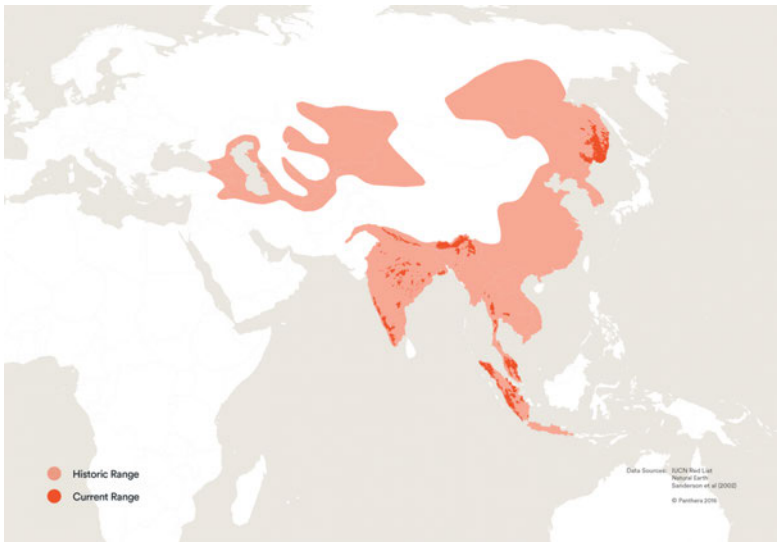

Figure 1.2 Global tiger distribution (historical and current) source: https://www.panthera.org/cat/tiger Accessed Jan. 16, 2022.

While the global decline of the megafauna population indexes the destructiveness of human modernity, the scrutiny of local natural history also reveals that the deeper root of extinction lies in the anthropocentric culture. As Cao Zhihong investigates, in China, human–tiger conflicts have existed since prehistorical times but intensified due to human population explosion, terraforming, and agricultural expansion. "Government-sponsored tiger-hunting activities surged to an unprecedented level in the Ming and Qing Dynasties, which drove the tigers from plains and lower ranges to mountains of mid and higher altitudes." (ii) Notwithstanding the destruction in pre-modern eras, "it is the 'Anti-pest campaigns' in the Mao era that edged the

[41] Despite historical shrinking of numbers, grey wolf (Canis lupus) is now listed as LC (least concern) in areas in Asia including Northern China and Mongolia, according to the IUCN Red List (Boitani et al. IUCN).
[42] The South China tiger is estimated to be extinct in the wild (with no solid evidence of sighting)—living South China tigers are all in zoos and breeding centers in China. There are about 150 South China tigers (all descendants of six tigers) in captivity (zoos and breeding centers), but its future looks grave due to the narrow gene pool and difficulty of rewilding (http://www.chinanews.com/gn/2017/11-29/8388442.shtml; https://www.tigersincrisis.com/south-china-tiger/ Accessed 5 Oct 2021).
[43] The South China tiger predecessed the other eight tiger subspecies (three have gone extinct). Historically, four subspecies of tiger are distributed in China, among which the South China tiger only exists within the borders of China, hence its nickname: the Chinese tiger.
[44] According to the ICUN Red List, only Heilongjiang, Yunnan, Jilin, and Tibet (or Xizang) are still considered as extant habitats for tigers in China.

tigers into near extinction" (Ibid. ii). It is documented that about 800 South China tigers were killed each year from the 1950s to the 1960s (Yu et al. 37). Held as pests and class enemies to the proletariat, tigers were hunted with military force and modern tools (such as guns and toxicants). In February 1959, the Forestry Department of the People's Republic of China ratified a policy in which apex predators, such as the South China tiger, bear, leopard, and wolves, were all classified as "hazardous animals (*haishou*)," and hunters were summoned to "kill the pests at all costs."[45] The anti-pest campaigns persisted for two to three decades, causing a devastating ecological impoverishment. Although the destruction of nature in the service of modernization is a global phenomenon, in the Chinese context it was socialist modernization that mobilized Anthropocentric mentality into a "war against nature," to use Shapiro's term.

The disappearance of the South China tiger reminds people that the violence, loss, and trauma from the twentieth century are registered not solely in human memories but also interwoven into nonhuman existence. Heise attributes the "deep-felt unease" in narratives surrounding extinction to the undesirable consequences of modernization and colonialization, but in Chinese extinction stories, modernization is destructive in a different manner. The extinction narratives discussed in this chapter are closely entwined with the conditions of natural and socio-political history in contemporary China and, regardless of their differences, their shared nature nostalgia is undisputable. Here I begin by exploring the entanglement between *xiangchou*, biopolitics, and bioethics in *Remembering Wolves*. I seek to comprehend how the situation of extinction in the Anthropocene has disabled previous cultural constructs, such as heroism, rural China, and *xiangchou* (rural nostalgia).

1.1.2 Fin-de-siecle Environmental Distress in Jia Pingwa's *Remembering Wolves*

Jia Pingwa and His Writing

Set in a post-reform China, *Remembering Wolves* follows a journalist and writer named Gao Ziming (高子明) who wishes to document the remaining fifteen wolves in rural Shangzhou. Endorsed by government authorities, he embarks on his photographic journey with the assistance of two former hunters, Fu Shan (傅山) and Lantou (烂头, nickname, literally: Rotten Head), along with a cat and a hound. They witness various human–wolf encounters as well as encounters between humans, of which some involve supernatural cross-species transformations. Despite these encounters, their environmental mission turns out to be detrimental. The former hunters, now assigned the

[45] In 1962, 19 species, including the North-eastern China Tiger (Siberian tiger), were listed as protected species, not including the South China Tiger. While the South China tiger was already rated as "critically endangered" by the ICUN Red list in 1966, it was only put under partial legislative protection (ratioed hunting was still allowed) in China in 1973 and full protection in 1989 (Cao 261–263).

role to protect the wolves, finally relapse into wolf killing. In Fu Shan's hometown, a village called Bear-ear Stream (*Xiongerchuan*) where the villagers live in entrenched lupophobia (dread about wolves), Gao's arrival contributes to a manic collective wolf hunting that eliminates all the wolves. As Gao Ziming returns to Xijing, ashamed and dejected, rumors begin to rise that people from Bear-ear Stream metamorphose into werewolves and attack travelers, propelling the government to set it as a forbidden zone. This section will introduce readers to Jia Pingwa's writing career and the literary tradition he comes from in fin-de-siecle China, which serves to understand this text in its expression of the sense of crisis (both cultural and ecological).

Jia Pingwa (1952–) is one of the most renowned and translated contemporary writers in China. Some of his representative works include *Ruined City*[46] (废都, 1993), *Qin Opera* (秦腔, 2005), *Happy Dreams* (高兴, 2007), and *Old Kiln* (古炉, 2011). Jia Pingwa writes with ostensible local elements, such as folklore and dialects. Apart from the influence of vernacular literature, he also experiments with classical storytelling techniques, such as notebook fiction (*biji xiaoshuo*).[47], and these formal features are apparant in *Remembering Wolves* in that the animals and plants can sometimes transform into humans.

Jia Pingwa is a representative figure of root-seeking literature (*xungen wenxue*) in the late 1980s, and he embarks on his literary career with a series of stories about his native town, Shangzhou. Growing up in the most tumultuous years of the Mao era, Jia became a writer with profound compassion for the agrarian population suffering socio-economic disadvantage in China's rural-urban dichotomic system. In many cases, he identifies himself as "a peasant," as registered in his autobiographical story collection *I Am a Peasant* (我是农民, 2010), and which informs his sensitivity to environmental issues, particularly environmental injustice. For example, in his most representative work, *Ruined City* (1993), the protagonist, Zhuang Zhidie, an acclaimed writer in Xijing finds himself drawn into the corruption of urban society. Zhuang emulates the lifestyle of a classical man of letters and shares an amicable relationship with a cow from Mount Zhongnan (lit: Ultimate South). The nonhuman character of the cow "stands for the belief that nature nurtures life and culture destroys it," which will reappear in *Remembering*

[46] Though *Ruined City* was awarded with the French Prix Femina étranger in 1997 and later recognized as one of the "100 Best Novels in twentieth-century China" (selected by Hong Kong-based 《亚洲周刊》 or Asia Weekly), the novel received severe criticism from critics for its blatant and excessive sexual descriptions. It was banned in mainland China from 1994 until 2009.

[47] *Biji xiaoshuo* (笔记小说), "A literary sub-genre of *xiaoshuo* (fictional narratives), commonly written in classical Chinese featuring short stories in free style." Notable examples of this genre include Gan Bao's *Sou shen ji* (干宝《搜神记》 *Searching for the Supernatural*), *Shishuo xinyu* (《世说新语》 *New Account of Tales of the World*), various *chuanqi* (传奇 tales of the marvelous) popular in the Tang Dynasties, and Pu Songlin's *Liaozhai zhiyi* (蒲松龄 《聊斋志异》, Records of the Strange). Stories of supernatural spirits and ghosts make up an important part of *biji xiaoshuo*. (See more in Chang, Taiping. "*biji xiaoshuo*." A Dictionary of Chinese Literature. Oxford University Press, Oxford Reference.2017, https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780191836183.001.0001/acref-9780191836183-e-0016. Accessed May. 24, 2022.)

Wolves. (Wang, *Narrating China* 69) Jia's constant concern about environmental degradation is consistent with his unease with the brutal destruction of rural society during China's rapid urbanization. In another novel, *Old Gao Village* (高老庄, 1999), Jia dramatizes the pollution and its cancer-inducing effects among the villagers that destroy a previously harmonious agrarian natureculture. Jia's rumination on the classical Chinese view of nature and eco-philosophy is also registered in his more recent fictional works, *The Root of the Mountains* (山本, 2018) and *Notes on the Qinling Mountains* (秦岭记, 2022), where stories of human and nonhuman cohabitation unfold. *Notes on the Qinling Mountains* reveals further development in Jia's exploration of classical Chinese literature, mythology, aesthetics, and eco-philosophy. (Yu Gengyu)

As the "New Era"[48] of reform and open-door policy ushers China into rapid urbanization, industrialization, and commercialization, the 1990s witnessed aggravation of the natural environment and marginalization of intellectuals, leading to the angst about the "disillusionment of humanist spirit" (*renwen jingshen de shiluo*).[49]. Disillusionment among intellectuals came with the waning of "High Culture Fever" in the 1980s and the burgeoning of the market economy. As Timothy Cheek wrote: "The 1990s saw the growing marginalization of establishment intellects into mere government employees." (259) Meanwhile, they also went through a phase of professional transition from influential thinkers into academics, professors, engineers, and experts.

Although Jia Pingwa's writing actively engages with "literature for humanity" and sees environmental issues as human social ills, extinction narratives among the aforementioned "animal turn" increasingly expose the limitations of considering literature as a solely human affair. As Jia himself wrote in the "Afterword": "*Remembering Wolves* is completely different from the subject matter I was versed in, and so is its key writing technique. I understood that it might make some people uncomfortable, or simply uninterested, but I knew it was a book I MUST write" (194).[50]. As his last work at the end of the twentieth century, *Remembering Wolves* reflects a fin-de-siecle sentiment that encompasses his eco-anxiety and social apprehension (Luo 46; Lei 6). Jia mentions in an interview how he first became aware of the disappearance of wolves when his child asked him what the wolf in the "big grey wolf" story looks like, which served as the creative motive for this novel (Liao, Jia 89).

[48] As He Guimei notes, "New Era" literature (新时期文学) is a concept proposed by Chinese intellectuals to distinguish the works produced after 1978 from the previous decades of the PRC era (18).

[49] A major cultural event in the 1990s was the widely involved "Debate over the Humanist Spirit" (Renwen jingshen da taolun, 1993–1995), where many intellectuals (such as Wang Xiaoming and Zhang Rulun) mourned the alienation of humanist spirit in a Chinese society overwhelmed by a money-worshipping market economy, while some other writers (such as Wang Shuo) and intellectuals (such as Zhang Yiwu) scorned the idea as the lurid self-pity of self-important intellectuals. In fact, both parties hit a nerve in the alienating circumstances of humanities scholars and ideals.

[50] The original words are in Chinese, and the translation is mine.

Remembering Wolves and Root-seeking Incentives

Remembering Wolves begins with the quandary of an urban intellectual named Gao Ziming who has been struggling with his enervation of creativity for years. In his estimation, he has been emasculated by the lifeless, meaningless, polluted city he lives in. The moral and social debauchery in *Ruined City* seems to persist here, and Gao Ziming feels a fundamental displacement while living in Xijing (the West Capital, the fictionalized Xi'an), where "nothing interests me nowadays" (3). He envisions himself "just like leaves fallen onto the ground in winter, gone rotten with only the leaf veins stuck in the dirty soil" (4). For him, Xijing, the biggest city in Northwestern China, is defined by traffic congestion, suffocating pollution, and mindless pursuit of material prosperity. While Ziming belongs to the urban middle-class, whose wealth and life prospects rely on urbanization, he seems unable to take on either the goals or the career of a modern intellectual.[51] The narrator begins by claiming that this is "still a story about Shangzhou" despite the fact that he lives in Xijing, and the story inherits the theme of "returning" in the root-seeking tradition. The narrator mockingly portrays himself as "ridiculously" dressed up as a photographer out of vanity:

> At the bottom of my heart, I know that I cannot shoot anything worth looking at. All is but make-believe, and I am just clinging to the title of an intellect. Xijing is prosperous as usual, yet there is no clear season, no twenty-four solar terms[52], you cannot even tell nights from days. All sorts of people forever crowd in streets and lanes, inhaling what others exhaled. There are still endless meetings, I get angry all the time, but who can I reprimand? It is a battlefield, yet I could not see the enemy. (3)

In his depiction of Xijing, two aspects are foregrounded and juxtaposed: the artificial urban environment, and his crippling ennui. He makes a connection between the living environment and his state of mind through the analogy of the body and the mind: "Ah, what can I say about living in this city? The city is to me just like my body is to my soul. It is in this ugly body that my soul dwells and becomes just as ugly. Yet what do I become if I give up this

[51] According to Liji (*Book of Rites*, 《礼记》), an ideal Confucian scholar, *junzi* (君子, a morally refined intellectual, a princely man), should achieve his aspired destiny by pursuing a continuum of goals: to cultivate oneself, to bring order to the family, to govern the state, and to bring peace to all-under-heaven (修身齐家治国平天下). This idea of a talented, upright intellect is the previous incarnation of the Western-influenced modern definition of an intellectual (*zhishi fenzi* 知识分子). This self-identification and moral burdens remain with the modern and contemporary Chinese intellectuals in their collective subconsciousness, according to Chen Sihe in "Fifteen Lectures". (22)

[52] The twenty-four solar terms are twenty-four periods in the traditional Chinese lunisolar calendar to indicate the season according to natural phenomena. They help people to arrange lifestyle and agricultural activities according to nature and are commonly practiced in the East Asian cultural sphere. The solar terms were listed by UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2016.

body?" (3) In comparing his body to the city, Ziming asserts that the material urban environment is not a good place for his "soul," and the defunct city has left him emotionally and spiritually displaced. The city is a "battlefield without enemy (*wu di zhi zhen* 无敌之阵)." Moreover, Ziming is seized by the distress of losing his masculine vitality: seeing his mustache growing increasingly sparse on his "pale, flabby face," he remembers reading that a man who lived in the city over three generations is no longer able to grow any mustache. It is in this context that his obsession with wolves begins: "It is the wolves, I say, that stimulate my fascination about Shangzhou, hence my passion for life" (4). His weariness persists until he accidentally hears an official claim that there only remain fifteen wolves, which were a strong part of Shangzhou's "heritage (*jiachan* 家产)" in the region. Given that wolves used to be rampant in southern Shangzhou, it fascinates Ziming that "in such a few years, a peril to human life could have become an object for human appreciation, what lies behind this immediately aroused my long-dormant creative impulse" (17).

As the narrator reveals, in southern Shangzhou, wolves were so widespread that the local people were thought to have taken on the characteristics of these animals and are nicknamed "southern wolves." The mutual influence of humans and nature is visualized in the mimetic terms of folklore: "People who live by the sea look like the fishes and sea creatures, and those who live on the plains usually feature a long face like that of cattle or a horse," and the natives of Southern Shangzhou look lean, "their ears pointy and upright, and their eyes three-white or four-white."[53] The locals, though, do not themselves identify with the wolves in this way. Instead, they tend to compare the wolves to bandits, especially the elders who lived through the early twentieth century when the townspeople suffered from the depredation of both bandits and wolves. According to the locals, there was a horrible wolf disaster (*langzai* 狼灾) where hundreds of wolves besieged and devastated the old town. Even when bandits later tormented the town, "the wolves' cruelty, brutality, and thirst for blood were already deeply nailed into human minds, and their nefarious reputation persisted" (7).

It is in this oral tradition that the conflict between human and wolf is mapped out in the book. In the 1940s, Shangzhou people started to retaliate against the wolves – a local hunting troop consisted of about a hundred hunters in its heyday. The leading hunter of the troop is a valiant, sturdy man named Fu Shan, who has a family history of fighting with the wolves. His grandparents were killed by the wolves, leaving their orphaned son and daughter separated. While the daughter then got married to someone in Xijing city, their son grew up as a

[53] Three-whites eyes (三白眼 *Sanbai yan*, sanpaku eyes) and four-whites eyes (四白眼, *sibai yan*, shihaku eyes) refer to eyes in which the sclera (eye white) can be seen around the three or four sides of the iris. Traditionally *sanbai* or *sibai* eyes tend to give people a malevolent appearance.

hunter, and in turn has a son, Fu Shan. In many ways, Fu Shan resembles a classical hero, like the tiger-wrestling Wu Song (武松) from the fourteenth-century classical novel *Water Margin* (水浒传).[54] Like Robin Hood-style heroes such as Wu Song, the hunters were admired by the locals. However, after two to three decades, when Fu Shan is in his early forties, the wolves become rare. Hunting is banned, and the hunters' guns are confiscated by the government. Since then, the hunters all suffer from mysterious symptoms – Fu Shan experiences an impotency problem and begins constantly dreaming about his limbs thinning.

As in the Chinese fantasy novel *Journey to the West* (西游记)[55], the three characters represent different attitudes towards nature. Gao Ziming resembles the human monk Xuan Zang and represents human fragility when confronted with the force of nature, while Fu Shan, the heroic protector, resembles the brave Monkey King, epitomizing the heroism of a human struggling with harsh pre-modern conditions of Nature, and Lantou resembles the nasty Zhu Bajie, who exemplifies the excess of mundane human desires (Luo Guande 45). Jia Pingwa analyses the paradoxical human-wolf relationship and the complexity of humanity that he aims to represent: "Right through the battle with the wolf have humans become humanly. The disappearance of wolves makes humans topple into terror, loneliness, debility, spitefulness, and even death. To remember wolves is to remember the exuberant vitality, the heroic culture, and the balance of the world" (Liao, Jia 88).[56]

Traumatizing and fierce as it was, the human–wolf relationship is above all that of "oppositional coexistence" (Wang Yiyan 215). This is embodied in the former hunters, as after the imposition of the hunting ban, all of them start to develop abnormal symptoms: "they suddenly feel aged, atrophied, and lethargic" (26). In this sense, both Ziming and the hunters share the same nature deficit disorder (or, more specifically, "wolf-deficit" disorder), symptomized by a loss of vitality. This shared dis-ease can be understood as solastalgia, a feeling of displacement due to the lack of nonhuman rivals.

It is due to this solastalgia that Ziming proposes his project to take photos and establish an archive of these wolves – an idea that he considers brilliant and original. He also begins a spiritual purification: "it is as if I abruptly become an environmentalist. I swear to refrain from killing and become a vegetarian" (17). With the

[54] Also known as *Outlaws of the Marsh* or *All Men are Brothers*, the novel is thought to have been penned by Shi Nai'an (1296–1372) in the Yuan and early Ming dynasty. The vernacular fiction was based on the historical events in the Northern Song Dynasty, and it narrates how the 108 outlaws and their debonair "big brother," Song Jiang, establish their own anarchic community that is finally shut down by the court—because Song Jiang accepts the court's feigned invitation to reaccept them into the society.

[55] *Journey to the West* is a fantasy novel published in the sixteenth century and attributed to Wu Cheng'en. The novel is about the pilgrimage of the Xuan Zang monk with his four fantastical disciple-helpers to obtain sacred sutras from ancient India. A major plotline of the book is the eighty-one hardships they must go through on their way to Nirvana.

[56] "人是在与狼的争斗中成为人的，狼的消失使人陷入慌恐、孤独、衰弱和卑劣，乃至于死亡的境地。怀念狼是怀念着勃发的生命，怀念英雄，怀念着世界的平衡。" (Liao, Jia, 88)

mission to search for the wolves, he revisits the old town in southern Shangzhou, which is his maternal hometown. He later meets Fu Shan and discovers that this former hunter is his long-lost uncle. In a way, Ziming's journey resembles the motif of root-seeking literature, and *Remembering Wolves* is consistent with Jia Pingwa's earlier works in its root-seeking quality, which is seen as fundamental for the spiritual enlightenment of the nation. Here, the rural hometown becomes essential because it preserves the remaining wolves/wilderness, which proves an irreplaceable source of vitality to Ziming, the modern man; hence, extinction of wolves becomes the crux of his existential crisis. Paradoxically, it is during searching that he permanently loses what he searches for, and the photography and documentation turn out to hurt the conservation action.

1.2 *Remembering Wolves*: Photography, (De-)Extinction, and Solastalgia

1.2.1 Photography as a Paradox: Mourning and Solastalgia

Based on *Remembering Wolves*, this section will discuss the paradoxical relationship between humans and apex predators reflected in the relationship between photography and extinction. I will draw on theories of photography from Susan Sontag, Roland Barthes, and Jacques Derrida, as well as Anthropocene studies of images and extinction from Ursula Heise, Jonna Zylinska, and Irmgard Emmelheinz. Sontag's and Barthes' interpretation of the entanglement between photography and mourning will be used to analyze the nostalgic and solastalgic distress about species extinction in the *xiangchou* writing mode against a backdrop of modernizing end-of-century China. My twin anchoring points are the affective and material properties of extinction photography. In affective terms, *Remembering Wolves* is a tragic pilgrimage where the protagonists seek emotional salvation and where photography connects humans with wolves, individuals with governmentality, and modern civilization with wilderness.

I will borrow from Sontag's comparison between the use of guns and cameras to analyze Gao Ziming and his hunter companions' tensions over how to "shoot" the wolves during the journey. The gun-versus-camera conflict also forms an analogy with the writer's struggle to re-conceptualize the human–nature relationship. On the other hand, and in more material terms, archiving the wolves means including the wolves in biological governance, which is an increasingly important obligation for nation-states in the Anthropocene. However, scientific enumeration has its root in the eighteenth-century Enlightenment drive to knowledge and implicit instrumentalism that is antithetical to species conservation.

The coincidence of affective and material dimensions within the act of photography reveals an "ecoambiguity" that is symptomatic of the current ecological crisis. Ecoambiguity, as Karen Thornber proposes,

refers to the disjunctions and contradictions between human attitudes and actions towards nonhuman beings. Such ambivalence reflects the problematic effects of human engagement with the nonhuman world, or what Thornber identifies as the equivocal quality of "environmental possibilities" (15).[57] There is a conspicuous ecoambiguity embedded in Jia Pingwa's representation of the human–wolf relationship that is distinctive of the ecological turn in contemporary Chinese society.

The extinction narrative of *Remembering Wolves* begins as a "story of decline" in both wilderness and society that "mobilizes readers' emotions through the lament, melancholy, and mourning" (Heise 34). Moreover, fundamental to its elegiac storytelling is the particular role that photography plays in the novel, a medium that Sontag defines as "an elegiac art, a twilight art" (15). Regardless of his nostalgic yearning for the wolves, however, the photographer Gao Ziming fails to accomplish his conservationist mission, relegated instead to the grim role of witness to the elimination of the endemic wolves from Shangzhou. In this way, his photography becomes entwined with the death of the last wolves, and thus consigned to the function of mourning. For Barthes, whose essay on photography influences Sontag, photography acts as the modern reminder of Death: "Photography may correspond to the intrusion, in our modern society, of an asymbolic Death, outside of religion, outside of ritual, a kind of abrupt dive into literal Death. […] With the Photograph, we enter into flat Death." The paradox, as Barthes notes, is that photography "produces Death while trying to preserve life" (92).

At the end of Jia's novel, an irritable Gao Ziming gradually regains his self-awareness because of the photographs: "Seeing the photos of wolves, dead and alive, and the wolf hide now hanging on the wall, I calm down, feel surprised at my behaviors, has my temper *really* altered? Am I haunted by the spirits of wolves now?" (188) If photography captures the "platitude of death" with its obliteration of speech, then indeed photographs of extinct species become the puncturing alibi for what has already disappeared. In this sense, Barthes calls a photographer the "agent of death" (98). In the novel, Ziming becomes the "agent of death" not just owing to the "flat Death" that his camera imposes on the lifeworld, but also because of the local extinction of a species. By inevitably reproducing the "that-has-been," photography also becomes a nostalgic vehicle for mourning what has lived but is no longer there. Eventually, the wolves are exterminated during Gao Ziming's photographic journey, which induces a sense of loss from both Ziming and Fu Shan. The nostalgic project is aborted, what is left is perpetual mourning:

[57] Although Thornber's assumption that East Asian cultural or literary texts exemplify more prevalent symptoms of ecoambiguity than their Western counterparts (3) is an overgeneralization (Huang, "Review" 171), the concept itself is helpful in understanding the problem with Jia Pingwa's ecological ethics.

> "But there are no more wolves!"
>
> His words make us all sad. There are no more wolves. My dream of being a great photographer by building archives for the wolves is dashed. I will be even more bored in the city, and Uncle will no longer be a hunter, like the giant panda expert. Now where will be their meaning in life?
>
> At this moment, deep in my heart and my Uncle's heart, I knew both of us were missing the wolves. (186)

The conversation takes place at the end of the story, where Gao Ziming consoles Fu Shan as the latter worries that he would further atrophy. Photography fails to help conserve the wolves, and the demise of the wolves means that their nature-nostalgia is inconsolable. In the novel, the "flat Death" of the wolves in photography meets the broader context of mass extinction as "a looming affective fact, something to be sensed and imaged here and now" (Zylinska 51). As Gao opines: "The newspapers say that each year hundreds of species become extinct on this Earth, if it goes on like this, the human race will be confronted with a horrible situation" (17). Before embarking on his journey for the wolves, Ziming is dispatched to the giant panda protection center to report the labor of the only giant panda in the center; however, both the mother and the baby giant pandas die during the process. In a way, the death of the giant pandas urges Gao Ziming to search for the essence of vitality from the wolves. Yet, as the story shows, such nostalgic command of wolves becomes inherently problematic along the way.

1.2.2 Oppositional Coexistence, Chinese Modernity, and Environmental Governance

If photography is a distinctly modern way of representing loss, then the gun becomes another modern technology that plays a vital role in shaping the human–wolf relationship. "Since humans have got guns, the wolves started a miserable life and their thousand-year-long struggle with humans has come to an end," ponders Ziming (165). As their mission begins, the government official allows Fu Shan to take a gun for self-protection. Interestingly, although the camera and the gun are used for disparate purposes, both modern technological instruments share a surprising similarity. As Sontag has noted in *On Photography* (1977), "to shoot" is commonly employed to describe the use of a camera and a gun, and the verb seems to imply an inherent connection between the two activities. Sontag exemplifies the double-sidedness of the camera with the popular "photographic safari" that Americans

undertake in Africa:

> The photographer is now charging real beasts, beleaguered and too rare to kill. Guns have metamorphosed into cameras in this earnest comedy, the ecology safari, because nature has ceased to be what it always had been – what people needed protection from. Now nature – tamed, endangered, mortal – needs to be protected from people. When we are afraid, we shoot. But when we are nostalgic, we take pictures. (15)

Both the gun and the camera project human desires. Whereas some humans use the gun to vanquish, the camera aims to possess and retain: "To collect photographs is to collect the world" and "to photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed. It means putting oneself into a certain relation to the world that feels like knowledge – and, therefore, like power" (Sontag 1–2). It is a nostalgic desire for nature that compels Gao Ziming to undertake his ecology safari and, in this regard, the wolves can be regarded as objects for his aesthetic consumption. Because the wolves are not treated as "independent, sentient beings" but as "a means to human ends" (Singer 10), their trip then inevitably becomes a form of what Derrida characterizes as mourning in advance, "the unanticipatable anticipation of death" (106).

The comparison between the gun and the camera reveals the ecoambiguity in the novel's shaping of the human–wolf relationship, whereby the protagonists acquire the irreversible distress of solastalgia due to their involvement in aggravating extinction. In the story, humans and wolves flourish in the fear they have for each other. The villagers from Bear-ear Stream, for instance, thrive with miraculous energy regardless of their generational struggle with the rampant wolf packs. As human power waxes with modernization, the wolves are hunted to the brink of extinction. Meanwhile, on one occasion, a boatman mentions to Fu Shan and Ziming that he once saw some wolves try to hang themselves on a tree as if they wanted to commit suicide when hunting was banned. When Ziming expresses his surprise, the boatsman replies: "Whatever humans can do, the wolves are capable of doing it too." Meanwhile, the suicidal wolves make Fu Shan commiserate: "Even the wolves have lost their opponent, even the wolves have lost their opponent?" (81–82) While the peculiar story of the suicidal wolves emphasizes the "oppositional coexistence" between humans and wolves, the novel exposes its inadequacy in ecological knowledge by indulging in what Haiyan Lee notes as "the anthropomorphic mirage" (3), and the voices of the wolves are smoothed by anthropomorphic imaginations. The narrator's ambiguity only leads to an impasse of co-extinction, a hopeless environmental possibility that does not promise any solution: "Humans cannot help

killing the wolves at moments of confrontation, because humans are humans; yet humans cannot do without the wolves, and that's also because humans are humans" (186).

Remembering Wolves reveals Jia Pingwa's contradictions and perplexities throughout the 1990s (Lei Da 6), which are reflected in the framework of oppositional coexistence. This model underscores inter-species competition, yet it ignores the cross-species cooperation that also acts as an impetus for species coevolution. In this respect, it is impossible to ignore the political ecology in twentieth-century China, which was deeply influenced by social Darwinism highlighting struggle as the only response to the law of the jungle.[58] Meanwhile, this model of dialectical coexistence is not completely foreign because it also (distortedly) draws on Mencius' motto "life is stimulated from adversity and anxiety" (*shengyu youhuan* 生于忧患).[59] Besides, the idea of oppositional coexistence is very much analogous to the Maoist ideal of "constant class struggles," a belief that motivated various "wars" against the nonhuman world during the Mao era. As environmental historian Hou Wenhui asserts: "In the 1960s, Mao's philosophy of 'keep struggling' caused another disaster, a disaster of culture and nature without precedent in Chinese history – the cultural revolution" (155).

As much as it is a narrative of extinction, *Remembering Wolves* is also a story about the failure of photography, particularly because the photographer always misses his shot when he meets the wolves. Either he forgets to take photos because he is too immersed in the moment, or something goes wrong with his camera. At the Bear-ear Stream, when the villagers chase after the wolves, the besieged wolf rushes toward people to distract their attention so that the cub can escape: "I was so stunned by what was happening that I forgot to press the shutter, it was only as the wolves ran towards the fields that I remembered to take a photo of its back. As I returned to photograph the wolf cub on the dam, it has already vanished" (172). If, as Sontag noted, "picture-taking is an event in itself, and one with ever more peremptory rights – to interfere with, to invade, or to ignore whatever is going on" (11), then Gao Ziming's unsuccessful photo-taking indicates his inability to interfere with the human–wolf confrontation.

In a previous encounter, he meets a family (three adults and two children) carrying a pig to cross the bridge.

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[58] Darwinism was introduced into China in the late nineteenth century through the translation of Thomas Henry Huxley's *Evolution and Ethics* by Yan Fu (1854–1921). Yan Fu intentionally mis-translated Huxley to purport the law of "survival of the fittest," which became sweepingly popular among Chinese intellects after the Qing Empire was defeated by Japan in the first Sino-Japanese war.

[59] In 《告子下》 ("Teachings for my Children: Part Two") of *Mencius*, Mencius illustrates his Confucian philosophy with examples of successful people who start with obscure origins or life misfortunes, he highlights the virtue of constant self-education for people to withstand challenges and for governors to be able to take in criticisms. In the quote, he furthers his argument about the importance of challenges and adversities for a person and for a state to survive and to thrive. "In your own state, if you don't have legal specialists and impartial advisors, and outside your state, you don't have enemy states to harass you, your own state will certainly fall to ruin. From this we can know that life is stimulated from adversity and anxiety, and death results from relaxation and pleasure." ("入則無法家拂士、出則無敵國外患者、國恆亡。然後知生於憂患、而死於安樂也。")

He takes photos for them, but his camera has run out of film. It is not until Fu Shan comes back that Gao Ziming realizes that the adults he met are *actually* wolves who transform into humans; to save the kids, they chase after the family, which gives Fu Shan a chance to kill the adult wolves (despite Ziming's objection). When Ziming gets ready to take a photo of the wolf cub, it tricks him by feigning death; the wolf cub is then shot by Fu Shan (with a gun), so Ziming loses the chance to photograph a living wolf. In this instance, photography falls short of the absolute power that Sontag grants it. Gao Ziming's photographic project reveals a human-centered optimism that humans can manage the nonhuman world, but it turns out that all his effort is ruined. This failure of photography also leads us to reconsider the nonhuman elements of photography. Here, photography can be seen as a medium that "is subject to dynamic and ongoing processes of mediation – only some of which involve humans" (Zylinska 4). Traditional animal photography, as an image-based worlding practice, is not effective in curbing extinction. Indeed, as Emmelheinz warns, "the exhaustive visualization and documentation of wildlife is effectively concealing its ongoing extinction" (135). Gao Ziming's mission fails to capture the image of the wolves but instead reveals his grandiose self-importance.

Historically, photography has functioned as a scientific representation of the natural world that is "superficially independent of the observer," and has played a prominent role in helping to establish a modern edifice of scientific knowledge (Davidson et al. 2). With its naturalistic interest, Gao Ziming's photographic mission is representative of the state's biopolitical governance of the nonhuman species. As Rafi Youatt draws from Michael Foucault's biopolitics, modern states undertake the task of species conservation and management through "the administration of (nonhuman)[60] bodies and the calculated management of life" (Foucault 140). The "logic of eco-governance" simultaneously "subverts the resource-driven agenda of modern capital by trying to conserve material nature and enables and rationalizes an entirely new form of intervention in life itself" (54).

Gao's project of photographing the fifteen wolves transforms them into an alternative, ecological "resource." Photography is, in such cases, part of the apparatus of biodiversity census, one of the major "power-knowledge techniques" of eco-governance (Youatt 53–54) In the story, Gao Ziming first hears of the fifteen wolves in the government official's report on Shangzhou. As a "valuable family property," the wolves are listed alongside distinctive local products such as mineral resources, forests, walnuts, and honey (15). This encourages Gao to document the wolves: "I suggested to the government specialist if I can have a look at the written documents of the fifteen wolves, if possible, I can add some photos for each of these wolves" (17).

[60] The parenthesis is mine.

Moreover, turning the wolves into photographs carries the ontological and phenomenological implication that the wilderness has been made ready for humans to possess, protect, and control. The story traces how humans "conquered" Nature with the aid of guns in the twentieth century. But this event – the destruction of the wolves – is also concomitant with the establishment of the People's Republic of China. With the emergence of the PRC, the biopolitical power of the modern nation-state infiltrates every aspect of villagers' lives and extends to the nonhuman realm. Studies in environmental history show that state-led exploitation of the environment in the Mao era resulted in heavy ecological debt for contemporary China (Shapiro; Marks 408).

Although the modern state wields vital influence in nurturing favorable conditions for nonhuman species, the photographic fiasco in *Remembering Wolves* reveals that technocratic ambition has its inherent limitations. The limitations of conservation are also registered in Li Kewei's *the Chinese Tiger*. In this book, when a South China tiger is photographed, Chinese and international conservationists spring into action to protect the tiger (they name the tiger Zuzu and manage to help Zuzu mate and breed, hence three baby tigers are born). However, all these efforts end up in vain because those tigers are eventually either poached or poisoned, and only one cub remains. As it turns out, behind the poaching there is an international conspiracy sponsored by another nation keen to secure tiger conservation funding.[61] The novel pays respects to the conservationists but is deeply skeptical about technological intervention as the ultimate answer to the plight of the nonhuman world.

1.2.3 Extinction as a Cultural Crisis

Through Gao Ziming's photographic adventure, *Remembering Wolves* gradually maps out the dialectical relationship between the human and the wolf. In doing so, the novel expresses distress about extinction through a palpable moral decadence in human society. As the urban photographer travels through Shangzhou, he becomes immersed in a rural and natural Other, one that is defined by its difference from modern urban China. Chasing after the remaining wolves, the urban dweller wants to regain the wilderness that modern subjectivity lacks, but his rewilding experience is dearly bought with the sacrifice of the last wolves. Meanwhile, what he witnesses during the journey is a compounded existential crisis: physical debilitation, moral decadence, and cultural antagonism. Above all, this crisis is embodied by the hunters who experience various diseases following the disappearance of the wolves.

[61] In the story, an unspecified Southeast Asian country wants to compete for funding from the ICUN (International Union for Conservation of Nature). If the South China tiger is officially considered extinct, China would be removed from the slate to receive funds, hence the funding would go to another country with tigers. (The story does not simply portray the foreigners as "bad guys" – the cruel poachers are two Chinese brothers whose mother is a very kind-hearted countrywoman. And, among the tiger rescuers, there are both an elder Swedish scientist and an American young man. Here the story does not fall into the trap of stereotypical nationalistic narratives.)

In this section and the next, I will further elaborate on the qualities of this crisis and the forces that lie beneath it in Jia Pingwa's novel, set against the social background of the late 1990s. At this time, China begins to encounter the "future shock" of postmodernity.[62] I would like to evoke Lu Xun's modern vernacular story "Diary of a Madman" (*Kuang ren riji* 狂人日记, 1918)[63] to orientate Jia Pingwa's "Hunting sketches"[64] in the textual coordinate system of Chinese literature in the twentieth century (and beyond). In doing so, I hope to explain how the extinction story of *Remembering Wolves* relativizes the hegemonic discourse of enlightenment modernity.

At the heart of *Remembering Wolves* is the dual decline of both nonhuman species and the sublime elements in human culture. The formula of an urban intellectual and his hunter companions evokes the Chinese traditions of wen (文 culture, writing, refinement) and wu (武 martial prowess).[65] But as the novel unfolds, both traditions – cultural refinement and martial prowess – are threatened by the wolves' extinction. As Heise notes: "Stories of flagship species, those that are able to occupy the hero's role, often function synecdochically by pointing to broader crises in humans' interactions with nature, especially during periods of modernization and colonization" (36). Here, the wolves are the condition of the hunters' prowess, but the disappearance of wolves removes the precondition for such heroism.

The hunter Fu Shan carries the same name as the literatus-calligrapher Fu Shan (傅山 1607–1684), who was famously known for his claim to be the last "remaining citizen (*yimin* 遗民)" of a bygone era.[66] Fu Shan shares the same situation, as Ziming points out: "Suddenly I feel sorry for my uncle. Our time is no longer a time for heroes" (25). The tragic end of the age of heroes is further attested by the other hunters' fate. For example, Cheng Yi, Fu Shan's best friend, is imprisoned for poaching snub-nosed monkeys. He tells Fu Shan a story about a hero who is poisoned by the same group of people he used to protect, leaving Fu Shan distraught (78). Here, Fu Shan "is a relic from a bygone age, in a modern society governed by instrumental reason in which people must fit themselves into the machine-like spare parts" (He Weihua 764). His experience is shared by his former hunter friends, who confess: "As we sit down, we live on our memories about the past. People say that true swimmers die in the river, and true adventurers die in the mountains. Although we lived a life fighting with wolves, we forfeit the

[62] Here I follow Fredrick Jameson's definition of postmodernity as the American-led cultural logic of late capitalism.
[63] "Diary of a Madman" is Lu Xun's early representative work during the New Cultural Movement (the 1910s–1920s). It was believed to have taken inspiration from Nikolai Gogol's *Diary of a Madman*, where the man who is deemed as mad in others' eyes observes reality more soberly than others (Yi-tsi Mei Fuerwerker, 171).
[64] *Remembering Wolves* is referred to as the Chinese version of *The Hunting Sketches* (*Zapiski ohotnika*, 1851), a story collection by Ivan Turgenev.
[65] This is inspired by Carlos Rojas' study of the medical discourse in modern Chinese literature. He evokes dialectical concepts to explain how modern Chinese intellectuals triangulate a renewed understanding about the "sickness" trope of the Chinese nation and how this weakness might turn into power. See Rojas, *Homesickness*, p. 6.
[66] Fu Shan lived through the Manchurian invasion of the Ming Empire and was known for his resistance to the Manchurian Qing Dynasty and refusal to be an official.

opportunity to die in daring fights but perish in bed" (49). Yet the paradox is that the hunters miss wolves because of their own need to conquer, perform masculinity and feel "heroic again".

While scholars such as He Weihua elaborate on the "ecological crisis as a symptom of social problems" in Jia Pingwa's sympathetic representation of "the last hero" (768), the novel also fundamentally destabilizes the underlying culture of heroism. In this respect, the novel's ecoambiguity operates to subvert the anthropocentric viewpoint of its human characters. The deconstructive endeavor lies precisely in questioning the human cultural construction of heroism, and in laying bare the disproportionate extension of human cruelty inflicted upon nonhuman others. In one town, at a beef restaurant, the owner cuts flesh from living cattle to attract clients with the "fresh meat," a venture which emerges after the government banned the business of selling wild animal meat. The violence is depicted so vividly that it is ethically repugnant and aesthetically obscene:

> I sidestepped a bloody puddle of sewage and entered the backyard. The yard was vast with piles of full cattle skeletons. A stout, small cattle was pinioned in a rough wooden scaffold. One of its hind legs was all bones, the flesh all cut. Blood flows on the ground. […] A young guy arrived with a bucket of water and a knife, his sleeves up. He put down the bucket to turn the radio on, and the instrumental sounds of *Two Springs Mirroring the Moon* started to pervade the air as if smoke or butterflies. He suddenly lifted the bucket of water and splashed it onto the cattle's right front leg. The animal didn't make any sound, yet its mouth was agape, and its body shivered. Its four legs have lost all energy, yet it was held by the scaffold in a kneeling posture. Its eyes were swollen with sticky, sallow tears dripping down its cheeks. The guy didn't seem to notice this, he ground his knife on the cattle's back and asked: "Beef tongue?"
>
> "No, we want a braised beef tail!" Replied Uncle. (83–84)

The butcher's detached treatment of the cattle provokes the readers who are forced to "gaze" at the vivisection. The horrific act is accompanied by a well-known classical Chinese song by the blind street artist named Abing (阿炳 1893–1950)..[67] The tragic, lyrical quality of the piece is jarringly incongruent with the acts of vicious cruelty towards the cattle. One cannot but remember the movie scene in Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (1993), where

[67] Abing suffered from disability, dire poverty, loneliness, and destitution during his life. His most famous work is an erhu piece named "Two Springs Mirroring the Moon" (二泉映月), which is a widely known masterpiece in and beyond China.

the Nazi commander massacres the Jews while appreciating classical music.

This grotesque scene from *Remembering Wolves* challenges the legitimacy of human culture and its fundamental qualities. Ironically, the restaurant is in a place called Hero Range (*Yingxiong Ling*), hence its name: "Hero Range Beef House." Beside the restaurant, Ziming finds an ancient stone stele inscribed with a story praising a valiant general named Li Yi who protected the "Dashing King"[68] and repelled the soldiers of the Ming Empire. The story also mentions that, after the victory, Li Yi cut off hundreds of dead soldiers' ears and hung them on a nearby cliff. Reading through the inscription, Ziming feels deeply disturbed: "Is 'hero' just about slaughtering? Li Yi is named a hero because he killed two hundred soldiers, and my uncle was called a hero because he has hunted for years. Nowadays this beef house also names itself 'hero', but how can we call these beef-consumers heroes?" (85) The final step in this sequence cannot evoke heroic feelings. Instead, it threatens to deconstruct the very meaning of the classical hero with its celebration of iron and blood.

In addition, the vivisected cattle also call to mind another renowned fable from the Taoist classic *Zhuangzi*. In "the Pivot of Nurturing Life (*Yangsheng Zhu*)" of the book, there is a tale of Cook Ding who carves the ox carcass so skillfully and artistically that it amazes Lord Wenhui. When asked how Ding manages to do it so deftly, Ding replies that it is because he is following Dao (the way): "I follow the natural form: slicing the major joints I guide the knife through the big hollows, and by conforming to the inherent contours, no vessels or tendons or tangles of sinews – much less the big bones – block my blade in the least" (Zhuang Zi, Eno, 27). While the ox carcass is viewed as an inert object to demonstrate the natural way Cook Ding follows in dissecting it, it provokes the readers to reimagine the scene as though the ox were a living animal. While Taoist philosophy is considered as the proto-environmentalist Chinese tradition (Evelyn, Miller, Girardot), the story of Cook Ding, when read in parallel to Jia's novel in the age of the Anthropocene, is quite disturbing.

If the consumption of the "fresh beef" depicts cruelty towards nonhuman species in sharp relief, then another incident reveals how the hunter-hero is also frustrated in the human world. As the group finally comes across a wolf in town, they also meet the money-grubbing Guo Cai. Guo forces his adopted child to get "accidentally" hit by passing cars so that he can extort money out of the drivers. Repelled by his lack of moral integrity, Fu Shan lambasts Guo as "a wolf" and beats him. He asks Ziming to take a photo to report Guo, but Guo impenitently kicks the camera away. The next day, as Ziming gets his camera fixed he finds his uncle surrounded by spectators skinning a wolf to intimidate Guo, only to hear the unscrupulous man threaten to report

[68] Li Zicheng (1606–1645), known as "Dashing King" (chuangwang), was a Chinese peasant leader who rebelled against the Ming Dynasty and briefly ruled over Northern China.

Fu Shan for killing the wolf. In this scene, the heroic hunter Fu Shan is dejected to find himself incapable of doing justice anymore, and in his frustration and humiliation, he shoots a wolf when it shows no fear in front of him (as if the wolves know that the hunters are banned from hunting). Fu Shan's vengeance on the wolves problematizes his identification with Wu Song, the classical tiger-battling hero.

In the era of the Anthropocene, the classical hero from *Water Margins* has lost his underlying context, and stories of human triumph over animals no longer appear heroic. In narratives of extinction, "many of the species that are singled out for attention function as symbolic shorthands for more encompassing stories about a particular nation's history of modernization and its changing relationship to the natural world" (Heise 14). Hunting predatory megafauna to extinction is now seen as the expression of human greed and cruelty. In the novel, human cruelty is graphically recorded in various horrifying stories the group hear or witness on their way. In one story, they hear of a serial killer named You Wen, who murders around 50 people. His rationale is that he is "optimizing population" by only killing the weak and disabled (76). In another story, a greedy official coaxes precious jade out of an old couple, leaving them in dire poverty. By contrast, in the novel, the animals display conscience, compassion, and gratitude in various ways. Once Fu Shan is approached by a blonde woman who thanks him and offers him two peaches. The woman turns out to be a transformed snub-nosed monkey that Fu Shan once saved (69). With the dual decline of biodiversity and basic morality, the novel highlights how human destruction of the environment is happening in parallel with the decline of human society.

The changing human–nature relationship also renders the utopian rural retreat impossible. Despite the root-seeking motif, when Gao Ziming reaches his maternal hometown, a village called Bear-ear Stream, he fails to recognize it as home. When his uncle Fu Shan asks him: "Do you feel it is familiar? Sometimes people dream of the places they are from" (148). Ziming only shakes his head blankly. The root-seeking impulse fails because it is no longer a place that is home for him. The eradication of wolves from "home" becomes symbolic for Gao Ziming's solastalgia and expresses its key affect: feeling homeless at home. Although Bear-ear Stream is a place where wolves were active, it also becomes a slaughterhouse for the wolves. In this way, Gao Ziming's camera mission accelerates the extinction of wolves, although he strives to protect the wolves from the villagers. By the end of the story, ecophobia triumphs over nature nostalgia: the wolves are all exterminated. In its conflicting attitude towards the wolves, rural Shangzhou is no longer a heavenly peach blossom stream in the urban middle class's imagination. Rather, it becomes a place of "poor mountains and foul water" (*qiong shan e shui* 穷山恶水): the natural beauty is wilting while classical virtue is hard to find. Gao Ziming's solastalgia is not just a response to

the fissure between "urban modernity" and "agrarian tradition," but also a mournful retrospect cast upon an eco-utopic time that is pre-Anthropocene. Hearing that the villagers unearth "dragon bones" (fossils of prehistorical animal bones) in the region, he opines:

> I can imagine, this village and Shangzhou Regions, were by no means a land of poverty or foulness in prehistoric times, it could be a sea, a swamp, a mountain, where all sort of animals and plants thrived, and humans were just a part of them. However, nowadays, the elephants are gone, the boars are extinct, and the deer are killed, only humans are left. (149)

However, it is not entirely fair to blame the villagers for the extinction of the wolves, because what happens in rural Shangzhou is but an extension of the urban environment in Xijing. With his photographic desire to symbolically possess the wilderness, Gao Ziming is not innocent in the extinction event either, despite his seemingly innocuous motivation. Against this, the novel offers the possibility of a certain kind of coexistence in the figure of the Taoist priest. Fu Shan sends a wolf cub to the priest to rear, because he had killed its guardian wolves. The Taoist priest is known for owning mythical gems called golden-fragrant-jade (*jin xiang yu* 金香玉). He is harassed by people who desire the gems, but he refuses to tell people exactly where it is from (he claims that the original place is no longer accessible). The official story about his treasure discovery sounds like Tao Yuanming's legend of peach blossom spring, in that the idyllic paradise the fisherman accidentally discovered was never found again.

When Ziming follows Uncle Fu to the Taoist monastery, he meets this old priest and is surprised to know how destitute the latter is (he had given all the gems away). At night, a wolf appeals to the priest to treat its blister, and it leaves the priest a piece of gem. It turns out that the priest has been helping the wolves all those years, and when he passes away, many wolves come to mourn over him. The Taoist priest provides a model of ethical co-existence that stands in contrast to Gao Ziming's modern environmentalism.

1.2.4 "But I/We Need the Wolves…": The "Madman" in the Anthropocene

To understand Jia Pingwa's impulse of dialogue with Chinese modernity, it is helpful to rethink the distinction

between *feng* (疯) and *kuang* (狂) in the Chinese context, with studies of Lu Xun's "Diary of a Madman".[69] as reference. While Lu Xun is the acclaimed "father of modern Chinese literature" (Gu 77), "Diary of a Madman" is seen as "a manifesto of the birth of modern subjectivity as well as of a modernist politics in twentieth-century China," (Tang 1225). This expression of subjective spirit comes from the liberating possibilities of *kuang* (狂, madness).[70]. The differentiation between *kuang* (prophetic madness) and *feng* (clinical madness).[71] is consciously made in that Lu Xun "postulates *kuang* as a Nietzschean self-affirmation that provides an essential regenerative energy for any thriving civilization" in his essay *On the Power of Mara Poets* (摩罗诗力说, 1907). (Ibid. 1226)

In distinct ways, Gao Ziming resembles Lu Xun's "madman" – the misunderstood herald of "modern subjectivity" in China – in that both are, at least at some point, perceived as "mad" while making insightful observations. At the end of *Remembering Wolves*, Ziming develops aberrant behaviors and aggressive personality traits, an early sign of madness. One day he even spits on some cyclists and quarrels with his wife as she thinks that he might be mentally disordered: "I realize that she often observes me fugitively. She must be suspecting that I am mutating too, although she doesn't mention it and even appears more affectionate to me" (191). He also notices that his wife secretly discards the wolf hide he cherishes, a gift from his uncle. Like Lu Xun's madman, Gao Ziming is conscious of other people's suspicion about his abnormal behaviors and has persecutory delusions: "I am irritated again, exclaiming that everyone is persecuting me, even my wife is the same!" (188)

From a Foucauldian angle, the madman's revelation of the oppressive force in society is the oracle that gets passed down through his maniac moment, hence individual self-awareness may break through what is prescribed as normality. "In the days to come, we must live; to live, we can only keep the wolves in our mind" (187). In Gao Ziming's nostalgia for wolves, he views his aberrant behavior as taking on wolfish characteristic, as a nostalgic mimicry of the wolves, and an indication of a supernatural metamorphosis – becoming a "wolf-man" (人狼). Strange as it may sound, Gao Ziming, the modern man, genuinely finds the spiritual and supernatural apparitions plausible (Huang Shiquan 68). Narrating in the first person, Gao Ziming talks about the strange things he experiences. Once, for instance, he sees a young woman standing in a yard, yet as he approaches, she turns out

[69] "Diary of a Madman" (or "A Madman's Diary") features nested narratives where a first-person narrator shares with us a young intellectual's diary when the latter was believed to be mentally ill. The frame narrator provides the background information, which deems the diarist as a crazy person at the time when he composes the diary, but the "mad" talk threatens to subvert the former's voice. In the diary, the "madman" insists that everyone around him, including his family, is, unwittingly or consciously, "eating people".

[70] *Kuang* has had its meaning enriched through literary and cultural history as being uninhibited; it is "the archetypal metaphor for an explosive ecstasy (ex-stasis), a jumping off the right track, a transgressing crossing of boundary". In contrast, *feng* has its pathological origin as "mad, crazy, insane," and it registers the power of medical knowledge that serves to repress the aberrant (Tang 1226).

[71] In Lu Xun's brother Zhou Zuoren's 1920s translation of Nikolay Gogol's *Diary of a Madman* (疯人日记 *Fengren riji*), the two words are consciously distinguished: *feng* indicates "clinical madness" whereas *kuang* is "prophetic madness" (Ma 4).

to be a lilac tree:

> Is that what grandma used to say about karma? Is that true that when a person dies, their spirit splits from their body and floats in the air? If, luckily, the spirit meets a pollinating bee, the spirit would land, and a new plant starts to form. [...] If this is possible, then all lives should be equal on this planet. How can I deny that I might be a pig in my last incarnation simply because I am a human in his life? What next? I could become a wolf, a fish, a grass, or a tiger. The more I fantasize, the more neurotic I get, I know I do not look like a son of my hometown Shangzhou now. Or it is as if I've betrayed my ancestors because of this affinity to the wolves that I have surprisingly developed. (17–18)

His rumination on reincarnation provides a counter-discourse to the modern scientific language of distinct speciation and fixed categories, and the traditional ecophobia of Han Chinese culture. Like Lu Xun's madman, who musters the revolutionary energy of individualistic modern human subjectivity, Gao Ziming expresses underlying distress over the radical upheavals of modernity. One evening, as they stop by a small town during a power outage, Ziming has a nostalgic chat with a Mr. Ma about "the past," when people did not rely on electricity so much. Soon the power is back, but the restored brightness only sharpens the darkness inside people's hearts:

> Suddenly deep inside my heart, I had a fright: the power is out tonight because of a short circuit somewhere in town. But what would happen if, all at once, the world ran out of electricity forever, what then? I looked at Mr. Ma, again I felt suspicious: this man who sits opposite me, is he the son of the neighboring landlord, or is he a robot? A clone? A monster? (91)

In this incident, electricity is the distinctive sign of modernization, and the brightness it brings represents, in various ways, enlightenment, modernity, development, and revolution. However, here the narrator is peculiarly overcome by the stark brightness. The dichotomy between light and darkness appears when the baby giant panda is born, but the achievement ends tragically: "Its smile turns out to be scorn, that its birth is but to urge the mother giant panda's death. Things happened so abruptly like lightning; it forcefully brightened everything before the arrival of an ever-darker night" (21). Gao Ziming's paranoia signals a profound consciousness of crisis, in which modernity

is presented as a grotesque brightness – one where newly empowered humans cause the extinction of other species and destroy the conditions for their nobility.

Ziming's questioning of "brightness" is reflected in his paranoia, which is paradoxically the "fear of no fear." As the local official declares: "The older generation grew up with the fear of wolves. If there are no wolves anymore, humans won't know what to be afraid of. So, one day if a child tells an adult: 'Mama, I am scared,' then the adults would be even more terrified because of the child's terror" (16). He then continues to talk about the distress of species degeneration with the example of an oil field site: if there are no women, then the men "do not even care to build toilets, nor do they care about their looks, gradually they even lose sexual impulse and live like a giant panda" (16). The paranoia is also a sign of the loss of potency in the enlightened world.

The story follows a group of men who all feel, in their distinct ways, emasculated. They suffer from a persistent sense of inferiority and distress at losing male vitality, such as Ziming lamenting the sparseness of his mustache and Fu Shan's lifelong impotency..[72] The wolf-hide Fu Shan skinned was from a "young and beautiful female wolf" (8) that killed his hunter friend while he was fast asleep. Strangely, the hide bristled every time important things happened, as if it possessed the potency that the men lacked. Fu Shan carries the hide wherever he goes, like a lifelong companion. In the story, the nonhuman beings are both feminized and sexualized, while the human characters are all men. The default analogy between women and nature, observes ecofeminists Karen Warren and Val Plumwood, facilitates the subjugation of women and nature in modern society. (*Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature* and *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*) Against Jia Pingwa's "glorification of machismo" to assert "social power and control," (Louie 168–169) such ecoambiguous symptoms offer a basis for an ecofeminist critique to resolve the quandary of "oppositional co-existence."

The emphasis on the act of eating meat in *Remembering Wolves*, which is often rendered in grotesque and obscene ways, is also evocative of the motif of cannibalism in "Diary of a Madman". While Lu Xun used cannibalism as a trope to call for a new culture (as well as a new language) to disrupt the suppression of the Confucian patriarchal socio-political system, which strangles modern human subjectivity (Yue 88–89), Gao's experience serves to convince people that eradicating the wolves unleashes hideous cruelty in modern humans. Like Gao's realization about heroism being in crisis, in the madman's inquiry the sanctified ethical principle is also subverted. The specter of cannibalism is present, for instance, in the cruelty at the Hero Range Beef House. After

[72] In a way, the fantastical nonhuman world had been clearly feminized in its predecessor, *Strange Tales from A Chinese Studio* (聊斋志异 *Liaozhai Zhiyi)*, written by Pu Songling at around 1740. This is a collection of fantastical tales involving beasts and ghosts that transform into human shape to interact with humans. A particularly common theme of the stories tells of the love story between solitary, poor, young Confucian scholars and beautiful young women transformed from animals such as foxes.

the meal, Fu Shan feels ashamed: "We shouldn't have dined here…even the wolves should scorn us!" (85) In contrast to Gao Ziming, "Rotten Head" and the other diners enjoy the beef without questioning the cruelty. (Rotten Head feels satisfied to have eaten the ox's genital organ, which he believes boosts his sexual potency.) Their blithe complicity with this hideous practice parallels that of the "cannibals" in Lu Xun's story. As Lu Xun's Madman recalls, in "Wolf Cub Village" a man deemed as "notorious" is beaten to death and has his heart and liver consumed by the public (because they believe eating the heart and liver boosts their courage). His friend defends the crime despite his uneasiness: "Maybe they are, but it's always been that way, it's—" The Madman questions: "Just because it's always been that way, does that make it *right*?" (37) Similarly, Ziming's descent into madness in the novel underscores a fundamental ethical plea. In the final scene of the novel, he begins to howl. His wife tries to restrain him, embarrassed and disturbed by his crying out for wolves:

> "But I need the wolves!" I cried desperately.
>
> She immediately covered my mouth with her hands and closed the doors and windows, not wanting to let anyone hear me. But I am still calling: "But I need the wolves! I need the wolves…" (192)

The cry – "But I need the wolves" – concludes the story with a desperate call for the wilderness. It also echoes the madman's distressed cry at the end of the diary: "Maybe there are some children around who still haven't eaten human flesh. Save the children…" The appeals of Ziming and Lu Xun's madman share a relation to modernization but move in opposite directions. If the madman's plea is a call for redemptive modernization, then Ziming's call is an elegiac, anxious appeal to species conservation. While the madman calls for cultural modernity, Ziming's call is a repudiation of its cost. It is a response to the complex situation in contemporary China, where traditional beliefs, enthusiastic modernism, and postmodern anxiety coexist.

1.3 *Wolf Totem*: National Extinction and Nomadic Pastoralism

This section brings in Jiang Rong's *Wolf Totem*, a more controversial and less crafted, yet widely read and discussed, ecofiction text for comparison, analyzing how these extinction narratives divulge the cultural ramifications of the ecological turn in China. While *Remembering Wolves* reveals that modern anthropogenic extinction deprives rural nostalgia (*xiangchou*) of its essential substance, *Wolf Totem* elegizes wolves on the Inner Mongolian grassland as the

more important object of nostalgia for contemporary Chinese people. By unraveling the entwining social issues in the extinction narratives of wolves, the section argues that both texts creatively explore their shared root-seeking literary heritage and structure of feelings (*xiangchou* and nostalgia), though in their dissimilar ways, to represent what they perceive as a national existential crisis.

1.3.1 A "Wolf Totem Heat" from Inner Mongolian Grassland

Jiang Rong and Wolf Totem

Along with tigers, wolves have also become "fantastic beasts" that featured prominently in the early 2000s Chinese public cultural sphere, which paid tribute to the totemic, ferocious Mongolian wolves portrayed in Jiang Rong's lengthy semi-autobiographical novel, *Wolf Totem* (*Lang tuteng*). Compared with the 200,000 copies that Jia Pingwa's *Remembering Wolves* sold,[73] *Wolf Totem* became an immense "mega-bestseller," with a circulation "second only to Mao's little red book" (Mishra, Lorenz 127). Soon it won immense international interest: since its English edition, translated by Howard Goldblatt, elevated its position to a Man Asian Literary Prize winner in 2007, it has been translated into over 30 languages, released in 110 countries, and adapted into an environmental movie by the French director Jean Jacques Annaud in 2015. Compared with Jia Pingwa's *Remembering Wolves*, which focuses on the wild animals of the Loess Plateau, Jiang Rong's book about the Mongolian wolves from the periphery of the "Middle Kingdom" surpasses the former with its robust energy, unconstrained spirit, and cross-national popularity.

Unlike the established novelist Jia Pingwa's wolf story, *Wolf Totem* is the debut novel of Lü Jiamin (吕家民), whose pen name is Jiang Rong (姜戎).[74] Lü is a retired professor in political science who was a former educated youth (*zhiqing*, 知青),[75] during the Cultural Revolution (1967–1977). The novel claims to have drawn on the author's decade-long life experience in the Inner Mongolian grassland, and the protagonist, Chen Zhen, resembles the author in age and experience. The novel demonstrates how some of these urban youths are "re-

[73] While a mainstream novel is considered highly successful with 200,000 copies sold (Lei Da 4), Jiang Rong's *Wolf Totem* made a miracle in the sluggish book market. The book appeared in April 2004 in major bookstores, and soon swept the book market with an extraordinary 150 thousand copies sold in six weeks (the number soon mounted to millions). In 2015, it was estimated that sales of Chinese copies had reached 4 million (www.chinanews.com).

[74] Jiangrong (姜戎) is a Northern nomadic ethnicity recorded in Chinese history. According to *Zuozhuan* (*左传 the Commentary of Zuo*), a historical chronicle published in the late fourth century, Jiangrong is the family name of a nomadic tribe that exists as early as the Spring and Autumn period (770–476). It comes from a chapter about a talented ambassador named Juzhi (驹支), who debated with an arrogant official named Fan Xuanzi (范宣子) from the Jin state (晋国), a Han Chinese state. In the story, Juzhi persuasively refuted the Han Chinese self-centered repudiations by evidencing their contribution to their alliance against the Qin state (秦国).

[75] During the Cultural Revolution (1967–1977), Chair Mao launched the "Up-to-the Mountains and Down-to-the Villages" (上山下乡) movement, where young people in the cities were called to do labor work and "learn from the peasants;" these youth were known as *zhishi qingnian*, or *zhiqing*.

educated" (*zai jiao yu*[76]) in rural regions – not as Chairman Mao would have expected but by the Mongolian grassland "superstitions" and the wolves. Working as a shepherd supervised by Bilgee (a respected Mongolian elder), Chen becomes a devotee of the wolves on the Olonbulag steppes and renounces his fellow Han-Chinese prejudice of seeing the wolves as spiteful pests.

Chen Zhen vividly details his enlightenment through various thrilling events of confrontation between humans, wolves, and other grassland animals, but the most fascinating part of the novel is Chen Zhen's attachment to a wolf cub he secretly raises (or incarcerates). It is through the direct contact with his honorable, unconstrained "little teacher" wolf that he gets to witness the spirit of the Mongolian wolf totem and proffers the latter as a valuable spiritual resource for contemporary China to march into national rejuvenation, cultural enlightenment, and modernization. Paradoxically, the wolf cub also becomes a sacrifice for its unyielding resistance to captivity. It fatally wounds itself, so that Chen must end its life. He performs the traditional Mongolian ritual for the dead little wolf – its pelt flutters on the grassland like a flag, indicating the undead spirit of the heroic wolf totem.[77]

Though lashed for flat characterization that serves political didactics rather than narrativity, the novel probably garners its wide readership with its configuration of an antithetical relationship between Han Chinese and Mongolians, domestication and wilderness, anthropocentrism and eco-spirituality, and authoritarianism and democracy. Through Chen Zhen's ongoing idea exchange with his fellow re-ed Yang Ke (they share similar opinions and personalities), the story not only records the multifaceted decline of Mongolian nomadism, of grassland wolves, and of the spirit of the wolf totem, but also serves as a forum where Chen exhorts the transformation of the (Han) Chinese "national character." To attest to that, the story portrays the estimable Mongolian elder Bilgee and the despicable Han Chinese cadre Bao Shungui. While Bilgee is a wise Mongolian elder who speaks from ethnic indigenous knowledge as a custodian of the grassland ecology, Bao Shungui is an uneducated peasant who becomes a cadre through his military background. Despite its distaste of the ideology Bao represents, the narrative takes on a stereotypical, socialist-realistic way of characterization that reflects exactly the influence of such an ideology. Bao embodies the root of all evils (anthropocentrism, Sinocentrism and

[76] On 22 December 1968, *People's Daily* reported a piece of news on a jobless urban family's settlement in the countryside, where the journalist quoted Mao's words from ten days earlier: "It is necessary that educated youth go to the countryside to get re-educated by the peasants. The cadres and other people in cities should be persuaded to send their children who graduated from the middle, high schools, and colleges. Let's encourage them, and our comrades in rural areas should also welcome them." Soon this quote became politicized as the well-known "12.11 Direction," marking the beginning of a 10-year-long youth relocation movement. Mao has not clearly explained his intention behind the "Up-to-the Mountains and Down-to-the Villages"—some scholars speculate that it is because of Mao's political mistrust of intellectuals. In historian Ren Guoqing's opinion, a plausible explanation is that Mao wanted to find a way out of the shortage of job positions and elementary education resources by sending middle school students to the countryside (www.modernchinastudies.org).

[77] Chen Zhen's story with the wolf cub is the biggest highlight in the novel and is later abridged and published as a children's novel entitled *Little Wolf, Little Wolf* (《小狼小狼》) in 2010.

anti-intellectualism) during the Mao-era political campaigns – he encourages the Han Chinese peasants to convert the grassland into croplands and leads the way to exterminate the wolves.

Between the two poles of pastoralism and settled farming (respectively Han Chinese myopia and Mongolian free spirit), there is a spectrum of characters, such as the Sinofied Mongolian Dorji (hence his active engagement in the eco-destruction) and Han Chinese students (represented by Chen Zhen and Yang Ke) who answer the call of the wild and of the Mongolian wolf totem. These people drive the ethnic and ethical dynamics on the grassland until, finally, the military forces are summoned to march into the steppes to expedite the agricultural transformation. With the application of modern technologies, Jeeps, guns, and chemical poisons, the war against the wolves culminates in a massacre. The remaining wolves are expelled to the other side of the border, leading to the demise of the centuries-old Mongolian nomadic lifestyle on Olonbulag.

The story ends melancholically, with the middle-aged Chen Zhen and Yang Ke returning to Olonbulag for a visit from Beijing. There is no more pastoral farming, no more wolves, but aggravated desertification and sandstorms that frequent even Beijing. It consoles them to see their old host families now leading comfortable lives with concrete houses, electricity, tap water, and motorbikes, but they cannot help grieving for the penurious, commercialized, and over-herded grassland that is no longer able to support athletic Mongolian horses, beautiful swans, or the vibrant grassland life systems. The younger generation no longer venerates the wolf totem. Indeed, the grandiose nomadism has been vanquished by both Sinofication and modernization.

Following the main story is a lengthy text (over 50,000 words) entitled "A Rational Exploration: Lecture and Dialogue on the Wolf Totem (理性探掘 – 关于狼图腾的讲座与对话)." Chen Zhen, now a professor of political science, shares with Yang Ke his discoveries of "Wolfology" (*langxue* 狼学) and the "(Han) Chinese national character." According to Chen, to understand the social problems in Chinese society, "one has to start with studying the wolves, or vice versa; probably 'Wolfology' is a huge field that helps to understand humans" (59). In the "lecture", he distinguishes two types of nomadic spirits: one ingrained in grassland pastoralism and the other one the Western "grand nomadic spirit" (大游牧精神) embedded in its tradition of ocean exploration (364). His comments stem from the collective memory of the Chinese nation's subjugation by colonial powers during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and he sees his country's lagging being rooted in the agrarian lifestyle. This he denounces as the foundation of authoritarianism and spiritual enslavement of its people. Since the Chinese have been turned into submissive, "sheep-like" subjects of conservative, Confucianism-based agrarian society, they must step out of Sinocentrism to embrace their brotherly nomadic wolfish spirit to regain vitality and

ingenuity. Hence, he proposes, contemporary Chinese people must pick up a "wolfish spirit" from the grassland wolves to modernize themselves as "Western civilized wolves (西方文明狼)."

The Controversies of Wolf Totem

Not only does Chen Zhen press for a re-energization of the Chinese national character, with the wolf totem preserved in the Mongolian ethnic pastoral lifestyle rooted in the grassland ecology – he also ventures to reconstruct the modern Chinese national mythology based on the artifact of the "jade dragon,"[78] by postulating that the "Chinese dragon totem is highly likely to have evolved from the wolf totem, just like the Han Chinese were originally a hunter-gatherer nomadic people" (405). To fully galvanize his argument about a multi-ethnic Chinese national identity, he brands the nomadic conquest of historical Han Chinese dynasties, such as the Mongol-ruled Yuan Empire (1271–1368) and the Manchurian-ruled Qing Empire (1644–1911) as the atrophied, sheep-like Han Chinese being rescued by their brotherly nomads by "receiving blood injected by the nomadic ethnicities." On the one hand, Chen Zhen's opinions reverberate with a mounting nationalism and stress about prevalent marketization in post-nineties Chinese society; on the other hand, his repudiation of Maoism, Sinocentrism, and Anthropocentrism happens to go in line with the political correctness of Western society.

Of course, *Wolf Totem* has become a different book from its Chinese original, as its English translator Howard Goldblatt has wisely castrated Chen Zhen's tedious, inflammatory "lecture." Adrienne Clarkson, Chair of the judges' board for the inaugural Man Asian Booker Prize, applauded *Wolf Totem* as "a passionate argument about the complex interrelationship between nomads and settlers, animals and human beings, nature and culture."[79] Even so, Chen's essentialist views on ethnic identity still ignite stern criticism, including refutation as shameful "fascism" from the renowned German sinologist Wolfgang Kubin.[80] Kubin's criticism is then echoed by Guo Xuebo, a Mongol Chinese environmentalist writer and author of *Wolf Cub from the Desert* (2001), who posed on weibo.com (Sino microblog, Chinese equivalent to Twitter) to refute Jiang Rong's wolf totem as a "fake culture planted to the Mongols." Guo also disagrees with Jiang Rong's moralization of the wolves by insisting they were

[78] From the Neolithic period in Hongshan Culture (est. 4700 to 2900 BC), seen as evidence of China's dragon totem.
[79] "A panoramic novel of life on the Mongolian grasslands during the Cultural Revolution, this masterly work is also a passionate argument about the complex interrelationship between nomads and settlers, animals and human beings, nature and culture. The slowly developing narrative is rendered in vivid detail and has a powerful cumulative effect. A book like no other." (www.manasianliteraryprize.org)
[80] "*Wolf Totem* is fascist to us Germans, it is a shameful book for China (《狼图腾》对我们德国人来说是法西斯主义, 这本书让中国丢脸)" (said Kubin in an interview with sina.com.cn news in 2006).

"greedy, selfish, callous, and cruel" animals.[81] Interestingly, the novel seems to be well received in the Mongolian People's Republic, with unprecedented sales and even rock music recreation.[82] Within China, it enjoys commercial success and widespread readership amidst mixed reviews. While some intellectuals, such as Wang Meng and Meng Fanhua, expressed appreciation for the book, several literary critics, including Ding Fan and Li Jianjun, were disgruntled by its provocative use of animal metaphors (such as "stupid Han Chinese sheep," "ferocious Mongolian wolves," and "Western civilized wolves").[83]

Regardless of the controversies, it is undeniable that the novel fervently challenges the anthropocentrism in contemporary Chinese society, and confronts the ecological debt left by the Maoist era's "War against Nature." It is through these two qualities that the novel forces intellectuals to pay attention to it. Chen Xiaoming, a professor from Beijing University, comments: "This book features the wolves as the protagonists and writes about animals more comprehensively than the other modern Chinese novels, so it can be categorized into the emerging 'environmental/ ecological literature'" ("A Collective Mourning for the Wolves"). Also, Zhang Xiaoqin praises it as "a rare ecological text" in contemporary China in her Ph.D. dissertation in 2008 (153). However, because of the complexity of the text, even among ecocritical scholars there remains a common question about the novel's position as an environmental text. For instance, as Lei Da proposes, instead of verifying the whole book as either "good or bad," it is better to read the novel for its virtue as an eco-text and leave out the political "lecture," for the inadequate historical study and generalizations undermine the novel's narrative effect. Lei Da's selective approach indicates the dilemma of Chinese ecocritical scholarship when confronted with *Wolf Totem*, a text that is heavily invested in discussing political ecology – though under the guise of "Chinese national character" discourse. Ecocriticism seems to be often treated as a separate issue from political criticism.

Aligned to this perspective, Chen Hong suggests that *Wolf Totem* "should be taken as a political rather

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[81] Guo Xuebo accused Jiang Rong of fascism and fake culture in his microblog: "Wolf has never been the Mongolian totem; no Mongolian books of history recorded the wolf as our totem! Wolf totem is a fake culture that a Han Chinese re-ed planted to the Mongols with a mere three-year experience on the grassland! Historically, we Mongols first believed in Shamanism and then converted to Buddhism. Wolves are the natural enemies of us Mongols; the wolves have no team spirit but fight with each other; Also, the wolves are greedy, selfish, and cruel, propagating the wolfish spirit is misanthropic fascism. We reserve our legal rights to defend our ancestors' and our people's culture. (狼从来不是蒙古人图腾，蒙古所有文史中从未记载过狼为图腾！这是一汉族知青在草原只待三年，生生嫁祸蒙古人的伪文化！蒙古人最早信萨满后佛教。狼是蒙古人生存天敌，狼并无团队精神两窝狼死磕，狼贪婪自私冷酷残忍，宣扬狼精神是反人类法西斯思想。我们保留诉诸法律捍卫祖先和民族文化的权利。) (http://ent.sina.com.cn/m/c/2015-02-24/doc-icczmvun6255257.shtml)

[82] Not only was Jiang Rong awarded with the "Genius Writer Prize" (Bichgiin Mergen Prize) by World Mongol Authors Association, but the Mongolian edition is recorded having sold 60,000 copies (until 2010), which amounts to one copy for every 50 persons in Mongolia. [See Hume, "'Wolf Totem' Author Awarded Prize by World Mongol Authors Association," 2015.] Meanwhile, The Hu, a Mongolian rock band, released a song entitled "Wolf Totem" in 2019, inspired by the concept of wolf totem.

[83] Wang Meng praised this book in interviews he did with literary magazines *Huacheng*(*花城*) and *Dushu* (*读书*), and Meng Fanhua recommended the book on its back cover. In contrast, Ding Fan sees the book as "the Deterioration of Moral Values," (Ding 4) and literary critics Li Jianjun wrote series articles to repudiate *Wolf Totem*, comparing it as "a rotten pea mistaken as a pearl". To Li, *Wolf Totem* is "a commercial success" and a literary failure (Li 62).

than an ecological novel," for it has attracted much less scholarly attention on ecology than on culture, ethnicity, wolfishness, and other issues (767).[84] Besides, according to Chen Hong, the knowledge of socio-ecological and natural history the story relies on is one-sided and oversimplified. While *Wolf Totem* attributes grassland desertification to the agricultural influence of the Han Chinese, especially during the Cultural Revolution, Chen Hong's research on historical data attests that desertification of the Inner Mongolian grassland is a thousand-year process of human intervention in the natural habitat, including Sinofication, Japanese colonization, war, and other factors. She points out that the book simplifies the cause of environmental degradation as agricultural influence from Han Chinese, which can create antagonism between these ethnicities. Perhaps Li Xiaojiang's "post-theory" reading of the novel provides a better conclusion: in *Wolf Totem and the Post-Mao Utopian* (2010), Li defines it as an allegorical novel, a utopian grand scheme that ventures to bridge postmodern environmental discourses with post-colonial discourses in post-Mao China. (541) Indeed, Li writes, *Wolf Totem*'s biggest contribution lies in its unequivocal effort to defend Mongolian ethnic minority nature–culture against Sinocentric assimilation, but it suffers from overlooking the colonial root of an omnipresent Western hegemony. Therefore, in purporting the wolf totem as a neo-utopian ecospirituality in post-Mao China, it becomes ethnically problematic by exhorting the Chinese to take on a "wolfish character/ spirit (狼性)."

With these controversies and defects, *Wolf Totem* exceeds its original literary composition to become a transversal and transcultural text that ignites debates about nature and culture, humans, and nonhumans, as well as colonialism and nationalism. "The grassland wolves Jiang Rong portrays are both biological and cultural wolves, both tangible and historical wolves. So, the book is both a eulogy and elegy for the wolves" (Bai 125). On the one hand, the text proffers persuasive environmental narratives based on embodied experience and indigenous ecological knowledge, which forcefully subverts the derogatory cultural stereotypes attached to the wolves. On the other hand, the biological wolves become overburdened by all the new cultural endowments. In a way, the "Mongolian/Western wolf – Chinese lamb romance"[85] in Jiang Rong's *Wolf Totem* is analogous to wilderness/rural wolf – modern urban humans in Jia Pingwa's *Remembering Wolves*. In both stories, the wolves become the flagship nonhuman species that preserve vital energies of life, more spiritually than materially, for the contemporary Chinese nation.

[84] Chen Hong discovers that there are only 210 articles with "ecology" as keywords out of 1800 records on *Wolf Totem* found in CNKI from 2004 to 2016.

[85] Here I borrow from Uradyn E. Bulag's term, "the Mongolian wolf – Chinese lamb romance" (Collaborative Nationalism, 2010, 11) but add in the other underlying animal metaphor the protagonist uses in the novel to complete the picture.

1.3.2 "Obsession with Wolves": National Extinction and Ecospirituality

The Mongolian Wolves and "Chinese National Character"

This part focuses on the "obsession with wolves" and eco-utopianism in both authors' extinction narratives. Via "obsession with wolves" I want to capture both protagonists' fascination with wolves. Here I am refurbishing the catchphrase "obsession with China" from Hsia Chih-tsing (or C. T. Hsia 夏志清) to indicate these novels' dual devotion to the wolves and the idealization of nationhood. Examining both texts considering Ursula Heise's insights about extinction narratives' role in nation-building and modernity critique (32–34), I will outline the dissimilar ways the two novels weld the extinction of wolves with Chinese national identity during modernization. While *Remembering Wolves* unfolds in the rural/urban dichotomic paradigm to reflect the human–nonhuman tension in the post-reform years, *Wolf Totem* foregrounds the ethnic and ecological differences between Mongolian herders and Han Chinese in the Mao era. In this part, I also argue that, while the two novels depict the environmental injustice in disparate specificities, both stories see the wild wolves as preserving an ecospirituality tainted with utopian colors.

Whereas Hsia coins "obsession with China" to renounce what he sees as a common defect in modern Chinese literature – that is: a plethora of issues identified as particularly Chinese, and a lack of critical vision for "the illness of modern civilizations" (526) – readers can observe both a continuation of this arguably self-obsessive complex as well a tendency to subvert it – with the Mongolian wolves. Although I do not completely accept Hsia's Western-standard view of modern Chinese writing, I do find his lacerating observations insightful to address the complexities in *Wolf Totem* and, more subtly, to penetrate the concern about rural China in *Remembering Wolves*.

With *Remembering Wolves* Jia Pingwa attempts to add an environmental element to the literary tradition regarding rural China – that environmental destruction challenges the spiritual preservation of the rural, not just for Chinese people but more broadly for the human race in the Anthropocene (see Section 1.2.3). In comparison, *Wolf Totem* highlights Chineseness and configures it in the notion of "Chinese national character," a concept introduced into modern China in the early 1900s from Meiji Japan. According to Wu Guo, while Yan Fu (1854–1921) first commented on the issue of the Chinese national character (using *guoxing* 国性 instead of *guominxing*) in his translation, Liang Qichao (1873–1929) ostensibly used the term to analyze the national crisis of China.[86] (260; 272). In his famous essay series entitled *The Renewed People's Commentary* (1902), he reckons that "the renewed people

[86] Liang's writing about Guominxing was written during the time he fled to Japan after the failure of the Hundred Days' Reform (June–September 2898), a political reform he participated in under the reign of a young Guangxu Emperor.

(*xinmin*)" are the key to reform a nation, and it is by discarding the old morality and consolidating a new morality about individual and public lives that the people can be renewed…[87] The idea of *Guominxing* is then picked up, extended, and popularized by Lu Xun (Lü 47). Since then, the specter of *Guominxing* has haunted the Chinese intelligentsia…[88] as a side effect of the rise of modern nationalism in China. *Wolf Totem* graphically depicts the ecological destruction that took place during the 1960s–1970s. It goes beyond a plea for ecological preservation in the grasslands to reflect on Chinese modernization by re-initiating the discussion of *Guominxing*. In this sense, both wolf novels share a twofold obsession with wolves and Chinese modernization; thus, the problem with extinction is also linked to a crisis in the nation.

In their obsession with wolves and Chinese modernization, both extinction narratives exemplify apocalyptic qualities that weave the extinction of charismatic megafauna with the crisis of the Chinese nation. As discussed previously, the narrator in *Remembering Wolves* relates the species extinction of wolves and ecological deterioration to the decadence of traditional virtues and rural society's moral ecology – extinction becomes both the result and root of the heroes' fall, forestalling the racial degradation of humans. Clearly, as Gao Ziming experiences, the provincial capital suffers from the eradication of nature as "a battlefield without enemies." Rural Shangzhou, in comparison, preserves the remaining essence of life (the last fifteen wolves); thus, it is up to modern people to prevent the imminent crisis. However, Gao Ziming's failure to preserve the wolves with modern technology indicates that modern rationalism or scientism is no panacea.

Can rural China provide spiritual resources, as it has always been the sacrificial mother for the Chinese metropolis? The story is not optimistic here. The home soil deteriorates into a hopeless dystopia, a morally foul and environmentally impoverished region, that no longer provides a remedy for root-seeking. The problem then must lie somewhere else – the broader moral ecology that humanity becomes too solipsistic, with nothing to fear or respect; that is, "fear of no fear." As we discussed in previous sections, the novel shows a deep skepticism about the purported enlightenment modernity from which materialistic developmentalism is enshrined as the ideology of the time.

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[87] "By 'renewed people' I do not suggest that our people should abandon all our old customs to follow others in everything. There are two-layered meanings in this 'newness,' first, to sharpen what we already have to renew it; second, to replenish what we lack to renovate it." (新民云者, 非欲吾民尽弃其旧以从人也。新之义有二，一曰、淬厉其所本有而新之; 二曰、采补其所本无而新之，二者缺一，时乃无功。) [Liang Qichao *The Renewed People's Commentary* (新民说)Cited from https://sangle.web.wesleyan.edu/etext/late-qing/xms.html, translation mine]

[88] Some of the most well-known works include *The Chinese National Character: From Nationhood to Individuality* (中国文化的深层结构 1983) by Sun Lung-kee, *The Ugly Chinese* (丑陋的中国人 1985) by Bo Yang, and a recent controversial bestseller, *The Giant Baby's Country* (巨婴国 2016), by psychologist Wu Zhihong. However, Sun Lung-kee, once an influential scholarly critic of the "Chinese national character," reconsidered the concept in a new preface for the 2003 edition of *The Chinese National Character*: "In this book, Chinese culture is represented in a very negative way because it is situated in a 'modern' world system constructed by the Others. Therefore, all the conditions are unfavorable to it, and all the normative rules are alienating. However, the idea of 'modernization' should be constantly redefined." (Sun 4)

However, *Wolf Totem* shows a completely different picture of the acclaimed Chinese "essence," in that the settler agrarian Han Chinese tradition is pilloried for its sheep-like conservativeness, myopia, and pliant obedience to authoritarianism. In Chen Zhen's critical examination, attachment to the native land – the most representative virtue in Han Chinese agrarian society – is the ultimate cause of environmental and racial deterioration. With his disgust at the Han Chinese home-soil attachment, Chen Zhen's viewpoint reverberates with Ursula Heise's argument about the downside of "the ethics of proximity" and her call for deterritorialization (50), but what he eventually repudiates is anthropocentrism rather than place attachment per se. In his conversion to the grassland and the wolf totem, there is still some distance before he reaches a planetary eco-cosmopolitanism.

The most important aspect of environmental consciousness is balance – the balance between populations of humans, carnivores, and herbivores: "Chen Zhen concluded that the herdsmen were experts at striking a balance, weighing the pros and cons of each animal, and accommodating them in the calibration so that the least harm and greatest benefits were achieved" (73; 115). As Chen Zhen learns from the Mongolian elder Bilgee, humans must mediate and find a balance between their interests and those of the other beings, because it is the grassland that eventually determines human existence. Among the disparate cultural values and ethics, Chen is being baptized by the nomadic indigenous eco-knowledge:

> Much of his world view, based on the Han agrarian culture, crumbled in the face of the logic and the culture of the grassland. The nomadic inhabitants safeguarded the "big life" – the survival of the grassland and nature were more precious than the survival of people. Tillers of the land, on the other hand, safeguarded "little lives" – the most precious of which were people, their survival the most important. But, as Bilgee had said, without the big life, the little lives were doomed. (29; 45–46).[89]

While the Han Chinese favor the meekness of domesticated animals such as sheep, the Mongolian nomads value carnivores, such as wolves, insofar as they act as natural mediators to control the population of herbivores on the grassland. Chen continues to unravel why the wolves are utterly important in keeping the balance between herbivores, carnivores, and humans to sustain a benign grassland ecological cycle and, more importantly, in carrying on the "wolf spirit" which he identified as authentic Mongol. His major argument regarding human behavior is

[89] For the translation of *Wolf Totem*, I refer to Goldblatt's English translation (the latter page number), but also compare with the Chinese edition (the former page number). In a few cases, when there are obvious omissions, I translate it myself.

the responsibility to live according to the law of Tengger; that is, "to stand by the side of the Big Life": to safeguard "mother grassland":

> Mongolians do not merely believe in the "unity of man and heaven", but take it further to the "unity of heaven, animals, people, and grasslands", which is wiser and more valuable than that in Chinese culture. Even the grassland rats, being top sabotage to the grassland, have got their irreplaceable functions in the Mongolian world. (267).[90]

In his enlightenment, Chen Zhen proposes that the Mongolian wolf totem proves a "proxy for subjective and national potency" for the Chinese people (Ni and Hughes-D'Aeth 214). There he takes on the moral burden of "reforming the Chinese national character" designated by the early modern intelligentsia, leading the way to investigate the pathogen of Chinese illness. The diseased body, on par with cannibalism, is also the key trope of Chinese national allegory activated in Lu Xun's writing career and modern Chinese literary history (Gang 97–100)..[91] Chen Zhen's diagnosis of the Chinese weakness of "sheep-like personality" must be historicized in the geopolitical milieu that catalyzes the birth of modern Chinese nationhood, which, like all other modern nation-states, establishes political expressions that "loom out of an immemorial past, and, still more important, glide into a limitless future" (Anderson, "Imagined Communities" 11–12).

Of particular significance to the transformation is late imperial China's encounter with European (and Japanese) colonial powers, and modern science, technology, and cultural normalcy. During the process of "Western learning spreading to the East (*xixue dongjian*)," the Qing Empire's self-sustaining, boundless, centripetal "All-Under-Heaven (*tianxia*)" identification is soon to be replaced by alienating self-realization in a geopolitical system of "tens of thousands of countries(*wanguo*)." Therefore, haunted by what Anderson notes as "the specter of comparisons," ("Spectre" 2) The modern Chinese national imagination is tainted by both senses of "wounded pride" and of humiliation and victimhood – which are repeatedly mentioned nowadays (Chang 186). In his novel, Chen Zhen constantly evokes the Qing Empire's humiliation, and expresses his shame and "pathetic feeling as a descendant of the agrarian ethnicity" (17). Such a "superiority–inferiority complex" is shared by the majority of Chinese intellectuals from the late nineteenth century until "the 1980s and beyond," and it also urges the root-

[90] This paragraph has been omitted in the English edition; it is my translation of the Chinese edition.

[91] For instance, in Lu Xun's short story, "Medicine" (《药》), his diseased father becomes the biggest symbol for sick China. For a comprehensive discussion on the symbolic meaning of the tropes of cannibalism and diseases, see Gang Yue, *The Mouth that Begs: Hunger, Cannibalism, and the Politics of Eating in Modern China*.

seeking stream among the "high culture fever (*wenhua re* 文化热)" phenomenon in the 1980s (Wang Jing 297).

It may appear peculiar that Han Chinese youth could seek their "cultural root" in the Inner Mongolian grassland. Yet, as Chen Zhen explains, literally everyone, including Han Chinese forebearers, descended from hunters (16–17). Diving deeper into primordial and pre-historic times, the Han Chinese ancestors, or Huaxia (华夏) ethnicities, were nomadic people like the ancient Mongols. Their primitive, wolfish spirit, which has fallen during their agrarian history, can be better regained from their Mongolian kin. "Han Chinese are both the descendants of the agrarian people and that of the nomadic people…I have both the wolfish character and lamb character in me," says Jiang Rong in an interview, "that is why I admire the wolfish spirit so much." The protagonist, Chen Zhen, has the same political tendency to embrace, appropriate, and possess the "wolfish spirit." Beyond a grassland elegy and eulogy, this book is meant for contemporary Han Chinese readers who suffer from a wounded national pride – just as he does:

> As the biggest population in the world, the Han Chinese cannot find their spiritual belonging by relying on imported culture from the West; we have to find a rootstock within ourselves even if we want to graft the scion of Western culture. Pastoralism is one origin of Western modernity, and the wolf totem is the local spiritual resource for the Chinese. (Ding, Ying).[92]

In this way, Chen Zhen's *guominxing* revitalization project in the wolf totem endows new meaning to the Confucian saying, "It is from the remote rural regions that one may be able to find the lost rituals of the court (礼失而求诸野)."[93] While the character 野(*ye*) originally refers to the periphery, rustic spaces remote from the center of civilization, in the modern Chinese dictionary, 野 literally means "wild" and 荒野 (*huangye*) is the equivalent expression for "wilderness." Strangely enough, in Chen Zhen's root-seeking pilgrimage, it is exactly the Mongolian grassland wilderness with feral wolves that preserves what Chen deems as the most valuable spiritual fountain. This wolf totem, as Chen sees it, is the antidote for the toxic aspect of Confucian cultural customs observed by the Han Chinese. Thus, he argues, to catch up with the "Western civilized wolf," the Han Chinese need to preserve

[92] "作为世界上人数最多的汉民族，若是完全依赖西方民族的精神资源来振兴自己，终究是无根之木，即便是嫁接还需要有母本。游牧精神是现代西方精神的本源之一，而狼图腾精神是中华民族珍贵的本土精神资源。" (Ding, Ying. ("Interview with Jiang Rong, Author of Wolf Totem", *News Weekly*, 2004). For the interviews in Chinese, the translation is mine unless otherwise noted.

[93] Confucius (551–479 BC) spent his life traveling between different states during the Spring and Autumn period (770–476/403 BC), trying to persuade these kings to revive the rituals of the Western Zhou Dynasty and to govern the country in a benevolent way. In *The History of the Former Han Dynasty* by Gu Ban, it is referred to Confucius's words that the lost rituals, though lost in the court, can be found in the most remote rural regions.

their minority Mongolian borderland in a primitive and "natural" state.

"Obsession with Wolves"

As a spiritual root-seeking pilgrimage, Chen Zhen feels more compelled to bear a grander political destiny and a heavier "moral burden" than Gao Ziming in *Remembering Wolves*: While Gao Ziming flinches at his sinful participation of extinction and calls out "but I need the wolves!" through his neurotic irrationality, Chen Zhen speaks as solemnly and rationally as ever in his assertive taking on of the grand enlightenment scheme. Identifying himself as a physician-like author – as Lu Xun is – Chen feels that he has finally diagnosed the pathogen of China's illness: the sheep elements in the Chinese *guominxing*, and his prescription is to inject "the wolfish blood of the Nomadic pastoralism" into the dwindled Han Chinese character (374). In that sense, ostracizing the wolf packs from the Olonbulag grassland induces results far worse than the decline of nomadic pastoralism; rather, it will destroy the medicine that can cure Chinese people of their problems.

With both narrators' "root-seeking" expedition, the two texts strive to rewrite their "obsession with China" through their studies of the wolves. If Jia Pingwa aims to infuse new elements into the rural writing norm, then Jiang Rong's rewriting of Chineseness is politically more daring. His problematic animal metaphors notwithstanding, this novel becomes successful environmental writing, with its vivid, detailed narratives about the biological wolves and their interaction with humans and other species on the grassland. Compared with the reticence of *Remembering Wolves* on the political history of extinction, *Wolf Totem* is outspoken in revealing the socio-political causes of eco-degradation in the time frame, which aligns with environmental historian Hou Wenhui's observation about the environmental consequence of both the ideology of struggle and "malignant swell of the population" (155). Not only does he challenge the ecophobia in Han Chinese culture by reconsidering the values of undomesticated nature, but he also directly repudiates the anti-intellectualism and political mistakes of the regime plundering the ethnic borderlands. One may also wink unwittingly at his *Guominxing* critique as a disguised criticism of the political ecology – Chen's "radical cultural statements" can be deliberate in a political environment where cultural criticism is comparatively more tolerated (Shu 93). In the epilogue, Chen disconsolately comments:

> Since China doesn't have a competitive, scientific, and democratic system for selecting top talent, honest people are denied a chance to rise. Uljii, a rare expert on wolves and grassland, was buried under the yellow sand of our current system, which is far worse than the yellow

sand of the grassland, because the political system was the true origin of the dust storm there. (356; 508–509)

In this blatant political expression, Chen Zhen highlights the ultimate purpose of his *guominxing* critique. In his anticipation of the revitalization of Chinese national character and the revolutionary result – a "competitive, scientific, and democratic system" – he expresses his utopian imagination about spiritual enlightenment that had been all the rage in the 1980s. The environmental ethics contained in the grassland wolf ecospirituality, though identified as *authentically* Mongolian, appear suspiciously like a reorganized neo-Confucian environmental ethics in its patrilineage format (specifically, father–son analogy). Of course, I hate to pose a prudent question as to whether the Mongolians do believe in the wolf totem because authenticity does not detract from its narrative appeal, but it does help us to further question the book's intention to "write a book for the Mongols." In Chen Zhen's discussion with Bilgee about the wolf as a favored child of the Tengger, he is applying the neo-Confucian paradigm of family–nation isomorphism (家国同构) rather than Buddhist language:[94] "Heaven, Earth, and humans are a unity, and humans, wolves, and dogs are essentially inseparable" (59). Wolf totem is, in this way, framed in the neo-Confucian concept of *tianren heyi* (the unity of human and heaven, or heaven–human holism), except that the nonhuman elements get more pronounced.

As Wang Dongsheng notes, *tian* (the Heaven, or Nature) provides the ontological foundation for the Confucian ethics that align the patrilineal family–nation isomorphism with the heaven–human holism (85). Therefore, Chen Zhen can be read as a rebellious child of the Confucian patriarch to claim his enlightenment; yet unlike his forerunners in the May Fourth Movement, he draws his inspiration from his Mongolian adoptive father rather than directly from the Westerners. Throughout the novel, Chen Zhen barely mentions his biological father, nor his mother. Instead, the "mother river," as both destructive and life-supporting force, is constantly referred to: "The Chinese do not deny the Yellow River the name of 'mother river' regardless of the disastrous floods. It can be said that destructiveness and 'motherly' can be the same thing" (57). It is probably through the absence of his biological father that Chen Zhen gains an individualistic voice to be able to create a more egalitarian "Chinese" family structure, and hence a democratic national political system.

In this ecospirituality, all animals on the grassland, including gazelles and rabbits, deserve their due space

[94] For readers interested in Mongolian religious studies, see Abrahms-Kavunenko on the Mongolian tradition of Buddhism (*Mongolian Buddhism at a Time of Environmental Disarray* 65).

for existence. Even wolves and humans must be controlled in terms of their population and what they take from the environment. On the one hand, as Bilgee the hardcore devotee to the wolf totem argues, while the Mongols respect and revere the wolves, they also hunt them in spring, so that the wolves do not overpopulate, "if there are too many of them, they lose their divine power and turn evil" (77; 123). On the other hand, "the wolves controlled the gradual development of the human population" and this explains why "throughout history, there had never been a large-scale land reclamation to feed the people" (73; 116). Because people must stay vigilant and be wary of wolves, herders, especially women, endure sleeplessness and hardship. While they become strong-willed, like Gasmi who can fight a wolf barehanded, the Mongolian population never grows too large, unlike their Han Chinese counterpart.

The narrator in *Wolf Totem* uses both empirical knowledge and scientific language to exemplify the human–wolf co-existence in Olonglage, leaving the "nonscientific" indigenous knowledge to be conveyed by a Mongolian elder, Bilgee: "The wolves are sent by Tengger to safeguard the grassland. Without them, the grassland would vanish. And without wolves, we Mongols will never be able to enter heaven" (77; 123). In contrast, *Remembering Wolves* indulges in folkloric storytelling, yet fails to provide emplaced knowledge, and the wolves Gao Ziming remembers are conceptual rather than biological. This is probably why he ends up being self-contradictory: "Humans cannot help killing the wolves at moments of confrontation, because they are human; yet humans cannot do without the wolves, and that's also because they are human" (186). In his experience living in a "battlefield without enemies (*wu di zhi zhen* 无敌之阵)," Gao Ziming's word is also empty words (*wu wu zhi yan* 无物之言). As Wen Huiyu notes, *Remembering Wolves* disappoints the readers in that "the artistic expression cannot sustain the meaning it aims to convey" (60).

To briefly sum up this section, both books share a compounded obsession that Chineseness becomes inherently blended with its untamed Nature, flagshipped by the wild wolves. Both stories follow a root-seeking narrative of the returning of a young intellect. In *Remembering Wolves*, Gao Ziming is led by his maternal family lineage to the Bear-ear Stream village where the wolves are executed, leaving him to suffer from remorse and solastalgic displacement. *Wolf Totem*, however, identifies Chen Zhen with a different tradition – the Mongolian wolf totem and grassland pastoralism. However, as Chen later aims to argue, the wolfish gene has always been in the Chinese blood, therefore, through studying the Mongolian wolf totem culture, he attempte to delve deeper into the primordial past of the Chinese nation that predates written history.

Both texts express a strong sense of nostalgia, yet their nostalgic object is no longer Chinese native soil

but a natural existence that is not yet destroyed by human exploitation. Meanwhile, as Benedict Anderson notes, "communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined" ("Imagined Communities" 6). In the renewed national image framed in *Wolf Totem*, though Chen Zhen aims to subvert the Sinocentric narrative, he still needs to take a step forward to reconcile both the Han Chinese and the Mongolian ethnicities so as not to essentialize their differences. Though addressing contemporary Han Chinese, *Wolf Totem* is supposed to be written for the Mongols and to grant voice to the grassland. It depicts the retreating of wolves together with the disappearance of Mongolian nomadic pastoral life. As Bilgee laments: "We Mongols lose in culture, our ancestors didn't write enough books, the few books left are mostly written by Han Chinese and speak on their side" (30; 61). Chen Zhen, as his adopted Han Chinese son, produces this book dedicated to the grassland and the grassland people.

However, here comes the post-colonial paradox: in Chen Zhen's jealous admiration of the "Western civilized wolves" and exhortation of the Chinese to "become wolfish", he risks hailing for colonial modernity. This is scathingly pinpointed in Huang Yi's words: "Under the miraging 'reconstruction of the nation' the book is filled with foggy violence, it is not merely necromancy for the grassland tradition, it is also applauding for colonialism" ("Post Utopia" 248). Secondly, when embracing the wolfish heritage of the Mongolian or Manchurian conquest of Han Chinese dynastic empires, Chen ignores that this is also essentially invasion and violence, just as Sinofication of the minorities can be. Lastly, according to Chen Zhen, it is only the wolf totem devotees who are "real Mongols." However, if an authentic Mongol's destiny, like the wolf cub's freedom, can be preserved only through fighting at all costs (that is, to a tragic death), "doesn't the wolf romance imply that a good Mongol is a dead Mongol?" (Bulag 11). To take a post-colonial perspective: while Han Chinese culture is assimilating Mongolian culture, and environmental degradation is threatening traditional Mongolian nomadic lifestyle, both ethnicities are confronted with homogenizing Western modernity. It is the issue of modernity that is fundamental to both novels, which I will further explore in Section 1.4.

1.4 Narrating Extinction in the Anthropocene: Rethinking Modernity

1.4.1 "Nostalgia about the Grassland is the Most 'Modern' Feeling": Nostalgias and Eco-utopianism

In the previous sections, I reasoned that both authors' extinction narratives formulate the extinction of wolves as an indicator not just of ecological crises but also a cultural and existential crisis for the nation and/or humanity. Both narrators are afflicted with a nostalgic complex and solastalgic distress about the wolves, even though their

rationales are different. These feelings of nostalgia and solastalgia, central to both narrators' struggles against crises, are closely tied to utopian/dystopian elements. By redefining the relationship between wolves and humans, the stories also help reconfigure modernity and humanity. This section further explores the entanglement of nature nostalgia about wolves with utopian/dystopian discourses in both texts of ecofiction, and hence their reflection upon the progressive ideal of modernity, as well as the dichotomic relationship between humanity and animality.

Aligned to the dual obsession with wolves and China, both extinction novels embody strong nostalgic (and solastalgic) feelings about the wolves; despite their different nostalgic place (one agrarian village, one pastoral grassland), they surprisingly share an eco-utopian imagination that stretches into the pristine past. In Jia Pingwa's *Remembering Wolves*, the narrator sees Shangzhou, now a "land of poverty and foulness," a wonderworld back in prehistoric times "where all sorts of animals and plants thrived, and humans were just a part of them" (149). The narrator's remembering of the pre-Anthropocene coexistence deepens the novel's ecological concern as more than an obsession with the wolves but an irresistible yearning for co-dwelling among the more-than-human world. In this regard, modernization (symbolized by the gun and the camera) has left human beings in a lonely, displaced situation – a state of solastalgia. Meanwhile, Jiang Rong's *Wolf Totem* sees in the Mongolian grassland an original, congealed green utopia, a place that preserves both an archetypal untainted nature and the ultimate remedy for the Chinese nation to march into advanced modernity. As Chen Zhen says:

> The presence of wolves is the ecological index to the existence of the grassland. When the wolves are gone, the grassland loses its soul; life here has completely changed. I miss the lush green, primitive grassland. Nowadays, on the middle plains where Han Chinese dwell, nostalgia is the worst thing, because people always relate it to agrarian lives, feudalism, autocracy and "big pot meals."[95] However, for all the modern people, nostalgia about the grassland is the most "modern" feeling.
>
> Rubbing his temple with one finger, Yang said, "I'm nostalgic too. As soon as I got here, my head was filled with herding scenes. It may be thirty years ago, but it seems like yesterday."[96] (364; 520)

[95] "Big-pot meals (大锅饭)" refers to communal feeding, the practice during the socialist socio-economic campaign named the People's Commune Campaign during the late 1950s, where everyone had to hand in all possessions to their commune, to work for the commune and to be fed by the commune. Nowadays, "to eat the big-pot meals" is synonymous with low efficiency and bad management.

[96] The original text is sifted out in Goldblatt's translation, so I translated these sentences myself and combined it with the existing translation here.

Here, Chen Zhen and Yang Ke, both urban middle-class, find themselves vulnerable to nostalgia for the grassland from just a few decades ago. Indeed, as Alastair Bonnet notes, "environmental disconnection is a perennial concern of modern life; a concern that is constantly being re-imagined and re-discovered" (49). But Chen Zhen's nostalgia about the grassland and the wolves is more complex. On the one hand, his nature nostalgia is close to the yearning for a wholesome coexistence of different species in *Remembering Wolves*; indeed, *Wolf Totem* introduces the grassland into China as a transcultural symbol of "wilderness" (with the "ecological natives" of Mongolian herds people), an ecological utopia.

On the other hand, after his initial defense of the Mongolian ethnic minorities against Sinofication and Maoist anthropocentrism, Chen Zhen digresses towards his nationalistic utopia rather than further expanding on ecocriticism. In his purported "modern" feelings there is an imperturbable ambition to revolutionize Chinese society according to a progressive view of modernity, and the grassland nostalgia is proffered as a cure for Chinese national character, an alternative utopia to the two popular utopias in contemporary China – "rural utopia (*xiangchou wutuobang*)" and "red utopia (*hongse wutuobang*)" (Wang Jie, "*Xiangchou* Utopia" 5). However, as Li Xiaojiang notes, "If nationalism (under whatever banner) dominates the world there can be no refuge for democratic government and individual freedom" (505). The destruction of the grassland is a palpable example of environmental injustice that harms ethnic minorities and nonhuman beings, but Chen jumps into overgeneralization by attributing it to the "deep-rooted inferiority" (*lie gen xing* 劣根性) of Chinese rurality. Along with Chen Zhen's disgust towards the rural, "sheep-like characters," he shows no sympathy towards the peasant migrants suffering from the nationwide famine, which exposes his prejudice against the rural population from his privileged urban middle-class position. In this regard, his and Yang Ke's grassland nostalgia is yet another version of the bourgeois pastoral imagination that finds its expression in the grassland and the wolves.

When Chen Zhen urges the Chinese to take on a wolfish spirit to survive in a global society, paradoxically, his wolf ecospirituality concurs with Maoist utopianism in its nationalistic and revolutionary fervor. As David Der-wei Wang puts it: "such a call for the 'wolf totem' cuts both ways, suggesting both a nostalgia for the socialist logic of revolution, no matter what the cost, and a yearning for the post-socialist market logic of survival of the fittest" (*Why Fiction Matters* 87). Therefore, Chen's biggest problem lies in his oversimplified ideological tendencies despite his repudiation of Maoist ideology, and his reflection on historical mistakes is inadequate, as described by Ostheimer:

> No wonder the historical-political background in the book – after all, it is set during the Cultural Revolution – is largely shadowed. Coming to terms with the past, like the concept of historical responsibility in general, implies that people learn from past mistakes by further refining culture in the sense of humanization. On the other hand, those who learn only from the spirit of the wolves have a single answer ready for all human questions about the past and the future: the true Cultural Revolution is the naturalization of culture, that is, a revolution that annuls man's forgetfulness of nature, that makes him natural. (97) „[97]

In its paradoxical call for a resurgence of post-Mao utopianism, *Wolf Totem* evades historical responsibility by seeking remedies to historical mistakes from the wolves, instead of rectifying the ideology of "constant class struggles" from the Cultural Revolution (as discussed in section 1.2.2). Therefore, such a grandiose "rewilding" project becomes derailed by its nationalistic obsession. When urging the Han Chinese to learn from the Mongolian wolf totem, it is paradoxical that Chen Zhen's domesticating of the little wolf becomes yet another example of Sinofication – regardless of his repudiation of Sinofication. Chen Zhen's domestication of the wolf cub is another example of ecoambiguity: as the little wolf dies, Chen and his friend skin it, hang its pelt on a long birch pole, and perform a sky burial for the little wolf according to Mongolian tradition. As its pelt dances in the wind, "suddenly, the long, tubular body and bushy tail rolled a few times like a flying dragon, soaring in the swirling snow and drifting clouds." Feeling the little wolf "soaring happily toward Tengger" and "to the free space," "at that instant, Chen Zhen believed he saw his very own wolf totem" (353). In a way, it is through the sacrificial little wolf that Chen finally arrives at his spiritual nirvana. Chen's solemn, stirring celebration of the little wolf's death for the sake of "the teachings of wolfish spirit" (169) is disturbing. If modernization of the Chinese nation completely takes on a competition-based wolfish spirit to march into Western-style modernization, does not the dead little wolf symbolize the sacrifice of both Nature and the ethnic minorities?

Nevertheless, considering the loss of wolves on the Inner Mongolian steppes as a tragedy for Chinese nationals, *Wolf Totem* holds the Han Chinese state responsible for ecological destruction on the indigenous land inhabited by ethnic minorities, emphasizing the state's responsibility for environmental conservation in the era of modern nation-states (the era after the formation of modern nation-states). Together with *Remembering Wolves*, *Wolf*

[97] Ostheimer's article was originally published in German in "From Popular Goethe to Global Pop," and excerpts were translated into Chinese by Li Jianming on the website of the Goethe Institute [See https://www.goethe.de/ins/cn/zh/kul/mag/20693386.html]. Here the quote was translated into English by the German–English translation program (DeepL translation) with reference to its Chinese translation.

Totem propelled the environmental consciousness in China into the new millennium, despite the novels' undeniable failings.

One environmental goal both novels achieve is their deconstruction of the negative cultural conceptions of the wolf that were once so ingrained in Chinese vocabulary and morality. Through this deconstruction, both stories redefine humanity beyond anthropocentrism. As mentioned in the Introduction, the transcultural concept of human (人 ren) plays an essential role in the rise of Chinese modernity in the early twentieth century. It can be observed that contemporary Chinese intellectuals since the 1980s have seen the ideal of rational human subjectivity to both rectify Maoist ideology and welcome the market economy. However, in face of serious local environmental problems and global ecological crises, the inherent anthropocentrism in modern humanism becomes more problematic. Writing in the context of a "literature for humanity," both *Remembering Wolves* and *Wolf Totem* actively seek to redefine humanity through rewriting animality.

1.4.2 Humanity or Animality: The Question of Coexistence

In *Remembering Wolves*, the dichotomy between humanity and animality is foregrounded. Earlier, I have compared the book's characters with those from the classical fantasy *Journey to the West* and pointed out the three protagonists' images as symbols of divinity (Fu Shan), humanity (Gao Ziming), and animality (Lantou). As the story proceeds, when humans eliminate the wolves, not only does Fu Shan lose his divinity and heroism, but Gao Ziming also suffers from mental illness, as he wistfully says "we must keep wolves in mind." As their journey in rural Shangzhou demonstrates, when wolves disappear, people commit horrible deeds as if they have absorbed the bestiality (that used to be culturally attributed to the wolves) from the wolves. Worse still, when all the wolves are killed, the villagers degenerate into human wolves, and Ziming's temper also changes as if he were taking on wolfish features.

The extinction of wolves does not just release the bestiality in humans but in the long run also makes people atrophy and regress. In this sense, humans' innate fear of the wolves acts as a reminder that should people become purely materialistic and jettison their moral constraints, then the aura of humanity would be dispersed, and society would be turned into a dystopia. Ziming's plea, "we must keep the wolves in mind", serves as a reminder for people to take species extinction seriously, to rethink the human causes of species extinction. Realizing that modern people cannot resolve the conflict between humans and wild animals, Gao Ziming opines: "Shangzhou needs a forbidden zone like this" (190). When modern people become a global force that alters the environment, stepping back and ceding space to other species becomes a likely way towards co-existence.

While Gao Ziming's nostalgia about the wild wolves reveals an uneasiness with the moral decadence of society during rapid urbanization and sweeping consumerization, it is through the dichotomy of bestiality and humanity that he exclaims: "but I need the wolves!" A wholesome society must be a society where humans can coexist with Nature, rather than an alienating space where nonhuman species are eradicated. Paradoxically, *Remembering Wolves* suffers from the same wolf-deficit disorder as its protagonist does, because the folktale-style narratives about the wolves are based on human imagination instead of experience with wolves. This is better resolved in *Wolf Totem* in that the biological wolves are vividly depicted. There is no clear distinction between humanity and bestiality because, as Chen Zhen argues, humans and animals are inseparable:

> Chen Zhen discovered that considering wolves' behavior from a human perspective, some of the puzzling behaviors could be reasoned out logically. Dogs display human characteristics, men display wolf characteristics or vice versa. Heaven, Earth, and man are a unity; it's impossible to categorically separate men, dogs, and wolves. (59; 94)

In the spirit of human–wolf wholeness, Chen adopted a wolf cub and felt "grateful for the lessons in wolf behavior." "He was able to both sense and touch the warm, gentle side of wolf nature" (169; 265). As the author, Jiang Rong's, apology for the wolves goes: "Is wolfish spirit merely brutality? The wolves are also caring, tender" (Zhang, Jiang).

The representation of the wolves in *Wolf Totem* compels us to rethink the deeply ingrained anthropocentrism in our moral and value system. Meanwhile, Jiang Rong also posits the wolves as the "central nervous system" standing at the "highest position" of the grassland ecology: "In the grassland food web, the grassland comes first, then follow other animals and people, on top of them are the wolves;" "If there were no wolves, then the chain would break down." (Ibid.) Regardless of his subsequent intention of "re-wolfing" Chinese *guominxing*, here the ecological understanding of the wolves as a key mediator in the grassland food chain and ecosystem reveals ecocentric thinking, which is a "capacity to think relationally and iteratively at the level of the ecosystem." To mimic Aldo Leopold, this can be described as "to think like the grassland" (Ni and Hughes-D'Aeth 214).

Like Jia's novel, *Wolf Totem* also reintroduces and develops the dichotomy between domestication and wilderness from Lu Xun's biopolitics. While Confucian morality emphasizes filial piety and obedience, Chen

repudiates the well-accepted morality of pliancy and conformity as "sheep-like characteristics." His questioning of the mistakenly glorified virtue of obedience has its root in the Madman's consciousness of (post-)modernism..[98] While raising the wolf cub, Chen Zhen realizes that it is impossible to leash the wolf, nor does the cub show any gratitude to its captor. He becomes enchanted by the wolf's wild spirit of freedom, which cannot be captured by human-centric moral values. To think from the position of the wolf, the idea that the human captor expects gratitude from the wolf sounds hypocritical: "The wolf showed no gratitude, for he did not consider himself as being raised by a human and was incapable of reacting slavishly just because he saw his master coming with his food" (169; 264).

After watching a competition between a feral hare and the wolf cub, which Chen arranges for the latter, he opines: "Every living being on the Mongolian grassland, be it carnivore or herbivore, embodies bravery and toughness, and this is the spirit of pastoralism" (302). In exulting the defiance of the wolf and the hare, Chen does not just make it a (post-)colonial analogy, but also an environmental ethic that is beyond anthropocentrism. Through the interplay of humanity and bestiality in *Remembering Wolves*, and that of domestication and wilderness in *Wolf Totem*, these novels provide alternative approaches to understanding nonhuman beings, and hence humans. In this way, both extinction narratives rethink modernity in the ontological sense, although neither of them finds a way out of binary oppositions, such as that between human and nonhuman, humanity and animality.

Before concluding the chapter, I would also like to mention Ye Guangqin's novelette "Big Fu the Tiger", a short story that provides alternatives to the human/nature dichotomy. "Big Fu the Tiger" is about the death of the last South China tiger in the Qinling Mountain region. The tiger is killed while it was resting: "Big Fu stumbled and ground to a standstill in the middle of the slope. It was at that moment that the people could see the tiger's pure and bewildered eyes, so full of miscomprehension" (43). Big Fu's death leaves an irreparable trauma on Second Fu, a local villager who sees Big Fu as his nonhuman bigger brother. The story questions: "His elder brother was dead. He had died in a truly miserable manner. Could his elder brother be held to blame? He was not at fault for he had to eat to survive" (45). Here the tiger is not shown to humans as an anthropomorphic mirage, and the narrator acknowledges her lack of knowledge about the tiger. The story gives the animals' standpoint not by trying hard to speak *for* them, but by the narrative affect that touches and compels one to think. It is through Second Fu's sad rumination that the simple fact is brought forth – the tigers *should* have a right to survive. Here

[98] See Tang Xiaobing "Lu Xun's 'Diary of a Madman' and a Chinese Modernism" for Tang's insightful interpretation of "Diary of a Madman" and Lu Xun's "modernism." To Tang, the narrative voices of the madman in Lu Xun retains more critical and self-subversive ambiguities than the hegemonic taken-for-granted reading of Lu Xun, hence the (post-)modernist rigor of the story.

humans and animals are not sharply distinguished, nor is there a categorical concept of "humanity" distinguished from "animality" or "bestiality," and this non-judgmental storytelling distinguishes itself from Jia's moralizing or Jiang Rong's instigating approach to extinction. Altogether, these texts show the diversity and potential of the emerging extinction narratives in China.

To summarize, this chapter illustrates how species extinction is registered in the contemporary Chinese literary imagination. The narratives about charismatic megafauna foreground environmental distress that is entangled with issues of gender, social class, ethnicity, and nationhood. The chapter begins with the news about the "rediscovery" of the South China tiger and ends with a story about the last "Chinese tiger." I use the example of the South China tiger to reveal some historical facts behind extinction in recent China. I begin by analyzing how the doomed "photographic safari" in *Remembering Wolves* reveals the fundamental cultural and environmental crises. While *Remembering Wolves* mourns for the crisis of *xiangchou*, *Wolf Totem* pillories rural nostalgia by revealing the problem with the Han Chinese agriculturalist way of managing grassland ecologies. Chen Zhen's call for nostalgia for grassland pastoralism draws cross-ethnic environmental justice into the discussion. Although by no means conclusive, these extinction narratives rectify literary representation of nonhuman beings and redefine a vision of (post-)modernity in post-millennium China. As an insurgent attempt at modernity critique, these ecofiction works form intriguing dialogues with modern Chinese literature such as Lu Xun's works and his biopolitics. I consider each of the extinction narratives a tentative answer to the inquiry into Chinese modernization in the context of the Anthropocene.

Chapter 2 – Re-imaging the Rural: Deforestation and Desolation in a Gyalrong Tibetan Village

> The primitive forests and indigenous cultural traditions have the biggest fear of modern roads. Culture is like birds that only survive in the natural ecosphere. If the trees are logged, the cultural atmosphere will be destroyed; If the culture loses its roots, respect for primitive forests is shattered, and people will also be obsessed with greediness. (97)
>
> (天然林与传统文化，最怕的就是道路。文化就像鸟一样，需要天然生态的适度荫蔽。如果"树木"被砍了，文化的气场也会随之涣散；如果文化断根了，对于天然林的尊重淡漠起来，人随之也会妄念追心。)
>
> *The Country with No Big Trees* (2008), Feng Yongfeng, founder of the "University of Nature (*Ziran daxue*)," a Beijing-based Environmental NGO

This chapter examines environmental degradation surrounding deforestation and its socio-ecological impact in the Gyalrong Tibetan ethnic regions represented in Tibetan-Chinese writer Alai's six-volume "Hollow Mountain" series. As one of the most biodiverse and ethnically diverse regions on Earth, Southwest China (especially where Western Sichuan province, Yunnan province, and Tibet Autonomous region meet) has enjoyed fame for its image as Shangri-La since the early twentieth century. However, this stereotypical image of spiritually transcendental residents of Shangri-La conceals the socioeconomic disadvantages and structural violence that the locals have encountered, especially during the state-led modernization era. Meanwhile, the dichotomic ethnic-political discourse of a monolithic Han Chinese versus a homogenous Tibetan ethnicity (analogous to that between the Chinese and the Western) also becomes a problematic framework, especially when it comes to the socio-environmental injustice confronted by the even more peripherized Gyalrong Tibetan ethnic farmers in this region. In the "Hollow Mountain" series, what Alai attempts to create is a chronicle of an obscure Gyalrong Tibetan ethnic village during the state-led modernization between the 1950s and the 1990s. Interestingly, in Alai's terms, Ji Village is employed to represent the origin of China, as the homophone of "Ji" in Gyalrong Tibetan dialect means "root," "seed," or "origin" (see "epilogue") – understanding its modern experience is essential to understanding modernization in China: "Indeed, the village is my root, villages are many Chinese people's roots, they are the root

of China. Because they are where the land and grains are, and where many people come from" (HM[99] 256).

Highlighting the rurality of Ji Village, Alai evokes both the modern Chinese literary tradition of *xiangchou* (rural nostalgia) and the rampant socio-economic inequality of the rural–urban dichotomy in contemporary China. What Alai attempts in this evocation is to contest and reconstruct the *xiangchou* discourse and to liberate it from an all-pervasive lyrical convention of rural nostalgia reaffirming the Han Chinese hegemony. Alai's stories emphasize the mobility and ongoing process of homemaking, which both destabilize the homogeneity of *xiangchou* discourse and reiterate people's right to mobilize. By distinguishing these structures and the rhetoric of feelings (or I would call "different nostalgias"), including *sixiang bing* (homesickness), *xiangchou* (rural/pastoral nostalgia), and *huaijiu* (longing for the past), the narratives question the idyllic image projected on the ethnic people and land peripherized in the modern socio-economic order, while also actively destabilizing the rigid conception of rurality by revealing the history of agrarian mobility. More prominently, the "Hollow Mountain" series manages to pluralize the *xiangchou* discourse by positing the slow violence of ecological exploitation as the other plotline of progress-obsessed modernization. As Alai notes: "A large part of the stories I wrote about Ji Village concerns the disappearance of our forests" (HM 259).

These six "chronicles" of Ji Village feature both human individuals and nonhuman beings as significant players, especially in that the human-induced environmental degradation turns into violence against both humans and nonhumans. After setting the background (Section One), this chapter proceeds with textual analysis in three sections. In Section Two, I attempt to untangle both the politics and poetics of the many "nostalgias" in the series, especially the representation of slow violence and historical violence in the first three books. Sections Three and Four focus on the last three books, and I explore Alai's representation of homemaking and environmental actions in a time of solastalgia. This chapter analyzes the ways in which the "Hollow Mountain" series challenges and reconfigures the *xiangchou* narratives as an affective tool to foreground the slow violence of deforestation, alienation, and displacement in the Gyalrong Tibetan ethnic region.

[99] For this Chapter, for convenience's sake, I use abbreviations for the individual books: GW (*Gone with the Wind*), CF (*Celestrial Fire*), D& D for *Dase and Dage*, D (*Desolation*), GT (*Gentle Thunder*), *and* HM (*Hollow Mountain*). For the name of the series, I keep it the "Hollow Mountain" series.

2.1 Forms of Pastoralism, Deforestation, and Alai's "Hollow Mountain" series

2.1.1 The "Sweet-wild Boy" and Pastoral Fandom in Contemporary China

Being the acclaimed locus of the Oriental paradise of Shangri-La, the Tibetan region has long enjoyed its fame espousing fantasies to the "outside world". On November 11, 2020, a 19-year-old Tibetan man known as Dingzhen Zhenzhu or Ding Zhen (in Tibetan: བསྟན་འཛིན་བརྩོན་འགྲུས་, *bstan 'dzin brtson' grus*) became an overnight sensation with a seven-second short *Douyin* (TikTok) video that went viral. With a smiling, good-looking face, healthily tanned "plateau-red" cheeks, and a pair of big, innocent eyes, Dingzhen Zhenzhu was like a breath of fresh air to the netizens bored with overly filtered blogebrity faces (*wanghong lian*)[100] gone viral on new media in the last couple of years. Chinese netizens were charmed by Dingzhen, nicknaming him "sweet-wild boy" (*tianye nanhai*), an endearment of Dingzhen's pastoral background of 田野 (tiányě, literal: fields and wilderness) that puns on two appealing adjectives: 甜 (tián, sweet) and 野 (yě, wild). Dingzhen, a boy from the rural-pastoral Tibetan regions, also directed the public's attention to southwest China's "remote areas" that have yet to be massively affected by capitalist modernity.

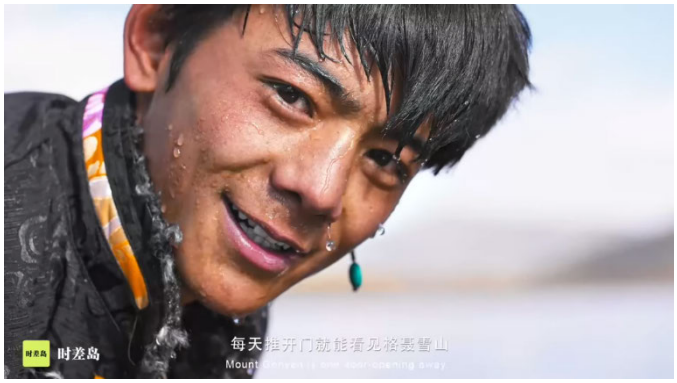

Figure 2.2 "(In our village,) everyday as I open the door, I see Ge'nyen Massif." Dingzhen's World Documentary by Time Island) (image used by kind permission of "Time Island" platform)

Before this sudden online fandom, Dingzhen led quite a simple life. He dropped out of school in the third year of primary school to help his family herd yaks and maintain their livelihood. Dingzhen's hometown, Lithang County in Garzê Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, sits at an altitude of over 4,000 meters and has vast grassland and snow-capped mountains. Due to its high altitude and poor transportation, Lithang has remained an economically impoverished county. Dingzhen's popularity, however, was quickly seen by local officials and entrepreneurs as an opportunity to promote tourism. Seven days after Dingzhen's sudden online fandom, he received a job offer as a tourism spokesperson from Litang Tourism Company, a state-owned enterprise. Official support made Dingzhen a household name in China. On

[100] Blogebrity face refers to the visage considered as photogenic in recent Chinese new media. Its key features include sharp chins, big eyes, and highly filtered fair skin.

November 25, *The World of Dingzhen* (*Dingzhen de Shijie*), a three-minute video, came out. The video presents Dingzhen's unadorned smile and naturally handsome appearance against the background of splendid local landscapes, such as Ge'nyen Massif, the Twin Lakes, and the Moya grassland. These landscapes conjure sublime, romantic and spiritual feelings, evoking the image of Shangri-La.

The Dingzhen phenomenon was seen as a heart-warming Internet event in the tumultuous year of 2020. As well as striking a chord by capturing a gradually changing concept of beauty, Dingzhen's visage also ignited nationwide interest in Tibetan ethnic culture and landscape. Some commentators have mentioned factors that have enhanced this interest, such as the Xi regime's ongoing "poverty alleviation" campaign, or the expanded influence of the female urban middle class (bjnews.com.cn). However, I would like to point out that an important psychological mechanism behind this phenomenon is the vigorous nostalgic sentiment towards an exotic, pastoral Shangri-La among the expanding Chinese urban middle class. With Dingzhen, there is as much "environmental imagination" projected upon him as onto the uncontaminated landscape behind him. With China's rapid and pervasive modernization, even remote rural places are undergoing significant environmental degradation, thus regions with well-preserved biodiverse ecologies have become rarer and more precious. While the increasingly urban population of China finds their neighborhoods beset by city bustle, low air quality, and a scarcity of natural life, Dingzhen's Litang promised an idyllic (if imperiled) sanctuary, and Dingzhen became the human emblem of the Chinese urban fatigue, if not environmental distress.

While Dingzhen invites us to his Khampa Tibetan pastoral world, the Tibetan-Chinese author Alai's "Hollow Mountain" series (2005–2009) provides a more complex and historicized account of a Tibetan village in this same region. Neighboring Litang (Dingzhen's hometown), Alai's hometown near Barkam (in the Ngawa Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture) is situated in the eastern part of the Tibetan Plateau, amid the Hengduan Mountain regions, and close to *Sanjiangyuan* (lit: The Origin of Three Rivers), where China's three major rivers, the Yellow River, the Yangtze River, and the Lancang River originate). Southwest China[101] is one of the most bio-diverse regions in China, and areas such as the Yarlung Tsangpo river basin, Hengduan Mountainous, and Western Sichuan Plateau are rated as "extremely important" by ecologists. The region contains all the major ecological systems and is home to at least 20,000 species of embryophytes (land plants), over 2000 species of vertebrates, and 50 percentt of China's tree species (Lin et al. 8668). This region is also known as China's most

[101] In the case referred to, this area ranges across 21.2 °~ 36.4°N, 83.9°~ 112.1°E, including the southeast Tibetan Plateau, Sichuan Basin and the large part of Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau (Lin et al. 8668).

culturally diverse region, home to 34 different ethnic groups with a total of 54 million people (Shen et al. 7597). Moreover, the region is the location of archetypal romantic, utopian images of Shangri-La. Home to multi-ethnic peoples, dense forests, and numerous plant and animal species, the region has been confronted with state-led modernization and environmental destruction in a way that has been ignored in a cultural sphere saturated with Sinocentric narratives. And Alai's "Hollow Mountain" series provides a significant text to reconsider issues of ethnic identity, ways of modernization, and the destruction of the natural environment.

2.1.2 Alai and the "Hollow Mountain" series

Alai (阿来, penname of Yang Yongrui 杨永睿) was born in 1959 in a small village of about 20 households in Aba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture under the administration of Sichuan province. While he initially abandoned school to help his family with farming, in 1977 Alai was eventually admitted to Barkam Normal School when China's National College Entrance Examination was restored after a decade-long pause (due to the Cultural Revolution). Alai was trained as a middle school teacher and taught (first in a middle school, then in a high school) for six years. He started writing poetry in 1982 and fiction in the late 1980s. During this time, he also became the editor for the local literary journal *Grassland* (*Caodi*). His first novel, *Red Poppies* (尘埃落定 or: *Dust Settles*), was finished in 1994 and published in 1998 by People's Literature Press. Two years later, *Red Poppies* won the fifth Mao Dun Literary Prize, one of the two most prestigious mainstream literature prizes in mainland China (the other one is the Lu Xun Literature Prize). In 1998, Alai became the chief editor for the influential *Science Fiction World* (*Kehuan Shijie*) magazine, which evolved into the most popular science fiction periodical, with over one million readers (Tidhar).

After his immensely successful *Red Poppies*, Alai embarked on his "Hollow Mountain" series in the 2000s. Part One of *Hollow Mountain* was published in 2005, while Parts Two and Three were published in 2007 and 2009, respectively. The series won Alai the "Outstanding Writer" in the Seventh Sinophone Literature and Media Prize.[102] It was then republished as *Ji Village Epic* in six volumes by Zhejiang Literature and Art Press.[103] Each book in *Hollow Mountain* features different central figures living in Ji Village during the latter half of the twentieth century. This narrative structure is also referred to as a "petal structure," where each story is like a petal, and the village is

[102] The Sinophone Literature and Media Prize is a highbrow literary prize awarded by the Guangzhou-based Nanfang Media Group since 2003.
[103] In this thesis, I use the new edition (six-book volumes, plus a few short stories in the appendix) but keep its original name "Hollow Mountain" series.

the flower. The title means "empty mountain" or "hollow mountain." The title, 空山, echoes a phrase from renowned Tang poet Wang Wei (699–761 AD) and connotes the meditative or ethereal emptiness of Chan Buddhism. Wang Wei is a representative of "fields-and-garden poetry" (*tianyuan shi*) and his art is also a form of "picture in poetry" (*shi zhong you hua*), because the images his poems evoke have a close relationship to his scroll landscape paintings. His poetry combines the traditional literati-hermit culture with Chan Buddhist aesthetics, which is a strong component of the Chinese pastoral (*tianyuan*) tradition.[104] However, none of the novellas is particularly consonant with Wang Wei's pastoral aesthetics, and the title 空山 contains a certain irony in evoking a contrast between the collapsing world of the novels and the idyllic rural landscape in Wang Wei's poetry. While Wang Wei's 空 (void, emptiness; in Sanskrit: *Sunyata*) is meditative and transcendental, Alai's 空 (Hollow) designates a mountain that has been violently emptied, subjected to waves of radical destruction, shorn of its primitive forests, stripped of its animals, and even of its human dwellers. The disappearance of the rich biodiversity and the dislocation of local people make the mountain hollow and desolate.

The "Hollow Mountain" series is a substantial contemporary Chinese ecofiction for several reasons, especially in that the forest surrounding Ji Village is treated as an active player rather than the background of the story. The series consists of six novellas, each depicting specific characters and their relations to historical moments in Ji Village, hence "a contemporary chronicle of a village" (HM 255). Scattered in the latter half of the twentieth century, these moments are not merely determined by socio-political factors but also by disasters surrounding deforestation, such as catastrophic forest fires, animals hunted to extinction, and landslides caused by stripping vegetation from the mountains. Also, the "Hollow Mountain" series is writing from (and for) the periphery that gives voice to and empowers the voiceless, including not just the Tibetan villagers but also the nonhuman life in the area. Indeed, various nonhuman "characters" play important roles in the stories and the lives of Ji Village people, such as the forests, the sacred pond, birds, monkeys, bears, and tulip trees (*Liriodendron chinense*).

The fragmentation of Ji Village's rural society is crisscrossed by its deforestation during modernization. Book I[105], *Gone with the Wind*, tells the tragedy of Gela, a fatherless little boy, following the accidental death of his

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[104] 空山 (*kongshan*, lit. empty mountain) is a recurrent image in Wang Wei's poems; for example: 1. "Empty mountains after a recent rain: The air, since evening, turns autumnal." (空山新雨后，天气晚来秋) "Dwelling in the Mountains: An Autumn Evening" (山居秋暝) 2. "Man at leisure, cassia flowers fall. The night still, spring mountain empty. The moon emerges, startling mountain birds: At times they call within the spring valley." (人闲桂花落，夜静春山空。月出惊山鸟，时鸣幽涧中。) "Bird Call Valley" (鸟鸣涧) 3. "Empty mountain, no man is seen. Only heard are echoes of men's talk. Reflected light enters the deep wood. And shines again on blue-green moss." (空山不见人，但闻人语响。返景入深林，复照青苔上。) "Deer Enclosure" (鹿柴) [translation by Pauline Yu, 196, 200, 202.]

[105] Book I and Book II of the "Hollow Mountain" series have been translated by Saul Thompson and published as *Hollow Mountain: Part One* by China Translation & Publishing Corporation in 2017.

friend Bunny during the construction of the first main road in Ji Village. This is a watershed event that marks the beginning of modernization in this once "secluded" Tibetan village. However, what the road serves is state-led massive deforestation, and the villagers are forced to labor for transporting timber. Gela, being bullied by many villagers, is falsely charged as having caused Bunny's death. If the fragile Bunny's death symbolizes the ending of a time of sensitivity and caring, then Gela's tragedy shows how human vice is magnified in that environment.

What follows is an unprecedented bushfire in Book II, *Celestial Fire*, where political ardor during the Cultural Revolution makes people act arrogantly toward this natural disaster and aggravates the loss. While the older generation in Ji Village sees the urgency of stopping the fire, the youth are seized by a craze for class struggle instead of preparing to control the fire. As the fire expands, the higher cadres, who have no understanding of local customs or ecology, take the suggestion of a young engineer and destroy Semocuo, Ji Village's sacred pond on the mountain top, only to discover that the water does nothing to stop the horrendous fire. It is only stopped by the late-arriving rain rather than by human effort. Even so, however cataclysmic it seemed, the forest lost in the fire was, after all, but a tiny fraction of that chopped down as timber in later years.

Book III, *Dase and Dage*, is a story of "the last hunter" (Dage), a woman longing for a different life (Semo), and a "wise idiot" (Dase). Their tragedies are entwined with the animals' suffering. With the massive destruction of the forests, animals lose their habitats and become exposed to wholesale human predation. Semo, elicited by a lofty dream to be a famous singer on the national stage, rejects Dage's love as the latter forsakes officialdom to be a local hunter. In exchange for a radio to please Semo, Dage starts killing monkeys that have been living with the villagers for thousands of years. While Dage lost all his faith, Dase is also disillusioned about school education after witnessing the widespread vandalism of books during the Cultural Revolution. He returns to Ji Village and dwells in a treehouse with boxes of books he saved. In Book IV, *Desolation*, Lin, a Han Chinese refugee fortunate to have labored a living on the good earth of Ji Village, confronts a moment of crisis when a landslide destroys the fields. The young villagers, inspired by the folklore about their ancestral homeland, search for a pristine valley to open new farming lands.

While the first four books disclose how human arrogance of the Mao era leads to massive deforestation and aggravates natural disasters, the illegal timber business in Book V, *Gentle Thunder*, and the relocation project for dam construction in Book VI, *Hollow Mountain*, highlight a fundamental environmental impoverishment instituted by capitalist modernity. In Book V, a young man named Lajia Zeli abandons school to join the lucrative timber business, hoping to elevate his family out of poverty, but his struggle and toil turn against him. Having cut an

ancient tree of an endangered species, Lajia is sentenced to a fifteen-year imprisonment. But he is already having a personal nirvana because of Cuiba Gawa, a loving, fatherly figure and a keen protector of local traditions and nature. In the last book, Lajia dedicates himself to reforestation and restoring their sacred pond with the money made from the timber business, although his quixotic deeds are confronted with a larger destructive force – the government plans to build a dam in the region, which means that all the residents are to be relocated. In the last scene, snow falls silently on the mountains and the village that is soon to be submerged, leaving the future of Ji Village uncertain. The series thus terminates at the point where a habitable homeland is about to be lost. This brings forth the sense of "homeless at home" – that is, "solastalgia" – in those local residents, who are soon to be environmental refugees. What Alai's novel achieves is far more than a mere "record of history" but an epic inquiry into meaning, dignity, and life – not just human life, but the broader tapestry of life on Earth.

2.2 The Politics and Poetics of Nostalgias: *Xiangchou,* or *Huaijiu*?

2.2.1 The Politics of Nostalgias

"I've always been seeking a way to relate my literary writing to my hometown," stated Alai in the documentary *The Hometown of Literature* (*wenxue de guxiang*) (tv.cctv.com). Indeed, it is impossible to fully detach Alai's literary career from his experience growing up in a Gyarlong Tibetan region of Western Sichuan. One can easily recognize in Alai's works the birthmark of his Gyarlong Tibetan ethnic identity and indigenous experience, which forms an intriguing dialogue with the writing convention of *xiangchou*. Delineating the cultural space helps one to enter and to circumscribe the literary space. However, it would be problematic to situate his literary world within a monolithic Tibetan identity. As the most well-known contemporary Tibetan ethnic writer in China, Alai confronts the dilemma of being scrutinized with the criterion of "Tibetanness." While some Han Chinese critics criticize Alai for not being Tibetan enough to capture the history of Tibet (Shao 19; Gao 121), some Tibetan intellectuals complain about Alai's "lack of devotion to Tibetan culture."[106] Similar assumptions apply beyond China. As Vincanner Adams has observed, people in the West often assume that the "authentic Tibetan" must be Buddhist, nationalist, and exiled (100).

[106] While Gao Yuanbao alleges that "Alai is basically a sinocized contemporary youth from the Tibetan border regions" (121), Shao Yanjun criticizes Alai that his portrayal of Ji Village people is absolved of its own culture but moulded after the "ecological natives" that meets Western expectations (19).

True, ethnically, or linguistically, Alai is not the authentic "Tibetan" that many critics seek. Alai's hometown (Aba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture) is a place where different ethnic groups mingle – Tibetan (~55%, predominantly Gyarlong Tibetans), Qiang (~17%), Hui (Chinese Muslim ~3%), and Han Chinese (~25%). (*The Statistical Yearbook* 2019) Traditionally, there are three main Tibetan cultural regions – Ü-Tsang (དབུས་གཙང་ Dbus-Gtsang 卫藏), Amdo (ཨ་མདོ་ Ānduō 安多), and Khams (ཁམས་ 康). (See Figure 2.2) A Tibetan saying goes: "The best religion comes from Dbus-Gtsang, the best men from Kham, and the best horses from Amdo" (Britannica.com).

What we now know as Tibet, or Xizang (Western Tibet) Autonomous Region is based on Ü-Tsang, the center of the Tibetan cultural circle, while Amdo and Khams are composed of several ethnic autonomous prefectures mainly in Qinghai Province and Sichuan Province. Unlike Ü-Tsang, Amdo and Kham are historically marked by their multi-ethnic culture as a "loose federation of tribal states, kingdoms and dependant districts" (Gruschke 11, 7). Gyarlong (or: Rgyarlong, Jiarong, 嘉绒) region, like some other places such as Songpan and regions dominated by ethnicities such as Naxi and Qiang, is sometimes included in and at other times excluded from the Kham (Gruschke 16).

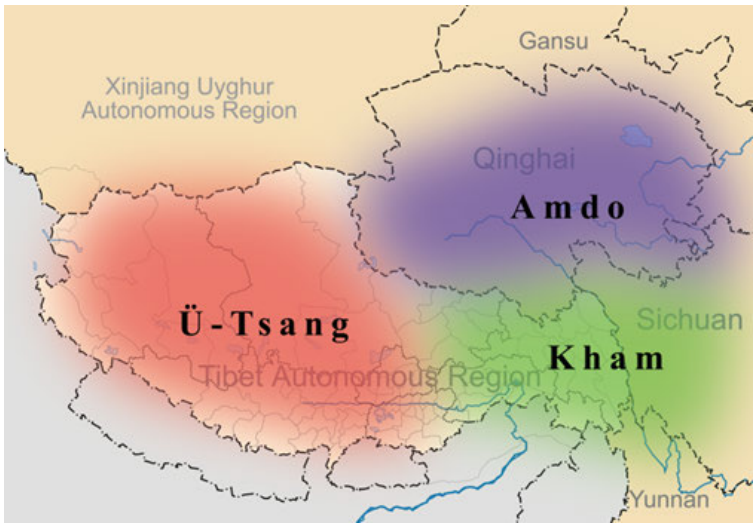

Figure 3.2 A simple map of the three traditional provinces of Tibet overlaid on a map of modern provincial boundaries of the People's Republic of China. (Source: Wikipedia Commons)

Gyarlong Tibetans are pastoral-agrarian people who were considered a different ethnicity before the 1950s, although the linguist Van Driem believes that the word "Gyarlong" comes from the Tibetan language, meaning "the Queen's River Valley". (Burnett 2, 13) In Aba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefectures the population – which includes nomads, semi-nomads, and agriculturalists – is overwhelmingly rural-pastoral, although this is steadily declining. In 1952, the rural population of the Prefecture constituted 92 percent of the 46 million people, whereas in 2019 the rural proportion of the current population of 92 million people is 64 percent. (*The Statistical Yearbook* 2019)

Basic knowledge of the ethnic diversity and complexity of the region reveals Alai's writing as being at the intersection between mainstream Tibetan and Han Chinese culture. While this can mean the peripherality of

Gyarong to both dominant cultures, scholars such as Jinba Danzeng argue that the "hybridity and diversity of the border" can also bring potential gains:

> I propose to look [at] it as a convergence zone where the Han and Tibetan peoples and cultures connect, interact, exchange, compete, blend, and coexist and where locals not only incorporate various elements from both of these two peoples and cultures but also carve a new space for their own survival, cultural expressions, identity construction and political positioning. (Danzeng 6–7)

Identifying himself as "a Tibetan writing in Chinese," (Alai, Jiang 88) Alai must juggle the disparate linguistic and literary traditions in his writing. His identity is characterized by in-betweenness and "transculturation," and this is exemplified in his understanding of "hometown." In the "Hollow Mountain" series, Ji Village is an obscure Tibetan village situated between the two dominant cultures of the Ü-Tsang and the Han Chinese. Paradoxically, the name Ji Village means "the root" or "seed" in the Gyarlong Tibetan language; and Alai's rumination about the hometown has been constant, as he explained in an interview:

> Our understanding of hometown is narrow for it is only based on the genetic connection. We need a larger hometown, a cultural hometown rather than a genetic one. As I have mentioned before, if my hometown is not the Tibetan Plateau as a whole, it is at least the Eastern part of the Plateau, and the Hengduan Mountain Range, that area is my hometown from the cultural perspective.
>
> I always see visiting these places as returning. The region is vast, its Northern end is Aba, in the middle is Ganzi, to the South is Shangri-la in Yunnan Province, and the southern part of Gansu Province. The Western part would be Guonuo in Qinghai Province, Yushu city, Changdu region in west Tibet and Jinsha River regions.[107]

[107] "如果我们对故乡的观念一直都是这么小，那可能只是血缘上的。我们应该还有一个更大的故乡，更大的故乡可能是一个文化范畴，不光是血缘范畴。我在不同地方也说过，如果不是整个青藏高原，至少是青藏高原东部，横断山区，是我的一个更大的故乡。这就是一个文化范畴上的认知。这些年我只要去这些地方，我都把他看成是回乡。这个范围很大，最北边是阿坝，中间是甘孜，然后，再往南边是云南的香格里拉，还有甘南，还可以往西边一点，青海的果洛、玉树，西藏昌都一带，金沙江两岸。" ["Alai: I Have Always Been Asking 'Why'?" *Alai: Wo yizhi zai zhuiwen, weishenme?* Lu Yiping, Alai. Chinawriter.com, *Zhongguo zuojia wang*. 2019 http://www.chinawriter.com.cn/n1/2019/0128/c405057-30592423.html Accessed Oct. 28, 2020.]

Alai thus extends his "cultural hometown" to encompass the entire region that is largely Kham Tibet plus the large area in the ethnically diverse Yunnan Province. This whole region is often known as China's Southwest, with its multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and geographically diverse landscape. Alai adds: "In a way, literature expands our understanding of 'hometown', but I don't want to make it too large to handle."[108] The cultural hometown Alai outlined is thus not Tibet as a totality, but its more specific instantiation in the world of the Khams; for this reason, Alai is also cautious not to act as a cultural spokesman for all Tibetans.[109] As Yiyan Wang insightfully puts it, Alai's place narrative "aims to convey both the particular social reality and emotional resonances of the Tibetan people in western Sichuan" and his native place is "the native place without a nation". (100)

Alai's deep concern with his hometown has been consistently registered in his literary career, which won him praise as a "poet harboring *xiangchou*" who "approaches his hometown via fiction" (Alai, Jiang 88). For example, his masterpiece debut *Red Poppies* (2000), based on fieldnotes from interviewing the descendants of eighteen local chieftain families in Gyarlong Tibetan region in the 1980s, depicts a denouement with the assassination of the narrator, son of the dominant chieftain (*tusi*); whereas he makes a moving confession of love for his hometown: "Dear God, if our souls can really be reincarnated, please send me back to this place in my next life. I love this beautiful place. Deities and spirits! My soul has finally struggled out of my bleeding body and is flying upward" (Red Poppies 433). However, it is worth clarifying that the *xiangchou* Alai habors is better understood as an attachment to his native Aba community rather than the rural *xiangchou* conceptualized in Han Chinese sociocultural context. As this chapter argues in the following sections, Alai's writing consciously challenges and reconfigures the meaning of *xiangchou* defined by the Han Chinese hegemony.

From the magical realistic style in *Red Poppies*' pre-modern Gyarlong, the "Hollow Mountain" series turns to a more realistic mode. The series is a historiographic representation of a Tibetan village's destructive modernization experience where the villagers, unable to accommodate the process, become confounded and alienated. The process is like (though not as grotesque as) the characters stranded in the quagmire of disillusionment in an industrializing American countryside in Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919). However, unlike the unsatiated yearning for his hometown in *Red Poppies*, Alai's *xiangchou* is saturated with

[108] Ibid.

[109] In *Antipodean China*, Alai directly rejects being taken as a cultural spokesman in his short essay "On region and Mobility": "When a writer enters this space, he or she will hear shouting from different directions, which is both a kind of prayer and an order. […] But who are we? Are we the whole of the region? Usually not. Those who speak in imperative sentences are the few who know the discourse of power and have other powers besides" (36–37).

heartbreaking realizations, worries, and interrogations. For instance, in Book IV, *Dase and Dage*, the narrator questions the popular *xiangchou* narratives that elevate the home soil as an eternal paradisal space of innocence, authenticity, and serenity, framed by an unadulterated natural landscape:

> Everyone seems homesick in this world.
>
> When people are afflicted with homesickness (*sixiang bing*), they tend to depict their hometowns as a paradise. If their depiction is real, then our nation would be an earthly paradise where birds twitter, flowers bloom, and everything seems elegant and charming. But that is not true. Chinese people like to project their utopian ideals onto their hometowns. When Uncle retired from his position, he published a memoir where he wrote many beautiful nonsenses. But when I think about my hometown, my heart is always filled with pain. I wish that I could lie like them to claim that my hometown is a paradise. Yet, in this world, who really has a heavenly hometown? (D&D[110] 202)

A literary context for the discussion of Alai's *xiangchou* complex is provided by David Der-wei Wang's interpretation of Chinese home-soil writing, a writing tradition that he sees stretching from the early twentieth century up to the "root-seeking" writing in the 1980s. For Wang, home-soil writing is characterised by a certain paradox because, while it is based on a recounting of memories of regional homes, it is "literally and rhetorically a 'rootless' literature" whose meaning "hinges on the simultaneous (re)discovery and erasure of the treasured image of the homeland" (109). Wang sees that behind this geographical change there is a transformation of social class. What drives modern native soil literature, writes Wang, is the "relocation of the writers' social status, intellectual/emotional capacities" just as much as their physical displacement from their hometown (111).

To a certain extent, Alai does share with writers such as Shen Congwen and Mo Yan a class-related change by "jumping the farmers' hurdle,"[111] yet it is hard to claim that Alai's nostalgia about Ji Village is simply an "imaginary nostalgia." In *Red Poppies*, Alai amplifies the exoticism and mysteriousness of the Tibetan region by focusing on its tribes at a time prior to the onset of modernity. However, such exoticism is abandoned in the "Hollow Mountain" series, where Alai deploys a complex combination of *xiangchou* (rural nostalgia), *sixiangbing*

[110] D& D for *Dase and Dage*.

[111] 跃农门 (*yue nong* men) is a Chinese phrase adapted from the traditional auspicious phrase 鱼跃龙门 (a fish leaping the dragon hurdle, it symbolizes that the student who gets good results in the national examination and is ready to embark on a career as a government official).

(homesickness) and *huaijiu* (nostalgia), even though he consciously rejects the general *xiangchou* rhetoric. Here, the narrator disputes nostalgic representations that turn ethnic villages into exotic Shangri-La for aesthetic consumption. For instance, in Book VI, the popular songs that come to the young people of Ji Village from the cities are full of such romantic projections, but the elders find their songs hypocritical:

> "Young lads, if our hometown is really that amazing, you wouldn't want to go to other places by singing those songs."
>
> "Even the immortals wouldn't be that carefree every day."
>
> "Oh, you see, however far our mates go, only those poor devils come back, for those who got lucky, how many of them have come back? Is that what you call 'our lovely hometown'?" (HM 86–87)

The villagers' contestations betray a gap between the popular nostalgic representation and their own lived reality. The songs in performance only appeal to tourists who project their romanticized imaginations onto Tibetan regions, where the villagers reside happily in Shangri-La as "ecological natives." What the locals experience, however, is the socioeconomic alienation of the villages that are losing their capable youth to the urban modern world. Their accusations of *xiangchou* emphasize the frictions and fissures between the actual home and the imaginary one, which is a common criticism of the nostalgia narrative mode. However, like the elders, what the narrator in *Dase and Dage* criticizes is not homesickness (or nostalgia) per se but selective representations of hometowns that gloss over the reality of structural inequalities. Of course, nostalgic feelings for the forested and uncontaminated countryside are legitimate and potentially also productive (Bennett 66).[112] Yet, when those are projected onto the Tibetan ethnic villages, it enables the commodification of the village by the tourism industry, which is more concerned about economic profit than local communities. The problem with "the inequality of nostalgia's scales" arises: "'We see our past in 'theirs' (but they do not have to return the favor)" (Bennet 10). Flocks of urban tourists, customers of the idyllic spectacle, have also made their nostalgia an insidious force in the local society. As the elders point out, young village folks are enacting insincere *xiangchou* sentiment in these songs because this *xiangchou* is not theirs.

[112] In *the Geography of Nostalgia*, Bonnet argues that environmentalist nostalgia has a history of complexity and diversity than naiveite. In the era of environmental crises, "a sense of loss is not readily reduced or reducible to a set of cultural cliches," and nature nostalgia is "both rigorous and urgent." (67)

The narrator's critique echoes Boym's distinction between "restorative" nostalgia and "reflective" nostalgia, which underpins Alai's refusal to render the hometown as an eternal sanctuary beyond the realities of life. For the narrator, restorative nostalgia is an image of the village as seen from the outside, but which has become internalized by its residents. The refutation of restorative nostalgia does not mean that Alai or his characters do not become homesick, but that the pastoral imagination cannot be called upon to cure it. In this way, the pastoral simulacrum falls into the trap of "aesthetic consumerism," where the systematic repression and unequal labor relations are ignored and replaced with visually appealing sketches of a well-preserved landscape, free from the contamination of modernity. When distinguishing his writing from romantic representations of rural villages, Alai is aware that his mourning for the destroyed landscape of his youth is equally prone to attacks from the modernizing hegemony. This is evident in the defensive quality of his Epilogue: "This novel is not an elegy for the old village. I am not immersed in nostalgia (*huaijiu*); I know everything is bound to change. However, I cannot help sympathizing with those who suffered and sacrificed for the goal of social advancement..." (258)

In these ways, the "Hollow Mountain" series offers an important negotiation of what I would call the "politics of nostalgia," by dramatizing an affective response to the experience of modernization in Ji Village. For instance, in Book 1, with the beginning of the new (Communist) regime, the discussion about whether the past or the present is better becomes the key identifier for people's political attitudes in Ji Village.

> People were always discussing whether these were good or bad times. The debate even broke the village into factions. There was one faction that argued that things were not as good as before. This factional split acted as a kind of dividing line in village society—the optimist faction was supported by the authorities, so they were always in the ascendant. (GW 14; 19[113])

This quote exposes the political dimension of nostalgia, splitting the community between those seeking to maintain or overturn the status quo. Those nostalgic about anything from the past are ostracized as anti-modern and resistant to progress. As Walter Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History" elucidated: "The concept of the historical progress of mankind cannot be sundered from the concept of its progressive, empty time. A critique of the concept of such a progression must be the basis of any criticism of the concept of progress itself." However,

[113] As there is already Saul Thompson's English translation of the first two stories, I refer to both the Chinese and the English edition whenever I quote from GW (*Gone with the Wind*) or CF (*Celestrial Fire*), I put the page number in the Chinese edition first and the page number in the English edition after it.

"history is the subject of a structure, whose site is not homogenous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now" (261). In modern China, as Leo Ou-fan Lee noted, there has also been transformation of the classical dynastic mode into "a new mode of historical consciousness," which was contextualized in "unilinear time and a unilinear sense of history that is characteristically untraditional and Western" ("Modernity and its discontents" 160). The progressive teleology of history renders the idea of "social advancement," along with "modernization," as social goods beyond dispute; but it is also haunted by a modern epidemic of nostalgia, as Boym puts it: "nostalgic manifestations are side effects of the teleology of progress" (10). For Benjamin, what the utopian destination of history brought is but catastrophe, a storm "blowing from Paradise" that "keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage" under the feet of "Angelus Novus," astonished, being propelled backward into the future (257). While Benjamin's context is the Holocaust and the two World Wars, here with Alai's writing, *xiangchou*, *sixiangbing* and *huaijiu* form intriguing dialogues with modernity and its discontents, especially with state-led modernization and deforestation.

2.2.2 Entanglement of Historical Violence and Environmental Injustice

This section will analyze how the above-mentioned discourse of nostalgia intersect with massive deforestation and socio-environmental injustice in Ji Village. In the "Hollow Mountain" series, one of the most crucial features is the entanglement of individual experience in the grand history that also encompasses nonhuman beings in its sweep. This commences from the outset of the series. Even in Book 1, personal and environmental tragedies foment and aggravate each other, as state-led modernization creeps in. The state, which is supposed to have released the Tibetans from the shackles of serfdom and toil, places a new chain on the locals by including this region into the scope of the national modernization scheme. "Till this day, the people of Ji village are still not sure how, overnight, the mountains and forest wilds which their ancestors relied upon had suddenly become the property of a new owner—something called 'the state'," and they are also surprised to be told that they are "the masters of the state" as well (CF 14, 225).

This coincides with the modernizing enthusiasm of the period of the late 1950s to the 1970s, which evolved into "a nationwide war against nature" – a war made manifest in "political repression, utopian urgency, uniformity that ignored regional variation and time-tested local practices, and state-sponsored relocations into wilderness areas" (Shapiro 11). The forests were seen as natural resources in the service of national economic-political modernization, while the villagers were compelled to do hard labor for timber production and transportation. In the novel, it is only those seen as irrational or deranged, such as Gela's mother, who dare to

speak bluntly about their perception of the change: "Everyone says that the new society is a better world, but people still eat or wear same as before, and their workload is increased" (GW 131). This comparison posed by a subject deemed by society as "mad" subverts the modern rationale of instrumental rationality, compelling one to rethink the teleology of history in modern "progress". By subverting the all-positive trajectory outlined by the Chinese nation-state, the reflective nostalgia here also opens space to unveil the entwined historical and environmental violence embedded in modernization.

With little apparent foresight, the old practices are purged, and the old experience is dismissed. In Book 2 (*Celestial Fire*), Dorji, the local wizard, gets punished when he practices the yearly burn-off on the slopes for the village. The burn-off of the shrubs serves to provide better grazing grass for the cattle stocks and had proven to be a successful grassland management practice for countless generations. When the Cultural Revolution erupts, Dorji is punished as an anti-revolutionary rightist, who seeks to destroy the state's property (the grasslands and woodlands). Yet, as is made clear in subsequent novels in the series, the forest fire turns out to be devastating precisely because the lands had not been managed through traditional burning practices. In other words, what is deemed as a "socially progressive movement" turns out to have had disastrous consequences. As Michael Schoenhal comments, from the 1950s to the 1970s "the term 'movement' helped maintain the illusion that Chinese society was moving forwards, or progressing, in a direction away from the dreary here-and-now towards a brighter and better future" (597).

The enthusiasm for "movement" disrupts the local socioeconomic regularities and disempowers the local villagers, while the future utopia also casts a dark shadow on the villagers' present. In *Celestial Fire*, when confronted with the catastrophic forest fire, the local village leader Kelsang Wangdu finds himself confused and rendered impotent because the Red Guards are too busy cracking down on so-called anti-revolutionists to respond to the fire signal. He finds himself unable to catch up with "the Situation" (*xingshi* 形势), a catchword of the time, and wonders where this "Situation" has come from:

> What he couldn't understand was, the seeds still had to be sown in the same way they always were, the four seasons still followed one after the other as they always had, people were born, got old, fell sick, and died; so why was there this invisible, intangible 'Situation' that refused to stay still, like a bad-tempered man who only keeps moving forward out of sheer nervousness.
>
> "*You're falling behind, you're falling behind!*"

> The Situation's relentless pace left everyone exhausted in its wake. It neutered the wisdom of old, lived experience, and left it useless by the wayside. (CF 71, 297–198)

Kelsang Wangdu asks his villagers to take precautions to protect their village from the fire, although they cannot stop the fire from spreading. Their social alienation is materialized by their displacement from the local ecosystem through the loss of their forest, first through the unprecedented forest fire, and then through the state-sponsored lumber mill. The devasting fire is calculated as having destroyed "only ten percent of the useable timber," and thousands of non-locals who were sent to help fight the fire stayed to become lumberjacks: "Ji village was a strange place now, a foreign village to its own inhabitants, who would have to slowly re-adapt to their old home" (CF 223; 485). These locals are suddenly surrounded by loggers with many privileges (loggers, being the "working class", were considered as "the proletariat", "the representative of advanced productivity" in communist class politics), and the subsequent and incessant decimation of the forests also leaves the villagers alienated, confused, and displaced.

A crucial feature of the "Hollow Mountain" series is the entanglement of individual experience in the tumultuous onset of industrial modernization and the deep history of the more-than-human world. With its chronicle quality, these historical moments in the fictional Ji Village are based on real events in mainland China during the period, such as the massive deforestation and human-induced famine during the Great Leap Forward (1958–1961), the forced collectivization, and the mega-dam projects. As well as their profound human consequences, these processes also had a devastating effect on the natural environment. In the stories, the fate of the forest is the primary index of ecological collapse. The authoritarian ideology of instrumentalist rationality is exacted on the trees, and their disappearance is correlated to the shrinking space of ideological freedom. The young man Suopo requires the villagers to choose the best timber, with no holes or scars, all cut uniformly: "Chairman Mao likes things to be precise and orderly. Did you hear that? He likes things to be precise and orderly!" (GW 143; 172)

The peculiar features of modernity in the Mao era are well captured by David Der-wei Wang. Maoist modernity fits within a basic Weberian framework of modernity, with its fundamental "disenchantment with premodern episteme." But Wang points out that this disenchantment with premodern faith systems was subverted in Maoist China by "the power of political theology," which functioned as its immediate substitute. Therefore, "the agenda of liberated subjectivity and secularized resurrection via revolution" is replaced by the re-enchantment

of political idolatry (Wang, *Why Fiction Matters* 94). The materialistic modern era purges the traditional cultures – singing, dancing, and worship in temples are all canceled – as "those things belonged to the Old Society" and must "disappear, along with the Old Society itself"; hence, "New Year had become a purely material affair in the New Society" (126; 152). In the novel, a bus comes in during the revised New Year's celebration and everyone is provided with material goods: 250 milliliters of grain wine, half a kilogram of peanuts and 50 lollipops. But these fancies offer little gratification, and "Ji village seemed dead as ever." The bored villagers start to find solace in gossip and rumors; after all, modernization does not change the fact that humans are sentimental beings.

Complaints about the purely "materialistic New Year" betray the inherent boredom and nihilism in modernization under the Maoist ideology. All the changes of the acclaimed "modernity" project were superficial, enforced by the administration, whereas the core feature of modernity, or enlightenment of people, was neglected.

> The reality of the times in Ji village was this: everything that could be labelled as a feudal superstition had been formally, or superficially, disposed of. […] However, beneath the surface, the currents of the villagers' subconscious were still shaped and guided by what has been handed down from the old ignorant ages. It is a common truth that civilization is all-conquering and unstoppable. But here in Ji village, the forces of civilization, in their presumptuousness, acted just like a flood; torrential on the surface, but underneath, its flow was directed by all the old things that remained down there.
>
> Life went on in this way, always the clamour of new things on the surface, while the lower currents exercised their will in silence. (GW 170; 201)

The superficiality of the "modern" transformation is captured by this paragraph – the previous customs and belief systems persist, to guide and influence people's lives, and modernization acts at its best as a rigid slogan and is conducted and materialized as violence upon those practices labeled as "tradition" or "superstition". The ferocious nature of the Cultural Revolution leads to pessimism, and resonating with this pessimism is the loss of respect for Nature. An ostensible example comes from Book 3, *Dase and Dage*, where the two young men are both disillusioned by the reality of the Cultural Revolution. Constant deforestation breaks people's age-old custom of respecting Nature, as Dase predicts:

> "Just wait and see, when the forests are burnt down and the lumbering farm is established,

> they would start chopping down the trees in the mountains. Look at our fellow villagers, which man is not sharpening their knives or polishing their guns? When the forests are eliminated, and the animals are slain," he gestured with his hand slashing on his neck, "Ka, then it would be the doomsday for our people." (113–114)

However, Dage is just one among the whole village to shoot the unprepared monkeys. With the offer from the section chief of the lumbering farm, everyone is excited to kill the monkeys for money. It is not until a large number of monkeys are shot that the monkeys start to run away, where people are also lost in craziness:

> "These people are aberrantly noisy: thrilled, stressed, also ashamed. The noises they made are much more boisterous than the panicked monkeys. Behind those escaping monkeys, several dozens of their kind are dying in the harvested crop fields, their wounds bleeding in scarlet." (129)

The massacre of the monkeys proves to be one of the most brutal scenes in the whole series; however, this only marks the beginning of the local people's active insulting of the nonhuman beings and disavowal of traditional practices. As the following stories reveal, when the animals lose their forest shelters and are exposed to people, even the children become brutal. Later on, the child narrator provides vivid details of their ruthless killing of the starving grouses, where the frail birds' panicky struggles only add exciting sensations to the children's killing game. Moreover, losing the shelter of the forests also makes the village prone to chilling winds in winter. Here the forests act symbolically as both shelter from the harsh weather for the human homes and, beyond that, shelter against human brutality: "What has changed is not just the weather – after people broke their last taboo by killing those monkeys, human heart became even more merciless" (148). After killing the monkeys, Dage leaves Ji Village to return to his original village, where he murders three people in vengeance.[114] Knowing that he will be sentenced to death under the law of the new regime, Dage tells his friend Dase, who is also disillusioned with the power of learning: "I don't want you to lose your faith like me; once a person loses faith in everything, he is doomed" (215).

Of course, not everyone loses their faith, even though they may find it difficult to express it. In *Desolation*,

[114] According to Namkhai Norbu and the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, vengeance culture was an age-old practice for Kham Tibetan people until the early twentieth century. "Violent conflicts among Tibetans were dealt with through vendettas between clans, a practice known as titsö" (Namkhai Norbu and Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, cited in Frank 132).

the local folklorist Xiela Dunzhu is chastized by the red guards when he sings the legendary songs describing a fallen world that is believed to be their mysterious ancestral home. These songs, with their elegant classical rhyming patterns, are deemed toxic by the authority for depicting a prehistoric kingdom favorably. "According to what people believe nowadays, how could there be a happy era except for now? Only the current time is the golden era where people feel living in a time as sweet as honey" (D&D 45). In the past, these folksongs used to be sung during local gatherings, such as weddings and funerals. Despite their prohibition, these lyrical folksongs, with their affective and imaginative poetics, appeal to the local people. Conflicts surrounding the folksongs highlight tensions between the poetics and the politics of nostalgia.

As Boym reveals, discussing the exile of retrospective nostalgia in the post-1917 Soviet Union: "The word *nostalgia* was obviously absent from the revolutionary lexicon. *Nostalgia* would be a dangerous 'atavism' of bourgeois decadence that has no place in the new world" (59). Similarly, Maoist ideology features an overriding teleology of history, and an ardent pursuit of a utopian future deemed as being at hand (Jin 23). Therefore, sentimental expression about loss and yearning for the past is seen as "a counterrevolutionary provocation" (Boym 59). What is concomitantly prohibited is the expression of feelings that require deliberation and reflection, for the Maoist utopianism demands enthusiasm and loyalty, whereas perplexity and doubt are taken as insults to the ideology. This division is captured in the expression of the folk singer Xiela Dunzhu, whose "grey eyes" displayed a "bewilderment that is nearly sorrowful and sympathetic (一种近乎哀婉的迷茫)." This forms a sharp contrast with the "determined fanaticism" (接近于坚定的狂热) that is common in the young people of the time (44). In an era defined by an "urgency to reorganize society" (Shapiro 71), when millions of youths are encouraged to leap into the utopian future, reflective nostalgia is profoundly out of place.

This utopian optimism also fuelled extreme anthropocentrism and antipathy towards nature, which is deemed as a resource to serve the grandiose utopian goal. Such destructiveness is a concern for Xiela Dunzhu, and his songs about the plenitude of the past and its disappearance provide a critical lens for observing the present. And indeed, he takes an even more active role in defending the forests of Ji Village. When the timber factory first opens, he sneaks in to destroy the axes to stop the logging. He gets caught by the workers, who proudly display to him their powerful new machine, a huge saw with a petrol engine. Xiela Dunzhu is a version of Akhu Dumpa (lit: Uncle Dumpa), a notable trickster figure in Tibetan folk stories[115] who dares to openly mock the authorities while

[115] According to *Asian Folklore Studies*, Akhu Dumpa, or *Aa khu bstan pa* (Aa khu means "uncle," and "bstan pa" sounds like "Tompa" here) is a classic trickster who cleverly resists social injustice and also helps the poor and disempowered people to avoid being bullied (Kun, Mchog Dge Legs et al. 7).

cleverly evading punishment. From a Bakhtinian perspective, the trickster character, sourced in folk humor, imbues a carnivalesque critique of official policy. Likewise, the temple fair in the village offers space for "a temporary suspension of all hierarchic distinctions and barriers among men, and of certain norms and prohibitions of usual life" (Bakhtin 15). This carnivalesque suspension of hierarchic distinctions is also grotesquely paralleled by the Cultural Revolution, with its violent inversions.

In the realistic narrative of the "Hollow Mountain" series, however, this traditional folktale character is powerless, and his wry comments and gestures of subversion cannot change the situation. For instance, in *Desolation*, during the Great Leap Forward, when the village party secretary issues a directive to pour fertilizer into the fields hoping to increase productivity, old Xiela is the only person who dares to point out the apparent mistake that too much fertilizer burns the crops. Also, unlike the triumphant trickster character in folk narratives, Xiela's effort to stop the loggers from destroying the ancient forests is in vain. When the action of resistance fails, lyrical expression becomes the last buttress. When Xiela is caught by the workers, echoing in his mind is an episode from the legend:

They show the blades of their fire sickles,

Black iron strikes the white stone,

Strike, strike! Still striking!

Suddenly fire blades soar.

Birds are startled, their nests destroyed.

They fell, they fell

Those fragrant birch trees.

Those linden trees with fluttering leaves like silver coins.

The king wants to build a palace,

The king wants to build a city.

But the palace is on fire,

And the city catches fire too,

So does the king's sandalwood throne. (D 48)

Xiela Dunzhu's folk songs depict the fall of the mythical ancient kingdom – a prophecy for Ji Village. According to the legend, the once-thriving kingdom declined, after launching too many conquests, as it was hit by a plague that killed most of its population. What the song emphasizes in its imagery is the linkage between deforestation and the fall of the kingdom. The folksong acts as an apocalyptic warning to Ji Village. Just as in the song, the loss of the forests is part of a catastrophic chain reaction that ruins Ji Village's land. As we are told in *Desolation*: "A few years later, the mountain slopes near Ji Village were desolate. Stretches of forests disappeared, after rainstorms, ditches scarred the slopes because of mudslides." (51) With the destruction of land by a mudslide, the village suffers from famine. Though people in Ji Village managed to avoid starvation in the national famine during the Great Leap Forward, they cannot escape the same fate when their forests are unremittingly ruined.

The circumstances in Ji village offer a microcosmic, devastating image of the environmental consequences of the anthropocentric utopianism in the Mao era, and "the Great Famine" which ravaged China from 1958 to 1962 and led to the death of at least forty-five million people (Zhou xii). While this period is officially referred to as the "Three-year Period of Natural Disaster", historians such as Zhou Xun, Dikotter and Shapiro maintain that the famine was undisputedly a human-induced disaster.[116] According to Zhou Xun, "the famine was a direct consequence of the Great Leap Forward" (x). The Great Famine was a consequence of political oppression, economic mismanagement, and environmental devastation. The environmental cost of the Great Leap Forward has been profound, insidious, and enduring, as represented in *Desolation*.

The establishment of the state-owned logging company in Ji Village in the 1950s serves as the backdrop of Bunny and Gela's tragedies in Book 1. The logging of the forests moves inexorably into the foreground in subsequent books. Somehow, the ecological event of deforestation is retained in public memory by its proximity to the death of Bunny: "Many years later, when the people involved were already old, they still remembered how on the same day they first took axes to the birch trees, Enbo's son died" (GW 143; 173). The accident of Bunny's injury becomes the marker of Ji Village's traumatic modernization. The concurrent events of individual tragedy and environmental deterioration provide alternative traumatic timelines of modernization. Following Bunny's death is Gela's tragedy in being wrongly held responsible. On his sickbed, Gela listens to the sounds coming from

[116] While official record registers the famine as from 1958 to 1961, some other historians argue that the famine broke out as soon as the collectivization started in many parts of rural China (Zhou xii).

the neighborhood and pictures the violence outside his home:

> Apart from the sounds of axes from the mountain slope, and the monstrous noise of huge, thousand-year-old trees falling to the ground, there were no other noises in the village. The sun poured down its light in torrents, bringing some thin warmth to the winter days.
>
> […] The sharp axe blades biting again and again into the thick trunks, chips of fresh wood flying everywhere, spreading the smell of pine resin, the tree's axe wounds getting deeper and deeper until the trunk, now moaning like a person in pain as its fibres split, too thin to hold up the massive weight of its torso, the trunk beginning to tilt, the canopy starting a downward spiral, and finally a crash, pine needles and broken branches and moss launched into the air by the impact. And that was it, a tree that had been growing for over a millennium stretched out on the ground, never again to stand on its own in the wild, directing traffic for the wind and the rain. (GW 127–128; 154–155)

This excerpt vividly pictures the logging of the ancient birch and pine trees as stark corporeal violence through the eyes of Gela, an orphan who is traumatized and alienated by his society. Gela's ostracization and scapegoating will be repeated en masse during the Cultural Revolution when families and friends turn against each other under political pressure. The emotional torment of losing his best friend and of being treated as a criminal resonates with the physical affliction of the ancient trees. In this sense, the novel endorses a form of animism in which the trees are sensitive beings that affect and are affected by human society, rather than being natural resources that passively serve human needs.

Gela's impression presents a scene of despair where the helpless birch trees are afflicted with human brutality. This dying image challenges the progressivist inauguration of modernization that is being loudly celebrated and hailed. The destruction of the beautiful birch trees not only reverberates with Gela's alienation from his community but echoes the loss of Bunny, who was "so kind and weak and sensitive" that some would say "he never really belonged to the human world" (HM 185).[117] The series shows the ferocity of the era by enumerating the constant loss of what is frail, exquisite, and beautiful (such as the gentle Bunny, the birch trees, traditional

[117] This quote is from *Hollow Mountain: Part One* as it has already been translated into English. (Quotes in the first two books of the "Hollow Mountain" series come from the English edition translated by Saul Thompson; the rest are my own translation.)

social decorum, books, and rituals) that are destroyed in the frenzy of "leaping forward." The position of these two children, the fragile Bunny and Gela the "feral kid (野孩子)," provides the vantage point for exposing the violence of Maoist "modernization." Moreover, the trees, whose existence is grounded in a more-than-human "deep time," are exterminated abruptly and brutally. By foregrounding the environmental violence in the human stories, the series offers a penetrating critique of human historical failure in China.

A forceful argument about the problem with environmental injustice is that it is as much inter-generational as inter-species; in other words, environmental abuses are the "stealing of future" from coming human generations and nonhuman beings. As postcolonial ecocritics Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin have suggested, "the battle is not so much against development itself as an intrinsically harmful activity or process, as against the flagrant social and environmental abuses that continue to be perpetrated in its name" (20). In China, mass modernization campaigns resulted in nation-scale famine, unprecedented deforestation, and the purposeful decimation of animals. They have left crippling ecological debts for Chinese people today and in the future. The 1958–1960 Great Leap Forward proved that "human activity can alter mutual dependencies more rapidly than nature can adapt, sometimes causing the collapse of entire ecosystems" (Shapiro 91). The collapse of ecosystems is graphically attested to in Alai's Book 4, *Desolation*.

Of course, China was not alone in devastating its environment in the name of progress, and the termination of the Mao era did not mark the end of ecological destruction either. As the fifth story, *Gentle Thunder*, unfolds, the economic success in the coming era of "reform and open door" is not gained without its sacrifice either. Lajia Zeli's benefactor, a rich timber businessman, Boss Li, appraises his success with regret when he is diagnosed with cancer: "I am a person who has no offspring, my timber business devours what the coming generations rely on for a living, it definitely is to be punished by the heaven and disparaged by people!" (GT 171) Given the fact that Boss Li is a Han Chinese and Lajia an ethnic Tibetan, the ecological toll is also determined by the socio-economic inequalities based on geographical distance and socio-cultural disadvantages.

The ecological disasters wrought by the white colonialists in Australian Indigenous land might offer a comparison, though the scale and extent of the Aborigines' dispossession and alienation are too deep to be comparable. When relating the dispossession of indigenous people from their own land to the adverse impact of climate change to people in the present and future, the Australian Aboriginal writer Alexis Wright asks: "What is the future? What is the future for our children?" (16) In the context of Alai's home Gyarong Tibetan region, the radical deforestation and abuse of the land on the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau during the Mao era poses both

ecological and human violence, which has a long-term impact.

The twin issues of cultural displacement and environmental destruction remain active in present-day China, where the state-led campaign model of "conquering nature" has shifted way into venturing to build an "ecological civilization." However, "efforts at minimising displacement or improving resettlement will only be marginal, palliative and temporary if they are not contextualised in a wider socio-political context" (Kothari 1476). In *China Goes Green* (2020), Li and Shapiro point out that contemporary China's state-led ecological governance retains many of the problematic features that led to the previous disasters, especially disrespect and ignorance of indigenous knowledge. Its foundation lies in the philosophy of materialist modernity and its faith in technocratic methods to solve the problems that it creates. Despite the state's success in certain key fields, such as new energy development, its top-down campaign model of environmental governance still perpetuates ignorance of indigenous knowledge. Here the Indian writer Vandana Shiva's reminder resounds: to mitigate the environmental crisis, assaults against small farmers and indigenous communities must be stopped, for they are not "remnants of our past" but "the path for our future" (20).

2.3 *Desolation*: Unnatural Disasters and the Birth of Solastalgia

2.3.1 "The Great Returning": An Affective Journey in an Ancestral Hometown

While the "Hollow Mountain" series provides significant discussions on the politics and poetics of nostalgia, it also brings forth the issue of solastalgia; that is, the environmental distress that makes one feel unhomely in one's home. As the story proceeds, more forests are destroyed around Ji Village. Such environmental destruction exacerbates the local Tibetan villagers' cultural displacement and results in threats to their livelihood when the landslides destroy their land. In the previous section, I distinguished the power relations behind the politics and poetics of nostalgia, and examined the collapse of historical and environmental violence. This section will further discuss the repercussions of environmental ravages on the land and its people, mainly focusing on Book 4, *Desolation*. This part unfolds in two aspects: one about the affective education and home-coming journey of the local youth, and the other one about Lin, a Han Chinese peasant's affinity to the land and labor. Both help reconfigure the meaning of "home" or "hometown" in times of environmental disaster.

In Book 4, *Desolation*, Xiela Chumpa, the grandson of the Xiela family notices his grandpa's songs, where a pristine Juerlang Valley (literally: Deep Valley) is described as their ancestral hometown: "the center of our

ancestors' kingdom, the origin of our sorrowful memories"[118] (53). If indeed there was an ancestral land abundant and rich, then they should be able to rehome it, so Chumpa embarks on his odyssey to the valley. Too often the act of "returning" is endowed with symbolic meanings. For nostalgic descendants, it is an epiphanic moment of the rediscovery, vindication, and/or salvation of oneself; that is, "a rendez-vous with oneself" (Yankelevitch, qtd. in Boym 50) – as is shown in Chapter One. However, here, for the Tibetan youths, this "homecoming" is primarily refuge-seeking in (human-induced) environmental disasters instead of a spiritual pilgrimage. It is a time of solastalgia for them (that is: being "homeless" at home) and the question about the meaning of "home" arises: If the land is rendered unliveable, migration becomes the only option.

> Before their ancestors moved to Ji Village, their ancestors have already migrated several times for their livelihoods: Out of war, natural disasters, or a plague, or the conflicted nuances between the different religious clans' interpretations of the cosmos or the meaning of life. Nowadays, humans destroyed the surrounding forests near Ji Village, and the deities of Nature reached out their hands for revenge to destroy the village. According to the custom, here comes the time to migrate and to seek a new homeland. (*Desolation* 89)

By unearthing the various hometowns of Ji Village, the folklore reveals the importance of mobility and border-crossing. As James Clifford argues in *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (1997), places are never a static source of identity; rather, they are always and already in constant mobilization, migration, and (re)settlement, hence the senses of home and identity are also in constant (re)construction (3). Emphasizing routes over roots helps one understand the cultures and histories of places where multi-ethnicities dwell, as well as minority rights over their land. The locals' displacement through the environmental devastation is, in Nixon's words, a more "radical displacement" that is caused by "the loss of the land and resources beneath them, a loss that leaves communities stranded in a place stripped of the very characteristics that made it habitable" (19).[119] The ethnic people's land right includes not just respecting their custodianship of the land but also their right to mobilize. The Ji Villagers, with the modern nation-state taking the forests as its property, are deprived of the custodianship of their land and forest, and thus of their right to roam freely. Suopo tells the cadre that the whole village wants to

[118] According to David Burnett's *Rgyalrong Conservation and Change: Social Change on the Margins of Tibet*, the word "Rgyalrong (Gyalrong)" literally means "the Queen's River Valley," One of the mythologies about the origin of the Gyalrong people is that they are migrants and descendants from the ancient homeland named by Zhang-zhung ruled by a queen. Zhang-zhung was later conquered by the Tufan Tibetan Kingdom, but Gyalrong survived. ("2. A Brief History")

[119] The original word is "[…] a place stripped of the very characteristics that made it inhabitable," which should be an error.

migrate to somewhere they can cultivate croplands, not realizing that "it is not a time where anybody gets to roam freely" (92).

To the state, Ji village is one small production team charged under layers of higher administrative units, and people are immobilized. Suopo's bold challenge to the cadre comes with a cost: he is brought to the "class" (*xuexiban*)[120] to be reprimanded for "having lost the ambition and fighting will for continuing revolution" (99). There he meets a former friend, Old Wei, now the county mayor. Old Wei is glad to see Suopo and decides to help him. However, when Suopo pleads for the government to stop logging in the region, "or Ji Village would be doomed," Old Wei is displeased: "Compared to the new towns and cities we have built, how trivial is the cost to sacrifice a small hamlet like Ji Village? Moreover, I already signed the document to distribute food to people; don't you see that nobody has starved?" (108) In Old Wei's understanding, urbanization and modernization of the state are the most important objectives, which everyone must give way to and be ready to sacrifice for. Meanwhile, the conflicts between the local villagers and the loggers increase (115). As deforestation intensifies, the villagers experience a psychophysical displacement that is more fundamental than cultural or linguistic alienation.

Because "our environment plays a central role not only in how we feel but also in our cognitive understanding of how we feel about that environment," the impoverishment of the environment also causes *psychoterratic dis-eases* of solastalgia (Mossner 52). Revisiting their ancestral hometown is both nostalgic and solastalgic to the youths in *Desolation*. Their journey is an affective education, and the narratives can be read as what Alexa Mossner sees as "mental instruction manuals" to negotiate the human experience of environmental degradation. First, I want to note that this "home-coming" journey compels us to reconsider ideas of home, place, and dwelling in a time of global migration and ecological crisis.

As the story demonstrates, home (or hometown) is the dwelling place generated in the constant, complex, and rhizomatic process of intimate human-nonhuman interactions, rather than as a designated nostalgic object. Therefore, this journey is less a retrospective idyllic retreat than an active home-making effort in a time of solastalgia. Second, it is an epiphanic pilgrimage where their instinctual affect and sentiments are revived. Away from the political movement, they experience subtler, instinctual feelings rather than politically encoded anger. For instance, they feel melancholic about what has been lost. As Chumpa reaches the valley, he is soon gripped with "a kind of melancholia for unknown reasons." This "feeling that he has never experienced before" compels him to remain silent and speak softly (63).

[120] The full name for *xuexiban* is "Mao Zedong Thoughts study class," a political term during the Cultural Revolution. It was first established for passing doctrines of Mao's thoughts but was soon used for the political cleansing and discipline of dissidents.

In the time of hyped-up revolutionary fervor, destruction of the past is considered progressive, and there is no space for melancholia or mourning for what is lost. It is only when Chumpa steps into the valley (the ruins of his lost ancestral hometown) that he starts to understand the sorrow in his grandpa's songs. Grieving for the long-lost hometown helps him to catharize the feelings of dis-ease for his destroyed village. In Freud's terms, melancholia comes with a person's mourning for loss, yet the lost object is ambiguous, or their mourning is ambivalent; that is, the "object of desire" or "lost object" is yet to be recognized (58). Chumpa's affective response to the splendid but dim pristine valley (the ruins of his ancestral homeland) is equally ambiguous and ambivalent, and it takes time for him to name what it is that has been lost. To use Boym's distinction between reflective and restorative nostalgia (55), these elements of mourning and melancholia make Chumpa's nostalgia reflective and retrospective. Guiding his peers through the dark valley, he chants the folksongs in a haunting tone like a wizard: "That road is not in front of your eyes but in your heart; that road does not lead to the hell nor heaven; that road leads towards our splendid hometown…" (73)

On the surface, the "splendid hometown" appears like a world of "pure Nature" or "wilderness" in Anglo-American environmentalism. However, deep down, it is a token of deep history that is neither a separate human history nor a natural one: it is a place where human traces have receded from the force of nonhuman existence. The world of humans, or the fallen ancient kingdom, has been almost completely covered and synthesized by the forests and animals. Deep down, it is a splendid picture of natural beauty: "At the brink of the cliff, a snow-white waterfall was plummeting into a beautiful huge lake" in the bosom of boundless forests. Countless colorful birds flutter, giant trees grow on top of the cliffs, and pine trees smell "dizzily aromatic" (66–67). This is a moment of purely aesthetic appreciation of nature, where the utilitarian anthropocentric considerations of the uses of "natural resources" are suspended. The spectacle of Nature's kingdom may also bring to mind nineteenth-century European missionaries' travelogues in central Asia, or a sublime Orientalist world of the peaceful Shangri-La reimagined in James Hilton's 1933 novel *Lost Horizon*.[121] But there are significant differences between the naturalists and the local youth, regardless of their shared sublime feelings. While the colonial explorers collected and encompassed these "discovered" species into the grand modern edifice of knowledge about natural history, these Ji village youth come to the valley simply because the land here is lifesaving for them.

Meanwhile, this journey back into the primitive also confronts them with the dim, dark, and unfathomable

[121] Hilton has never been to Tibet and what he wrote in the novel, according to himself, was reimagined based on his readings of the travelogues written by the European missionary explorers who travelled through central Asia (James Hilton on "Lost Horizon", the NBC University Theatre Radio Show, 1950).

world of Nature. When the sunlight dies away, a "dark, gloomy ray of light rising from the basin sweeps them like water," (68) leaving the proposed "brave new world" of Maoist utopia behind them. The paradox of light and darkness also acts as a perfect symbol for the radical Maoist utopian pursuit: "They are the brightness-pursuing youths cultivated by their own time. But they can never figure out why there arises so much darkness inside their hearts during their pursuit" (59). When darkness is seen as necessary to eliminate and exterminate, the effort to reach full brightness turns destructive. It is in the doubts about the binary opposition of light and darkness that their homecoming journey contains moments of epiphany, where the belief about utopia and dystopia is destabilized. As they go deeper into the valley, light gives way to darkness, and it is the darkness or shadows that lead them to homecoming. Here, the utopia of modernization is fundamentally challenged, so is the binary episteme. Here, not only is the dichotomy of light and darkness questioned but the modern negation of enchantment is also deconstructed. These ethnic youths rediscover here the premodern knowledge of spirituality that had receded during the Mao-era modernization campaigns. Among the trees of the misty gorge, they fumble dreamingly behind Chumpa, who believes that an ancestor is guiding him. The power of the legends and the folklore becomes alive.

The sign for the revival is a sense of fear about the unknown, and "the fear makes them numb to the passage of time" (83). The overriding sensation of fear changes the spatial as well as the temporal landscape in the progressive-minded era. However, the sense of fear is not necessarily negative, for this fear is mixed with reverence (in Chinese, 敬畏之心 *jingwei zhixin*), which balances human interaction with nonhuman beings. Fear about the chaotic infinity, though unpleasant, is a feeling deeply embedded in the human survival instinct and sensory faculties, as Yi-fu Tuan puts it, "the landscapes of fear are the almost infinite manifestations of the forces for chaos, natural and human" (6). These young people's emplaced experience enables them to feel with their coinhabiting forests, leaving their ardent utopian pursuit open to questions.

Through the awakening of bodily feelings, the once "progressive-minded youth" Suopo finds it relaxing and homely in the valley. Lying down on the grassland, Suopo sighs: "I don't want to come back" (86). Later, punished for having stood up for Ji Village, Suopo reflects on his past "progressive deeds." He used to have big fancy talks about "revolution" and "political mistake," but nowadays he feels it absurd that two illiterate farmers should stand by the road and exchange those "big and void words." "Words of the farmers should be small and tangible ones, such as 'seeds,' 'weather,' 'harvest,' and 'natural disaster.' Those void words that he does not actually understand wear him out" (135). In this sense, this homecoming journey is also a journey back into their minds.

In *the Meanings of Landscape*, Kenneth R. Olwig delineates the mutation of the word "progress" in the English context, that it became a notion that "involved the linear development through a succession of stages" rather than its previous implication as "a circuitous process" in Renaissance Europe:

> The creation of a sense of place […] depends on a form of peripatetic progress, which is in conflict with the march of progress. The march of progress takes us into an "open" placeless space, a utopia (or nonplace), and tends to obliterate the places that it leaves behind. (51–52)

When the so-called "progressive-minded youth" (*jinbu qingnian*) embarks on their pilgrimage back to (one of) their ancestral hometown(s), such a gesture of "glorious returning" disrupts the clear, linear outline of modern "progress." The youths' search for the deserted ancestral hometown does not serve as the final reunion but rather as a rediscovery pilgrimage to one of their many ancestral hometowns: "In the legend, Ji villagers have migrated several times, so many times that they cannot remember where they started, that no one can tell how many hometowns they have had" (89). The awareness of the Ji villagers' "many hometowns" strewn through deeper historical time deconstructs the fossilized conception of *xiangchou* in the Chinese context. The hometown attachment is hence a topophilia that has to be maintained rather than preordained, hence bringing forth the ecological ethics of care, such as Aldo Leopold's "land ethics." Also, by deconstructing the hegemonic, static "hometown," the story pinpoints the access to mobility as well as the temporality of place, because "change is a cultural constant, but the pace of change is not. Hence the temporal contests over how to sustain, regenerate, exhaust, or obliterate the landscape as resource become critical" (Nixon 17). With the youths' forced home-seeking, the problem of slow violence becomes clear.

2.3.2 Home and Soil in the Time of Solastalgia

Alai's philosophy of dwelling also lies in Lin, the Han Chinese peasant, who settled down in Ji village through dogged labor. Coming from a poverty-stricken rural village, Lin became a teenage soldier in the 1930s and later settled down in Ji village, where he could clear his own plots with the consent of the local chieftain. As he opened the first patch of cropland for himself, he squatted and ate some soil: "He heard himself chewing the soil, the soil got stuck between his teeth, causing a sensation feeling like he was about to spasm. Letting himself be absorbed in this feeling for quite a while, he then stretched his neck and swallowed the soil" (150). This act of soil-eating

vividly and dramatically acts out Lin's attachment to the soil – when this peasant celebrates his security residing on the land through the act of chewing and swallowing the soil, "he finally felt authentically that he owned the land" (151). As much as it feels like an allusion of the cliché "complex of home-soil" (*xiangtu qingjie*) of the Han Chinese, Lin has already identified himself as one of the Ji villagers after living in there for many years. When the natural disaster of landslide hits Ji village, Lin, now a village secretary in a newly built village in the frontier, immediately comes back to Ji village:

> […] everything in Ji village seems fresh in his memory. In New Village No. 1,[122] he has repeatedly dreamt of coming back to his hometown – surprisingly what he dreamt of is not his childhood home but Ji village. Having left his birthplace as a teenage soldier of the Red Army, his memory there has been blurred and overshadowed by his years in Ji village." (148)

Here, Ji village has replaced his birthplace as a de-facto hometown. For the villagers, Lin has also become a part of the community, just like how the Xielas integrated into the community. Till this point, "hometowns" are not necessarily fixed with blood ties, ethnic or cultural identities or "innocent childhood," and nostalgia about the hometown is more about a sense of belonging, laboring, and connection, which is not just a matter of social relationships but also people's connection with the land that supports them. Coming back to Ji Village after the landslide, he is saddened by the sight of his destroyed homeland:

> He sits still, the bright sunset shines in front of him, Ji Village lies behind the shadow, his feelings complicated. When the sun sinks behind the mountains, before it gets completely dark, suddenly he sees all the damaged hills that used to be covered by dense forests. The fields around the village are torn into pieces by the gutters and residues left from the landslides. For the entire day, he only says two sentences, of which one is: "The fields I opened have been destroyed completely." (129)

This is a vivid depiction of a solastalgic moment – the estranged feeling about the home village when one is in

[122] These numbered "New villages" were newly established under the militarized production group organized during the 1950s and 60s. The aim was to invest more human labor and land to produce more grain for the state.

the ecologically destroyed homeland – and it is also mixed with nostalgia: "He tries to be submerged in memories of the past so that he can forget the disconsolate scenes of Ji Village." Meanwhile, he knows that "he is not here to be nostalgic, what he needs to do is to search for new croplands for Ji Village" (149).

To frame this in Heideggerian terms, the home is the locus of "dwelling" or "being-in-the-world," and the place where the sense of emplacement is generative. Intriguingly, the "Hollow Mountain" series also features a pseudo-philosopher Dase, whose name evokes Heidegger's *Dasein*: "When in the school of ethnic cadre, our philosopher teacher said, philosophy is about proposing questions rather than solving them, you know what? I am that philosophy[123]" (D&D 166). While Heidegger's phenomenology treats the "within-ness" in the world, or being-in-the-world, as the essential feature of Dasein, Dase chose to live with his books in an arbor instead of pursuing a career to be an official, that to him is full of inauthenticity. Feeling sorry about people's killing of animals and deforestation, yet unable to stop it, he retreats into his books. Dase is marked by his simple-mindedness, which implies his personal tragedy in a particular era. While he does sometimes act as a prophetic saint, his ignorance comes from the lack of proper school education. Nevertheless, Dase introduces the childhood narrator to the world of languages, which to the latter is the revelation of a new world:

> From the naming of things, I got to know that everything in the world has its proper name. Especially when their names come from a book, especially when the names are spoken in a different language, the world suddenly presents itself in a brand-new picture. (D&D 87)

> Dase, even nowadays, whenever I imagine loads of things in my mind, I see the image of an arbor, the kind of tree that you build your treehouse in. The only difference is that there have been so many chatty, twittering birds residing in the tree, so the tree must grow lusher and stronger to make room for more bird-like words. (Ibid. 136)

These excerpts would easily bring forth Heidegger's understanding of Aletheia, or "the revelation of the world." However, Dase passes away in disappointment as he realizes that "the secrets of the world didn't unveil themselves to him just because he owned some books" (D&D 101). Dase's life as a philosopher in the trees (in a parody of Cosimo, the hero in Italo Calvino's *The Baron in the Trees,* 1957) is violently destroyed by the progressive ideology of his era, his treehouse is destroyed by the red guards and his notebook, where he drafts fragmented poems and messy notes, is lost. After his death, the notebook is found hidden in his decrepit house, and the poems and notes

[123] Here Dase confuses "philosophy" (*zhexue* 哲学) with "philosopher (*zhexuejia* 哲学家)," which is a purposeful mistake on the author's part.

preserve some traces of his philosophical ruminations. One of his notes reads: "Both the books and lama tell me that god lives in the heaven, but I see god among the leaves. He appears when the sunshine brightens on the leaves, he is also there when the winds flutter amid the leaves" (HM 176). Dase's Heideggerian poetics of dwelling become a valuable spiritual resource to the community of Ji village, and one of his poems is adapted into a song.

In *Desolation*, two different homecoming events occur: the first is the Tibetan youths' odyssey visiting one of their ancestral hometowns, which is both an effort of environmental refuge-seeking and an epiphanic adventure back into the primitive. The second is the homecoming trip to Ji Village for a Han Chinese peasant. In both cases, the idea of hometown goes beyond the ancestral hometown, and the *xiang* in *xiangchou* is open to many directions. Writing in a Tibetan ethnic land, Alai's writing challenges the sacred position of *xiang* (home village) in the enshrined conception of *xiangchou*, which helps to reconfigure an understanding of "home" that is not dictated by nationalistic sentiment, Sinocentric cultural hegemony, or anthropocentrism. In an era where urbanization and migration become widespread, both the awareness of the Ji villagers' many hometowns in deeper historical times and Lin's effort to be part of the local community deconstruct the fossilized conception of *xiangchou*, which also brings new light to issues of social mobility, equality, and environmental justice.

Four decades after the Mao era's ecological disasters, the government's green-oriented transition still suffers from problems such as anthropocentrism and instrumentalist rationality. The top-down, one-size-fits-all model of policymaking can also devastate traditional ways of life for ethnic minorities (Li Shapiro 77–78; 102–107). There have been many forced settle-down projects for the nomadic ethnic indigenous peoples: the Evenki reindeer herders in the Northeast, the Mongolian nomadic herders, and the Kazakh herders in the Northwest in Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region,[124] to name just a few. Whereas the settlement programs could come from an intention of goodwill, they still cause significant ecological losses due to ignorance of indigenous knowledge and social inequality. In the contemporary Chinese context, words such as "progress" (*jinbu*) or "development" (*fazhan*) remain indisputable words, although understanding of these words has been replaced by capitalist modernization. The progressive teleology of history is also challenged in the last two stories, where the community of Ji village struggles to keep up with the commercial model of "development" that turns out to be further socio-ecological dispossession of the local people and nonhuman beings.

[124] There are a handful of literary texts, fictional and creative nonfiction, dedicated to registering these disappearing lifestyles, for the above three examples, Chi Zijian's *The Last Quarter of the Moon* narrates the dawn of the reindeer herder tribes before the government designated settle-down project; Jiang Rong's *Wolf Totem* scathingly repudiates the Han Chinese Sinocentrism and anthropocentrism on the inner Mongolian steppes; and last but not least, Li Juan's *Winter Pasture* vividly details her experience living with a Kazakh herder family. All these books reflect the disappearance of the nomadic or pastoral lifestyles of these indigenous ethnic peoples, with the Chinese government's monolithic, linear developmentalist understanding of modernization an important socio-political attribute.

2.4 Reforestation: Homemaking in the Time of Solastalgia

2.4.1 From *Gentle Thunder* to *Hollow Mountain*: The Waking up of Loggers

The "Hollow Mountain" series unfolds in a procession of ecological events where the forests near Ji Village are destroyed. This massive deforestation results in various subsequent environmental problems, such as landslides and the mass killing of animals. In terms of the timeline, the last two stories take place in post-reform China, revealing that the socio-economic alienation of the ethnic villagers exacerbates the ecological impoverishment, even as the state-led logging ceases. Alai's attempt to redefine hometown ushers us into the local people's home-making efforts to confront ecological degradation. This section will go on to explore three interlocking ecological events: the insidious illegal timber business, Lajia Zeli's effort to restore the forests and reinstate the sacred pond, and the locals' response to the proposed dam project that forces them to relocate. With the grassroots hero Lajia Zeli as the main character, the section extends the discussion of the politics of nostalgia and the poetics of emplaced dwelling in a time of solastalgia.

Lajia Zeli's story begins in Book 5, *Gentle Thunder*, which is set in the 1980s, a time of commercialization and economic development. The huge state-owned logging company is closed, for the remaining forests are "not worthy of mass-scale industrial exploitation," but timber becomes a profitable business for individuals (4). Lajia Zeli, then a fatherless teenager, renounces schooling to try his luck in the lucrative timber business that thrives on tacit bribery and breaches of the law. He moves to the new town renamed Double River Mouth (*Shuangjiangkou*), a place previously known by the locals as "Gentle Thunder (*Qinlei*)," referring to the sounds of the rising tide. Having withstood heartbreaking separation from his high school lover, disillusion, and humiliation, Lajia finally makes money with the help of Boss Li, a mysterious middle-aged man with a strong social network in the timber business. In gratitude, Lajia pays someone to cut an ancient larch for Boss Li, for the latter, diagnosed with cancer, has expressed his wish for a quality coffin. Later, as Lajia learns about the spiritual significance of those ancient trees from Cuiba Gawa (a well-respected local elder), it is already too late. Because that larch is of a rare species, he is imprisoned for fifteen years.

Upon Lajia's discharge, the old town that once thrived on the illegal business is abandoned, overgrown by weeds and groves of trees. New bridges and roads have been built to connect the Juerlang Valley, now a major tourist attraction, to the outside world. With a huge sum of money from the deceased Boss Li, Lajia atones for himself by restoring the forests. Vegetation takes over the deserted town, but the self-ameliorating ecology is

incomprehensible, "in places once lived in and then deserted by people, the new vegetations are very different from the surrounding area" (GT 210). The ruins are overtaken by scrub and small plants, whereas the arbors, such as pine, cedar, and birches – trees that can endure time – are missing. In Book 6, Lajia Zeli chooses to restore the forests in his hometown, and he even proposes to restore the sacred lake Semocuo, a volcanic crater lake that was destroyed by the Han Chinese cadres with explosives in the unprecedented forest fire. As part of his repentance, Lajia obtained two university degrees in prison; one is in forestry protection. It is now his goal to bring the big trees back: "Nowadays the mountains become green again since we don't damage them, but the mountains don't look good without arbors" (HM 78).

Lajia's attempt to reforest his hometown, out of a sense of topophilia, is also self-redemptive. His story follows a tyical coming-of-age narrative, except that reforesting the mountains marks his maturity as a human with moral integrity, in the sense of both human and ecological ethics. In the process, Lajia must choose between two fatherly figures: Boss Li and Cuiba Gawa. While Boss Li helps him with material wealth, he also sins by destroying the home forests. However, from Cuiba Gawa he learns to appreciate and cherish the trees whose lives long exceed ephemeral human lives. Towards the end of *Gentle Thunder*, there is a key moment when Lajia realizes the sacredness of primitive trees and he reaches his spiritual epiphany. As Cuiba Gawa reveals to Lajia, the elders used to hang prayer flags on these huge trees, most of which have already disappeared under the axes: "For the deceased, these trees are the dwelling places for their souls, for the living people, their lives rely on these trees. Therefore, these bower trees are called soul-reposing trees" (GT 182). Cuiba Gawa's teaching about "soul-reposing trees" delineates what Rob Nixon dubs the "vernacular landscape" that is drastically imposed on by the official landscape that takes the trees as resources (17). Interestingly, Cuiba Gawa shares the same name with "the son of the God" in the most significant Tibetan epic, *the Song of King Gesar*. Like Jesus in the Bible, Cuiba Gawa descends into the human realm to save the immortals from suffering. It is through the legendary figures in Tibetan folksongs, such as Cuiba Gawa and Xiela Dumpa, that Alai harbors the hope of handing down the local culture. Like Cuiba Gawa in the epic tale, who instills in the folk singers the desire to propagate the legendary life story of King Gesar, this Cuiba Gawa also plants the seed in Lajia's heart about the restoration of Semocuo, Ji village's sacred lake:

> You know what? My child, back then there were many springs near the lake. Although they've long shrunk underground, when I see the thriving trees, I know that these springs were hidden under them. When people stopped destroying our forests and when the mountains thrive with trees and grasses again, these springs would revive with sweet, clear water. (GT 185)

In Book 6, Lajia starts a non-profit company whose business is to plant trees. In many ways, Lajia resembles a grassroots hero, having come to terms with his humble origin in a place taken as "the periphery" by mainstream society. Unlike most youths, who aspire to leave the small village for modern cities, he chooses to stay to carry out his mission. In many ways, Lajia is marked by a nostalgic temperament. He is a handsome, proportionately built Kham Tibetan man with a poised and somehow melancholic expression, and he has a profound interest in things from the past such as old stories told by the elders. In an era of crumbling certainties, acceleration, and disorientation, where "all that is solid melts into air," Lajia remains staid and unruffled: "This is a time where people are always excited by some new things and harboring some new hopes, but he is quite different. Although he can easily catch up with lots of current trends, he does not seem to care at all, as if he lives in the past" (26). In Lajia's case, this attachment to the past and the vision of a beautiful, afforested homeland anchor him with a sense of constancy in a tide of alienating transformations.

Yet, his nostalgia does not come from imitating the literati-hermit in the imagination of *xiangchou*, but from solid, grassroots actions of reconstruction instead of hermetic inaction. His social identity sits ambiguously between an ethnic farmer and an ethnic local elite, and it is in Lajia's presence that Alai seeks to subvert the dichotomy between the enlightened modern intellectuals and the masses wanting enlightenment from the former (Su 2; Chen "Keywords" 133)[125]. As mentioned in the Introduction, in the modern Chinese literary tradition of *xiangchou*, the complex of rural nostalgia belongs to the intellectualized rural youth, and their nostalgia, or *xiangchou*, reflects a sense of social displacement in the transformation. In Alai's narratives of eco-destruction, the rural–urban dichotomy is foregrounded, along with the ethnic identities. There is a clear social class disparity and conflict between Lajia and his partner, a female anthropologist who visits and studies local customs in Ji village. She is attracted by Lajia's simplicity and physical appearance but decides not to waste her feelings on him due to their disparate social circumstances. Her presence is as figurative as it is realistic,[126] which plays on the contraposition between a male urban intellectual and a rural peasant/a female student, both are significant in modern Chinese literature.[127] As an urban intellectual, the anthropologist speaks from the position of a savior:

[125] As Chen Sihe points out, the modern Chinese intellectuals see the Confucian culture as a whole entity inlaid in the mass customs, hence they see the mass as the backward group to be enlightened. This dichotomic framework is over-simplified and problematic. In fact, the folk culture preserves alternative cultural traditions that have far greater diversity and potential. (Chen, "Keywords" 133)

[126] Alai does not even give her a specific name, and she is known as a "woman Ph.D." (nǚ bóshì 女博士) in the story. To me, this is arguably sexist.

[127] In this contraposition, the former is considered the savior of the latter, although the result is usually disappointing. Two examples can be easily made with Lu Xun's stories, such as the male protagonist (Juansheng) and the female protagonist (Zijun) in "Regret for the Past"

"This is so pointless, who can really wake up you people?" She divulges a sense of superiority in this question, which hurts Lajia's feelings. To the latter, salvation must come from inside the community: "One can only wake up by their own effort. Those who are wakened by others would relapse soon" (HM 193).

This question is a deliberate parody of Lu Xun's "iron house" analogy in the preface to *Call to Arms*,[128] where a sullen narrator questions the possibility of "waking up" the masses slumbering in the "iron house" of unenlightened darkness. Lu Xun's narrator may or may not presume himself from the iron house, yet in the conversation here, the urban intellectuals consider themselves from the bright world outside the dark "iron house" of Ji village trapped in ignorance and marginality. The rural-urban inequality is aggravated by unequal policies, such as the household registration system (*hukou*[129]), and the sharp contrast does break the common ground between these intellectuals and the ethnic villagers. Although the anthropologist and her colleagues are indignant at the government's decision on a hydropower plant construction, they soon abandon their objections and leave Ji village after being admonished by the authorities. Considering themselves as being from outside the iron house, these intellectuals choose not to be troubled.

The many privileges of the urban middle-class social status quo lead to these intellectuals' indifference, unfolding more layers out of the "two types of environmentalism" distinguished in Ramachandra Guha and Juan Martinez-Alier. To a certain extent, the relationship between the urban middle class and the "othered" ethnic villagers resembles that between the Global North and the Global South, and the consensus is that there is no consensus about environmentalism. For instance, when the anthropologist asks her assistants (two master's students, respectively in ichthyology and meteorology) to explain to the villagers how the construction of a reservoir would adversely affect the local ecology, Lajia is more anxious about the trees he has grown, for the mountains would be damaged by the explosives after the construction of the reservoir. The anthropologist does not disguise her disappointment with Lajia for being ignorant of the possible changes to the climate and for the fish: "I thought you were different" (191). Her words set a boundary between the "we" and "them": the educated citizens versus the ignorant villagers on the periphery.

(*Shangshi* 伤逝), and the narrator (Lu Xun's persona) and Runtu (a peasant, and Lu Xun's childhood friend) in "Hometown" (*Guxiang* 故乡).

[128] The "iron house" is a metaphor Lu Xun uses in the preface to *Call to Arms*, and its orthodoxically considered as a metaphor for the situation of premodern Chinese society; however, this might not be the only explanation. For comprehensive research on this topic, see Leo Ou-fan Lee's *Voices from the Iron House* (1987).

[129] The hukou system was first introduced in 1958 as a modern method of population control, especially to prevent massive migration from the country to the cities. Though maintaining social stability, the system restricts the vast rural population from "eligibility for state-provided services and welfare." The system has changed throughout time: from the late 1970s, although the rural migrant workers are allowed into the cities due to the high demand for cheap labor, the hukou system stipulates the inequality between the rural and the urban residents. The hukou system precludes the rural population from various forms of social welfare, including "access to subsidized housing and other benefits available to those with urban registration" (Chan, "The household registration system and migrant labor in China," 245).

Indeed, "in Southern movements, issues of ecology are often interlinked with questions of human rights, ethnicity, and distributive justice. […] They are a defense of the locality and the local community against the nation" (Guha and Martinez-Alier 18). After being lectured about the weather and the fish, while sympathizing with the fish, the villagers nevertheless conclude that it might be better for the poor fish to reincarnate earlier if their migration route is obstructed. Similarly, as the meteorology student explains that human manipulation of the water would change the local climate, they snigger: "Damn, by then, even our village would have already disappeared, what's the point in caring about this!" (HM 190) One cannot blame the villagers for their sense of disengagement, because they are victims of the indestructible "iron house" of multi-layered inequalities. The urban middle class seems much more reticent and equivocal about the environmental violence against ethnic minorities. While they preach their modern knowledge to the villagers, they also tacitly acknowledge and accept the injustice. In the mistrust of the urban middle class, Alai lets Lajia speak powerfully about the innate force of the local rural society: both the homemaking efforts and enlightenment can only sprout from the local people, they cannot be dispatched from the outside.

2.4.2 Socio-ecological Injustice and Imagining the Community

The "iron house" metaphor could also be referring to the socio-ecological violence of modernization. Even though some people can recognize its brutality, it still seems hopeless to find a way out of it: "Just like what Dase wrote in his notebook, what is about to come comes 'so brutally, so fast,' it does not even wait for people to think about how to react. It comes as an absolute decision with no room for reconciliation" (HM 191). The situation of the Ji villagers easily reminds us of the Three Georges Dam project, which forced about 1.4 million people to relocate. Although hydrological power provides low-carbon energy, the socio-ecological toll on the local human and nonhuman beings is horrendous. The negative social impact of these mega-dam projects is not yet openly or fully discussed, and forceful relocation is still an ongoing practice. With its large regions of steep mountains and rivers, the western part of the Tibetan Plateau is especially prone to mega-dam projects. According to statistics from the Chinese Ministry of Water Resources, from the 1990s to 2020, hundreds of dams have been built in the Tibetan and multi-ethnic regions. To count major projects alone, there are now 43 projects in Sichuan Province, 9 in Tibetan Autonomous Region, 12 in Yunnan Province, and 13 in Qinghai Province.

The forceful relocation of Ji village imagined in *Hollow Mountain* clearly has strong resonance with reality, and the story helps picture an affective account of the socio-ecological injustice for the ethnic people. Meanwhile,

the question of environmental justice also compels us to consider the issue of environmental activism in China, which, according to Olivia Boyd, has only been emerging in the last decade or so, and has met with limited success (56). In the Chinese context, due to authoritarian governance, environmentalist activism can only be organized within a narrow scope circumscribed by the regime. In the story, the Ji villagers lack both institutional support and social exposure, and the injustice in their confrontation reveals the "representational crisis" of slow violence (Nixon 15). Yet, "where history fails to address man-made or natural atrocities, fiction arises to bear witness to the immemorial and unthinkable" (Wang, *Why Fiction Matters* 155). This section will further discuss the socio-ecological injustice as well as the human responses in the Ji village, and I will begin with the environmental actions represented in the story.

In my observation, two aspects of environmental action can be drawn from Alai's narrative: first, Alai sees modern scientific knowledge and education as a vital means of empowerment for the ethnic people; second, this environmental action must come from within the community. Alai's admiration of modern scientific knowledge is definite in the story, as he occasionally "steps in" to his own story as a narrator in the last three stories, conveying his fascination with modern natural science and natural history. One example appears in Book 4, where the narrator remembers being mesmerized by Dase's books (an encyclopedia of natural history) in his boyhood. In another case, in Book 6, he remembers how the engineers who applied cloud-seeding technology inspired him towards education in his childhood. While some literary critics criticize Alai for "lacking the intellectual's critical vision towards Western modernity" (Gao; Shao 23), I find Alai's vision of modern knowledge stems from the post-socialist Chinese context. As these stories reveal, there is a broad lack of deep scientific knowledge, and it is arrogant scientism that causes serious human-induced natural disasters. Although disenchantment in the process is destructive, the story is not nostalgic about re-enchantment; rather, the narrator sees modernity as a goal for the liberation of all lives, but feels it should not be imposed from the outside. While local ethnic culture is an important epistemological element of this modernity, modern scientific knowledge is seen as the source of empowerment for the ethnic people; and tradition and modern knowledge are not necessarily conflicting with each other in this story.

Thus, besides modern education, the story also presents it as imperative for the local community to be engaged in their own affairs. Book 6 imagines the formation of the public sphere in the Ji village community. This "public sphere," according to Jürgen Habermas, is a "realm of social life" open to every individual resident to gather and form public opinions (49). In *Hollow Mountain*, Lajia opens the first bar in Ji village, a place where

everyone can gather and have a chat. In a way, this bar is a place for remembrance and reconstruction, where the villagers retrieve, exchange, and accumulate the collective memory of Ji village. It provides for the locals "to be able to have a place to sit down and talk about the past," a significant event for the community needing to reconstruct a sense of cultural identity and solidarity. It is a democratic, open forum where:

> […] everyone who has been through the years can get drunk to comment on the sea changes, love, and hatred during the past few decades, which is the Ji villagers' attempt to rebuild their minds and history. Because just decades ago, the history of this village that has been concealed in the mountains has already been hard to trace, what is left are but some blurry and scattered legends. The past generations do not review the past. They do not have to review the past because their historical awareness has not awoken. Nowadays people need to talk about the past because the transformations they have been through have already exceeded that in the last thousand years. (HM 23)

As we have mentioned before, the "Hollow Mountain" series is itself an attempt at reconstructing history. Recognizing that to voice is to empower, Alai aims to construct a sense of local rural solidarity, where the cultural values, languages, and behaviors are formed by and for the indigenous people. Yet, writing about the Gyalrong Tibetan villagers is inevitably a challenging and politically charged task. For one thing, Alai is discredited by critics who say that he does not understand Tibetan written languages (Gao, Shao, Tsering). Meanwhile, Alai's distance from orthodox Tibetan culture is equally prone to attacks from Tibetans. Because the Gyalrong ethnic people are the "othered" of "the other" to both the Han Chinese mainstream and the Tibetans in Western Tibet, Alai is in an even more challenging situation as a member of the Gyalrong Tibetan ethnic minority, writing in Chinese. Even though he refuses to be taken as a "cultural spokesman," he cannot escape the observations and different expectations from Tibetan society and the Han Chinese majority. As Lü Xueqin observes, the excessive attention critics paid to Alai's ethnic, cultural, and geographical identity can be blinding as Alai is primarily a writer rather than an ethnic minority. (67) Certainly, Alai cannot speak for the Tibetans as an entity, and this work should be treated as an example of a way to understand the historical and ecological disasters from a peripherized position.

In the "Hollow Mountain" series, the villagers' cultural and social displacement is aggravated by ecological degradation, and Alai defends local people, nonhumans, and local customs against the destruction. However, he does not see "culture" as some crystalized rituals or beliefs, devoid of the humans that live by it: "People's lives

are more important than culture" (HM 133). More importantly, the indigenous population should have the final say about the decision to pass on their traditions or adapt to changes. In the public sphere of Ji village, respect for local culture is a principle and a marker of solidarity. When someone says disrespectful things, a quick reproving stare is enough to stop that person because no one wants to behave "not like a Ji villager." This behavioral code is observed by the community members, including the son of Lin, a Han Chinese who has already assimilated with the local Tibetans.

> Unnoticed, a behavior code that cannot be counted as a code is forming in this bar, those who are too disrespectful and too unlike Ji village people would be dispelled from here. As for what type of people are Ji village people, nobody can describe it, yet everyone knows clearly, what a Ji villager should be like. (HM 75)

This "behavior code," which forms organically within the community, is not something dispatched from the outside. The villagers' proud identification with the local community also encourages them to rehabilitate their home environment. Every household joins voluntarily in Lajia's restoration project of Semocuo, Ji Village's lost sacred lake, even though the restoration seems pointless given that the government has decided to turn the whole region into a reservoir. The project brings along a surprising archaeological discovery of some ancient pottery fragments on the mountain top, which proves to be a site from the Neolithic Age. The discovery of the village's pre-history is a significant point of departure for developing a sense of solidarity. The process is also accompanied by the nurturing of communal emotions, where the villagers gather and share the moment of solidarity and festivity. Seeing the snow fall silently, the villagers share the moment together: "It's been a long time since we felt like we're living in the same village!" The moment is lyrical and emotional:

> The snow continues. It has been a few years that snow was scarce. People from the outside world think it is because of climate change. But the Ji Villagers' explanation is that because people cut down too many trees, the air gets drier and the wind stronger; since less water rises into the sky, less rain or snow falls from the sky. […]
>
> Laowu says: "Perhaps it also snowed heavily like this in our ancestors' time?"
>
> No one could answer that question.

Someone starts to hum the song written and sung by our villagers, *The Raindrops Fall*:

The raindrops fall, the raindrops fall!

Our hearts are nourished, our faces wet!

The buffalos' faces, the sheep's faces, and the human faces!

The raindrops fall, they fall into our hearts – and the outside!

Oh heaven, your raindrops fall!

People toast to each other, take each other's arms, and sway to the song. Men, women, young and old, gather, sing, and dance. In this song the emotional bond revives among the villagers. The lyrics were written by Dase during the horrendous forest fire, where eventually the late-coming rain extinguished the fire. They were accidentally discovered, sung, and made popular by Xiela Dunzhu's great-grandchild, now a professional singer. This song is plain, sincere, and sensitive, unlike the other over-exuberant songs displaying their hometown as an idyll. Between the lines is an uplifting feeling of salvation, blessing, and gratitude for the rain that saves Ji Village and the forests. There is a common love of Ji village as home, uniting people, even though destiny awaits to dispel them from this place. Soon, a new migration plan arrives – the dam construction was to continue, except that Ji Village and the Semocuo are to be turned into tourist sites, one as an underwater museum, and the other as an above-water tourist village. Apparently, the plan to turn the whole region, including the village, into a dam, will not benefit the villagers despite some economic compensation. They are displaced and expelled from their previous homeland, and their loss, both social and emotional, is immeasurable.

Earlier in Book 6, when the Juerlang Valley is turned into an eco-tourist site, the elder locals, including Dase, are rejected from entering the gate because of their rustic appearance. The modernization has left these elder locals behind: They have not enjoyed much of the benefit, but the negative consequences fall upon them and their offspring. Right in the end, with the proposed relocation plan, the local people's displacement is aggravated into a desperate situation. *Hollow Mountain* ends with an anticipated yearning and mourning for home, and this feeling of emptiness evokes a scene in *Dream of the Red Chamber* by Cao Xueqin (1715?–1763), one of the greatest Chinese classical novels: "In a vast expanse of whiteness, the whole world is cleared (落了片白茫茫, 大地真干

净)," which also reflect the "impotence of imagination" about the future (Fu, "'Alai's 'root-seeking' journey").

The soon-to-disappear Ji village and its surrounding region do provide a modern tragedy, one that shares a similar destiny with Cao's "Grand View Garden" (*daguan yuan*), an exquisite and extravagant world that gradually collapses. While the cascading fall of the Grand View Garden reveals a Buddhist view of the transience and falsehood of the material world, the fate of Ji village in *Hollow Mountain* is a tragedy of solastalgia and socio-ecological injustice. Regardless f various attempts at home-making efforts, the future is yet uncertain. Such "impotence of imagination" is a symptom of solastalgia as both reaction to the planetary ecological crisis and widespread slow violence. The series provides narratives that question the current regime's social and environmental governance, calling for more perspectives from the indigenous people on home, culture, and ecology.

Chapter 3 – "Journey through the Waste": Ecosickness, *Xiangchou*, and Solastalgia in Silicon Isle

> Behind the curtain of free competition and equal trade, *homo hierarchicus* lingers. In the caste society, only untouchable people could (and had to) handle untouchable things. In the world of global freedom and equality, lands and population have been arranged in a hierarchy of castes. (59)
>
> *Wasted Lives: Modernity and its Outcasts* (2004), Zygmunt Bauman

> We are living in an era of technological acceleration, and alienation will only be an increasingly frequent phenomenon. But human cognitive faculties adapt fast, eventually what's perceived as abnormal will become normal, accepted, and accustomed. Each of us would be just like Benjamin's Angel of History who is swept backward by the blast of development into the future. We prefer to confront the past because it is a world with which we are familiar and feel comfortable. We need to ask: What is human? What is the boundary of being human? Is human nature the assemblage of all human characteristics or just their commonalities? […] All these questions are testing the society's ethical threshold clashed by technological waves, and sci-fi is the best vehicle to interrogate these issues.[130] (123)
>
> (我们生活在一个技术发展加速度的时代，异化将会愈加频繁地发生，人类的认知更迭交替之快，异常会变成正常，被我们接受 习惯。我们每一个人都会像本雅明笔下背向未来，被进步之风吹着退行前进的天使，我们愿意看着过去，因为那是我们所熟悉，感觉安全舒适的世界。我们需要厘清什么是人？人类的边界在哪里？人性究竟是所有人身上特性的合集还是交集？[…]这种种的问题都考验着我们社会在科技浪潮冲刷下的伦理道德底线，而科幻便是最佳的引起广泛思考的工具。)
>
> Chen Qiufan in an Interview "The Literature of the Future"

Tide is a natural phenomenon where the Earth's surface water undulates regularly as the gravitational forces of the moon wax and wane. It is a representative image of Nature's cyclical movement. Industrial waste, on the other hand, is not – it is purely a human phenomenon, produced by human society in both conceptual and material

[130] He Ping, Chen Qiufan. "The Literature of the Future (它是面向未来的一种文学)," *Huacheng* (花城), no. 6, 2017, pp. 121–124. Translations are mine.

aspects. The encounter of waste and tide, or waste in the tide, produces an image of the Anthropocene, where human activities substantially impinge on the planet's surface. Yet, the impact is disproportionately created and asymmetrically endured (those who make the waste are not the same as those who suffer from it). This chapter aims to explore two topics: the tide of pollution (especially industrial and electronic waste) and the experience of technological acceleration. The chapter uses three texts of Chinese "New Wave" science fiction as examples: Chen Qiufan's *Waste Tide* (2013), "The Smog Society" (2006), and Hao Jingfang's "Folding Beijing" (2012).

Post-2000 China offers a vantage point from which to observe this global crisis of waste, partly because of the unparalleled scale and intensity of pollution, and partly due to China's paradoxical condition of being simultaneously wealthy and poor. This chapter reads these texts to investigate the problem of slow violence in both global waste transfer and the domestic waste industry. These ecofictional texts represent the individuals and communities whose lives are directly impacted by pollution due to socioeconomic disadvantages. I approach their experiences through Zygmunt Bauman's theory of "wasted lives" to critically examine contemporary, postmodern society in its psycho-terratic distress. The chapter unravels the narratives of ecosickness in these texts to explore the human experience of displacement, solastalgia, and depression, focusing on the use of *xiangchou* and nostalgic discourses in the stories. I use neo-materialism and affective ecocriticism to understand the psychophysical and existential aspects of environmental contamination. I argue that these sci-fi texts not only highlight the entanglement between environmental crisis and socioeconomic inequality, but also place human feelings at the very center of humanity in the age of technological acceleration and ecological crises.

3.1 The "Garbage Era" and *Plastic China*: Situating the Problem of Pollution

The early 2000s witnessed an economically booming China staging itself in a hopeful and self-assured image, notably marked by the 2008 Olympic Games and the 2010 Shanghai World Expo. It was also a time when the world's leaders began to see China as a potential remedy for the world's economy. Amidst the global financial crisis, the increasing consumption of China's 1.3 billion people provided welcome momentum to the sluggish global market. But largely hidden throughout this period was a mounting crisis in urban waste and pollution, which was the inevitable consequence of increasing consumption. With several significant environmental protests against landfill and incinerating practices, the year 2009 was termed "Year One of the Garbage Era (*laji yuannian*)" by

Chinese environmental activists[131] and NGOs, who had started to take waste reduction and recycling seriously. If indeed, as the World Bank Report on solid waste (2018) noted, the proliferation of solid waste is the "natural product of urbanization, economic development, and population growth," (18) China's waste crisis is not unique, except perhaps in its scale and suddenness. According to a report released by the China Association of Circular Economy (CACE), the amount of urban domestic waste in China had reached 179 million tons in 2019, second only to that of the United States (228 million) (chinacace.org). Considering the continued urbanization in China, the urban waste problem will be even more urgent to attend to. And it is also the subject of *Beijing Besieged by Waste* (垃圾围城, 2010), a documentary by the Beijing-based independent photographer Wang Jiuliang.

Beijing Besieged by Waste takes the viewer on a "journey through the waste" beyond the sixth ring road of Beijing in post-millennium China. It depicts a "Seventh Ring" of the expanding megacity, composed of waste dumping sites (assembling, landfilling, or incineration) that surrounded and "besieged" China's capital. Although the documentary was banned soon after its release, the Chinese government invested RMB 10 billion yuan to ameliorate the environment at these sites. (Cornell) Beijing's waste crisis is but one extreme example of the mounting waste challenges in China, and it is connected to other issues stemming from China's rapid urbanization. As Gong Haomin points out, the waste, or "excrement of the city" exposes the irony in contrast to the "libido of developmentalism" during Chinese urbanization (14), revealing the problematic side of contemporary Chinese society where modern Juggernaut roars along over the natural world and the underclass.

The challenge of urban waste has been compounded by the fact that China has been a major receiver of waste from developed countries since the 1980s. In joining the world economic system, China has acted as the world's recycling (or dumping) site, as well as being the "world's factory." Between the early 1990s and 2017, "95 percent of the plastics collected for recycling in the European Union and 70 percent in the United States were sold and shipped to Chinese processors" (Cheryl, "Piling Up"). In total, between 1992 and 2018, 45 percent of the world's plastic waste was exported to China. (Brooks et al. 1) It was not until 2018 that the Chinese government banned the importation of plastic waste, and in 2021 all foreign waste importation was made illegal. While observers considered the 2018 ban as "a game-changer" to boost an eco-transformation of world industry (Walker 405), the United States reproached the moratorium as a violation of World Trade Organization rules, and then U.S. President Donald Trump requested that China "immediately halt" the ban (ecowatch.com).

[131] Three grassroot environmental protests against waste incinerator plants broke out in or around 2009; namely, the Liulitun protest (Beijing) between 2008 and 2009; the Panyu protest (Guangzhou) in 2009; and the Pingwang town protest (Wujiang) in 2009 (Lang& Xu 832). See: Kao, "Photographing 'Year One'".

Indeed, it was another film by Wang Jiuliang, *Plastic China* (塑料王国, 2016), that drew national attention to the so-called waste recycling industry in China, and helped accelerate its closure. The film featured Yi Jie, an eleven-year-old girl living with her parents and siblings in a waste-recycling workshop. Unable to afford school tuition, Yi Jie is highly likely to grow up being an impoverished rural migrant worker like her parents. An iconic scene from the documentary shows Yi Jie babysitting her toddler brother while sorting through waste from all over the world's developed countries – a "United Nations of Plastic Waste" (*Plastic China* Official Site). The camera then shifts to a night scene where the residents are street-dancing to a jubilant children's song featuring the lyrics: "Our China is a garden/where flowers bloom in every season/The warm sun is shining/everyone here is beaming…" "Plastic China," in Wang's term, has three layers of meaning: first, it refers to the changes brought by plastic waste to the places and people who live close to the waste; second, it is a documentary about the materiality of plastics; beyond that, "plastic" evokes "plastic surgery" which reminds people of the fakeness of the seemingly beautiful and harmonious. The documentary draws attention to the dire conditions confronted by the rural population under the surface of an economically buoyant China, by revealing the environmental and social injustice in global waste transfer.

The surreal picture of Beijing's "seventh ring" of garbage, together with that of children condemned to live in seas of waste, exemplifies the socio-ecological injustice that underpins waste production and disposal. Although these cases are set in mainland China, the ramifications are global. The World Bank (2018) estimates that global municipal solid waste generation (2.01 billion tons in 2016) will double by 2050. Yet, only "19 percent undergoes materials recovery through recycling and composting" (World Bank 30). The problem also lies in the current system of waste transfer from the Global North to the Global South. Although the OECD[132] countries produce "almost half of the world's waste", most of the waste ends up in Africa and Asia in legal or illegal ways. (Ibid. 8) As environmental campaigner Jim Puckett puts it: "Toxic waste will always run downhill on an economic path of least resistance" (cited in Pellow 13). Through the global waste "recycling" industry, environmental contamination is transferred from where it is created to places where it is forgotten by the consumer society. In this way, "the treadmill of production" (in Allen Schnaiberg's term) keeps running, exploiting Nature as "resources" for industrial production and turning it into waste and pollution.

The production of waste, considered from a structuralist viewpoint, results from the ordering of things

[132] OECD stands for Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. The OECD countries consist of the world's most developed countries, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and Western European countries.

in human culture. As Mary Douglas famously noted in *Purity and Danger*, "dirt" (pollution) is a "matter out of place" (55). This idea was developed by Zygmunt Bauman to observe modernity from the position of its waste and its "wasted lives," such as refugees, the jobless, and alienated minorities. The problem of waste is "possibly *the* most acute crisis of modernity's global triumph" (Bauman 70), and it provides the basis to challenge the current model of globalization under neoliberal capitalism. Moreover, the toxicity of industrial waste after World War II has been made more complex and insidious by the development of synthetic chemical industries that fundamentally change the meaning of pollution by bringing in environmental illness, or ecosickness. Waste transfer underscores and exacerbates socioeconomic inequalities, unfolding with the logic that Rob Nixon calls "slow violence," or "the long dyings – the staggered and staggeringly discounted casualties" (2).

This hierarchical structure of environmental pollution is both domestic and transnational, and its detrimental effect is disproportionately inflicted upon more vulnerable communities and individuals. However, because these communities have fewer opportunities to voice their problems, and many environmental and health effects are long-term, these problems cannot be tackled without addressing the issue of slow violence. To approach the waste crisis, the voices of people who suffer from waste pollution need to be heard, and the cultural theorization of waste issues should also be informed by this fact. In the chapter, I analyze three ecofiction texts by drawing on their extratextual social realities, as well as the cultural theories of Bauman and Nixon.

3.2 *Waste Tide*, Sci-fi Realism, and Postmodernity in China

3.2.1 *Waste Tide*, Electronic Waste, and the Failure of Home

Within the problem of planetary waste transfer, the electronic waste recycling industry is a prominent issue. Electronic waste, or e-waste, is an umbrella term for all sorts of electronic items "nearing the end of their 'useful life'", such as broken (or simply out-of-date) televisions, smartphones, computers, and video cameras (calrecycle.gov). The growing amount of e-waste reveals a dark side to the era of information technology. E-waste contains highly toxic substances, such as "heavy metals, polybrominated diphenyl ethers, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, and polychlorinated dibenzo-p-dioxins and dibenzofurans" (Khan et al. 222). However, because it also comprises valuable metals, it offers an opportunity for profit in developing countries. It is estimated that "around 80% of e-waste is illegally transported from advanced to developing nations like India, China, Ghana, Nigeria, and Pakistan" (Ibid 223). However, the environmental contamination that the e-waste recycling industry poses to the local environment outweighs its temporary economic gain, and its long-term socio-ecological toll has

not been sufficiently addressed.

Chen Qiufan's *Waste Tide* (2013) is a science fiction novel set in the near future but focusing on the problem of e-waste in contemporary China. The story is set in a fictionalized version of Guiyu (贵屿), a coastal town in Fujian province in Southern China that has "thrived" on the e-waste recycling industry. Guiyu was one of the world's largest e-waste recycling sites since the 1990s, with about 80 percent of the local households in Guiyu employed in the industry (Greenpeace 4). Guiyu literally means "Precious Isle," but Chen uses the homophone Silicon Isle (guīyǔ, 硅屿) to ironically allude to California's famous "Silicon Valley." In Silicon Valley, technology is imagined and created, but in Silicon Isle, it comes to its inglorious end. In contrast to the glamorous Silicon Valley, each year millions of tons of e-waste are dumped in "Silicon Isles" out of the original consumers' sight and mind. Once a farming and fishing village, Guiyu has now been turned into one of the most contaminated places on the planet. The pollution has not just impoverished the environment but has also devastated the wellbeing of the residents, especially rural migrant workers who are directly exposed to e-waste.

Set in the year 2025, the story depicts a coastal town torn between tenacious regional mysticism and tides of technological optimization. Such peculiar juxtaposition between postmodern technologization and premodern spirituality leads us to rethink the risk in scientism as well as cultural fundamentalism. At the center of the conflict are the stratified social groups in Guiyu: notably, the local workshop owners, the migrant laborers, and the developed world, which is represented by visiting Chinese American businessman Chen Kaizong, who is returning to his childhood town. The novel highlights the massive disparity in living conditions and how inequality is internalized by technological development. The heroine of the novel is Mimi, who works in an e-waste workshop in Guiyu, having travelled from an impoverished rural region in north-western China in search of work. In the story, both Mimi and Luo Zixin (the young son of the Luo clan business owner) are unwittingly infected by a neuro-virus from a discarded US military machine smuggled to Guiyu. Mimi is blamed by Boss Luo for his son's condition and sends his gangsters to apprehend her. A local priest convinces Boss Luo to offer Mimi as a human sacrifice in exchange for his son's life. But Mimi escapes this fate when she is transformed into a cyborg by the military virus.

Before we meet Mimi, though, the story initially appears – like other texts considered in this thesis, such as *Remembering Wolves* and *Wolf Totem* – as a root-seeking story where Chen Kaizong, a Chinese-born American, returns to his native home of Silicon Isle in search of a sense of belonging. Like other root-seeking protagonists, Chen Kaizong is motivated to return by *xiangchou*. After graduating from an elite American university, specializing

in History, Kaizong applies for a job at TerraGreen Recycling Co. Ltd, a US-based multi-national company. Kaizong works as an assistant and translator to Scott Brandle (a shrewd, white American businessman), and his job is to help negotiate a business takeover of the local waste-recycling industry. Imagining himself as spreading the boon of technological wealth, Kiazong does not initially know that "the so-called sustainable development" proposed by TerraGreen is "just another name for legalized looting" (105). Behind the proposal lies a plan to control the rare earth resources extracted from e-waste.

Kaizong's naïve conception of his role is altered by his encounter with Mimi. From Mimi, Kaizong learns about the concealed dark side of Silicon Isle, which dissolves his self-identification as a heroic savior. In the meantime, they are drawn closer by a shared sense of displacement regardless of their stark differences. As the story unfolds, there emerges an even more dubious dimension to the industry – the trafficking of military e-waste. The illegal military e-waste contains a neurological virus named QNB that can cause irreversible cognitive damage to its victims.[133] In fact, the virus was a neuro-biological weapon created by the US Military under the name of Project Waste Tide and had been deployed in several regional wars.[134] Although officially abandoned, the technology was secretly transferred to multinational companies.

When TerraGreen's proposal is refused by the local family clans, Kaizong's boss, Scott, decides to kidnap Mimi, who has been infected with the neuro-virus. His plan is to sell her to technology companies as the first human cyborg. The tension escalates amid a deluge caused by a huge typhoon. Mimi, now encased in the mechanical suit known as "Mimi-1", is revered as a goddess by her former colleagues, the waste workers of Guiyu, in their class war against the Luos. During the conflict, Kaizong's left eye is wounded and he has to get a prosthetic eye. Later, Kaizong turns against Scott and comes to rescue Mimi on a steamboat. Together with Mimi-1, Kaizong defeats Scott. However, Mimi, with her remaining human consciousness, aims the gun against her head and requests Kaizong to pull the trigger, for she understands that Mimi-1 is a direct threat to the safety of the world and the sanctity of life. As the story comes to an end, TerraGreen takes over the local business, Mimi's life is saved but she sustains brain damage that means she will remain at the intellectual level of a three-year-old. Cherishing

[133] According to the story, "QNB functions as a competitive inhibitor of acetylcholine (Ach), a neurotransmitter that increases responsiveness to sensory stimuli and plays an important role in learning memory, spatial working memory, attention, muscle concentration, exploratory behaviour, and other cognitive functions" (186). In severe cases, QNB causes uncontrolled behavior, self-sabotage, memory impairment, and long-term brain damage. Despite its horrible effects, QNB was internally classified as a "nonlethal chemical weapon" and was applied in various regional wars that the US launched: Afghanistan, the Persian Gulf, Sarajevo, Ethiopia" (187).

[134] Project Waste Tide was established by Seisen Suzuki, the fiancée of the Japanese Lieutenant Commander Hideo Kuboki, the captain of the Imperial Japanese Navy destroyer Arashio (荒潮, *Stormy Tide*) during the World War II. In reality, Arashio was built in the 1930s and was bombed by "Chatter Box", an American B-25C Mitchell Bomber in 1943. In the story, after her fiancée's death in the war, Seisen Suzuki went to the United States for her Ph.D. in Biochemistry. She invented QNB (the neurological virus) and become the leading scientist of Project Waste Tide under the U.S. Military. An elder Suzuki regrets her decision to join a project that led to inhumane suffering for the victims of the experiments.

his memories with Mimi, Kaizong decides to join Coltsfoot Blossom, an Asian-based environmental nongovernment organization (NGO), to tackle the floating plastic waste that has formed an island in the Pacific.

The story is intriguing in that it deploys a *xiangchou* narrative in a posthuman context, and these two incongruous elements reveal the sharp contrast between rural and industrial China. Kaizong's homecoming journey is subverted by the radical changes to his home, leading to the kind of solastalgia that was such a feature of Alai's novel cycle. The posthuman dimension is to locate, in the figure of Mimi, a solastalgic estrangement from the "home" of the human body.

3.2.2 The Chinese "New Wave," Sci-fi Realism, and "Variations on Utopia"

Since the 1990s, Chinese science fiction has witnessed a resurgence dubbed the "Chinese New Wave" by Song Mingwei. Chinese New Wave sci-fi is characterized by a "subversive, cutting-edge literary experiment" that observes social reality through a highly critical lens, sometimes even with nightmarish dimensions. Variations of utopian and dystopian imaginations are a significant theme in these stories ("The New Wave" 8). Many of these sci-fi texts provide critical visions that subvert the dominant technological optimism and respond to ecological crises and related social problems. Some key works include Liu Cixin's "space epic" the "Three-Body Problem" trilogy (2006–2010) and short story "The Wages of Humanity" (2005), Han Song's dystopian allegories *Red Ocean* (2004) and *Subway* (2010), Hao Jingfang's "Folding Beijing" (2012), and Chen Qiufan's "The Smog Society" (2010) and *Waste Tide* (2013). While *Waste Tide* probes some of the most prominent social issues in present-day China, especially e-waste issues and their imbrication in technological acceleration, social inequalities, and global capitalism, Hao Jingfang's "Folding Beijing" imagines a dystopian version of a technologized "folding city" that segregates the different social groups. Although "Folding Beijing" does not tackle the problem of pollution directly, it features the life of a waste worker and reveals the starkly unequal living conditions between different social groups. This story serves as a postmodern allegory of slow violence in its analysis of the "wasted lives" in China's rapid urbanization. Here, the displacement of the "wasted" workers is both temporal and spatial.

In a way, many of the Chinese New Wave sci-fi texts answer Amitav Ghosh's call for engagement with reality in writing about the Anthropocene. As Ghosh observes in *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (2017), global-scale ecological crises, such as climate change, calls for new languages and imaginations in literary narratives, because "the mere mention of the subject is often enough to relegate a novel or a short story to the genre of science fiction" (7). Ghosh is skeptical about science fiction. To Ghosh, the futuristic tendency of

science fiction, especially climate fiction (cli-fi), risks dissolving the urgency and cogency of ecological crises, because the "future is but one aspect of the Anthropocene: this era also includes the recent past and, most significantly, the present" (72). Although his concern is mainly about narratives of climate change, his observation can be extended more generally to ecofiction.

Ghosh's hesitation surrounding sci-fi as an effective mode for ecological consciousness stems from the view that sci-fi is to be opposed to realism. However, many Chinese New Wave sci-fi texts are firmly grounded in the realities of urbanization, pollution, and social inequality in China. Indeed, the concept of "sci-fi realism" (*kehuan xianshi zhuyi*) has been used to describe many New Wave sci-fi writers. Sci-fi realism is a concept first proposed in 1981 by Zheng Wenguang (1929–2003), the "Father of Chinese sci-fi" (Jiang, "Sci-fi realism" 79), and it is developed by recent sci-fi writers such as Chen Qiufan: "Science fiction is the greatest realism at the present time. It provides a window for imagination through its open realism, to delineate a reality no man has written about" (Chen, "Rethinking Sci-fi Realism" 38). Moreover, the contradictions in contemporary reality, as Han Song observes, are so sharp that even sci-fi writers find it challenging to keep up with them (Chen, 39).

Both Chen Qiufan and Hao Jingfang offer narratives where the interplay of *xiangchou*, nostalgia, and solastalgia underpins their treatment of environmental crises, social inequality, and unchecked globalization[135]. The success of the Chinese New Wave has also led to a reconsideration of early Chinese science fiction. Scholars such as Song Mingwei, Nathaniel Isaacson, and Li Hua have each sought to highlight the significant role of science fiction (translation and writing) in late-nineteenth- and early twentieth-century China. Various early modern Chinese intellectuals, including Yan Fu, Liang Qichao, and Lu Xun engaged with science fiction as a way of processing the cultural impact of Western scientific modernity.[136] Indeed, three distinct stages of Chinese sci-fi can now be recognized (Raphals 82). First, there was the early Chinese sci-fi in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth century (predominantly utopian political fantasies to fuel scientific modernization). Next, during the Mao era, there was pedagogical children's sci-fi imbued with socialist scientific optimism. Finally, there is the post-1990s

[135] The term "globalization" was formalized in the late 1980s by the British sociologist Roland Robertson. (Waters 2-3) Although there are different globalizing forces, such as the rising of global communism in the 1960s, the concept of globalization is mostly commonly known as an accompanying phenomenon of Western-led modernization which began with colonial expansion, plantation economy and capitalistic trade dating back to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. (Ibid. 7) For Anthony Giddens, globalization is a "dialectical process" in which "local transformation is as much a part of globalisation as the lateral extension of social connections across time and space." (64) Philip McMichael emphasizes the economic institution of "globalization", understood as "global economic integration", Globalization is seen as "the governing force of the later-20th century world" (McMichael 27) both as an unequal economic order and ideology. Its "most palpable impact", according to McMichael, has been the forceful involvement of diverse peoples and communities in a homogenizing realm "through the worldwide restructuring of states and economies" (Ibid. 27). Here in this thesis, I refer to "globalization" as the underlying cause of the slow violence inherent to colonialization and neoliberal capitalism.

[136] See more in Nathaniel Isaacson, *Celestial Empire: The Emergence of Chinese Science Fiction* (2017).

sci-fi that is being considered in this chapter. Early modern Chinese sci-fi reflects the drastically shifting temporality introduced by technological modernity. Yan Jianfu contends that Chinese modernity counterposed the traditional nostalgic Chinese utopias (such as the peach blossom spring) with a cosmopolitan future of *Datong Shijie*[137] ("the World of Great Harmony") reconfigured by Western utopianism:

> As a new expression of the ideal space, [a futurist] Utopia enabled the writers of the late Qing dynasty a visual alternative to the Chinese literary tradition. If the immortal village of Peach Blossom spring resembles the value of sedentary, simplicity, and self-sustained satisfaction through the image of a recluse enjoying tranquil longevity, then the late-Qing writers accentuated their beliefs in sovereign dignity, modernization, and development through the narratives of politics, adventure, and science. (145)[138]

While modernity under the banners of democracy and science becomes the leitmotif in early twentieth-century China, the process is also accompanied by the transfiguration of *xiangchou* as the structure of the feeling, especially with the literary narratives of the rural. With the rise of communism, the modern utopia of technological development, born among the national crisis, is later transmuted into the image of a socialist utopia.

3.3 "Wasted Lives," Slow Violence, and Ecosickness

While using the term Chinese "New Wave" to refer to the post-1990s Chinese sci-fi, I do not suggest the emergence of this category as the conscious effort of a homogenous writing movement, nor are all writers directed by some pre-agreed principle. However, these writings do share some common features, because they receive influence from shared canons and are written from a specific social context. My focus here is on environmental narratives, especially narratives of pollution. I observe that slow violence, especially transnational and national (rural–urban) inequality becomes the primary concern in these narratives. Waste transfer attests to Nixon's

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[137] *Datong Shijie* was an ancient concept of a Confucian meritocratic "Paradise Lost" recorded in *the Book of Rites* (*Liji*). While *Datong Shijie* was a remote world, not to be achieved in ancient Confucianism, in Kang Youwei's treatise, "Book of Great Unity" (*Datongshu*, 1956), *Datong Shijie* becomes a world set in the remote future where the transitional stage is "Small Tranquility" (*Xiaokang*). This transition from the status quo to "Small Tranquility" and then to "Great Unity" is the trajectory of social evolution according to Kang Youwei's theory (Meng and Zhang 35). In this way, *Datong Shijie* is refurbished into a utopia that is in line with modern linear temporality.

[138] "'乌托邦'作为新的理想空间的表述，使得晚清作者群重构了一套不同于文学传统的视野。如果说仙乡桃源透过避世、寿命、安乐等命题强调静态简谱、完美自乐的价值，那么晚清作者群则是透过政治、冒险、科学等类型凸显主权尊严、文明进步的信仰。"（Yan 145）[Yan Jianfu (顏健富), *From "Body" to "World": New Schema in the Late-Qing Dynasty Fiction* (從「身體」到「世界」晚清小說的新概念地圖) Taipei: National Taiwan University Press (臺北：國立臺灣大學出版中心), 2014.]

definition of "slow violence" because contamination is "dispersed across time and space" and its harm is attritional and delayed (Nixon 2).

The other way in which pollution conforms to Nixon's conception of slow violence is that waste often disperses "gradually and out of sight" – at least, out of the sight of those who consume the goods that produce the pollution. In a speed-obsessed contemporary media, the slow violence of waste falls out of sight – a victim of a "representational bias" toward faster, more visible phenomena (4–5). To write about issues of pollution is to create a space for people whose lives are directly impacted by pollution. *Waste Tide* and "Folding Beijing", though set in fictional futures, address the contemporary experience of such people. Both stories foreground environmental injustice in the context of the Anthropocene (a time of human-induced, planetary ecological crises), and reveal the environmental injustice that flows from ecological degradation. In the following section, I will draw on their "third-world consciousness" alongside Zygmunt Bauman's theory of "wasted lives" to elaborate my argument, which serves for further exploration of the narratives of ecosickness, displacement, and solastalgia in these texts.

3.3.1 The "Third-world" Perspective, Globalization, and "Wasted Lives"

The "third-world consciousness" of contemporary Chinese sci-fi was proposed by the seminal Chinese sci-fi scholar Wu Yan, in a speech entitled "Chinese science fiction and The Third World" (2005). Wu calls upon Chinese sci-fi writers to help develop an awareness of planetary issues so that the younger generation can "care about the world" and "be determined to get ready to be a citizen of the global village" (blogsina.com.cn/wuyan98). The idea of a third-world perspective was later taken on by Luo Yanlin in a research article on Liu Cixin's sci-fi narratives. Liu Cixin, by far the most influential Chinese sci-fi writer, created the "Dark Forest Law"[139] in his Hugo-award-winning the "Three-Body Problem" trilogy, where the universe is seen as a Hobbesian society. To Luo, Liu Cixin's social Darwinist conception of the universe and society reflects the impact of global colonial history, mirroring the third-world perspective of the global geopolitical order in the modern era (270). The rise of modern nation-states and nationalism is another factor in the popularity of social Darwinism (as discussed in Chapter One).

[139] The "Dark Forest Law" is one of the three universal laws in "Universe Sociology" proposed by a character named Luo Ji in Liu Cixin's *The Dark Forest,* book two of the *Three-Body* Problem trilogy. It can be considered as the "law of the jungle" or the bleak principle of Hobbes' *Leviathan* lifted to the level of the galaxy. In this law, every civilization lurks in the galaxy like hunters in a dark forest, and whoever is exposed is immediately in danger of attack from the others.

In Chen Qiufan's *Waste Tide*, global injustice is established on colonial heritage, although Chen does not subscribe to social Darwinism as his response to such inequality – instead he offers a more optimistic response modeled on the environmentalism of the poor. The Prologue of *Waste Tide* presents the effort of Clotsfoot Blossom, an Asian-based environmental NGO, to block a cargo ship loaded with smuggled e-waste from the United States bound for Hong Kong, from where the waste would be dispatched to Guiyu. As a typhoon named "Saola"[140] is approaching, Sug-Yi Chiu Ho, a senior member of Clotsfoot Blossom shows the new members a painting, *L'Incendie du Kent* (*the Burning of Kent*, 1828)[141] by Jean Antoine Theodore Gudin. The painting shows panicked crowds struggling on a soon-to-capsize ship amidst stormy torrents, while a small group has embarked on a lifeboat to reach potential safety, leaving the majority on the sinking boat wailing for help. Sug-Yi Chiu Ho explains: "The world we live in is that ship, about to be lost. Some have already jumped on life rafts, but some still remain ignorant and unaware" (12).

The burning ship acts as a metaphor for a planet Earth threatened by ecological crisis while directly situating the story in the context of environmental injustice. The ship mockingly evokes the infamous "lifeboat ethics" described by the American bioethicist, Garrett Hardin. In his 1974 article "Lifeboat Ethics: The Case Against Helping the Poor," Hardin compares the world's rich nations as lifeboats with a designated number of resources and the world's poor population as swimmers desperate to come aboard. On this basis, Hardin argued against immigration and humanitarian programs, believing that philanthropic aid would only increase the world's poor population and place impossible burdens on the

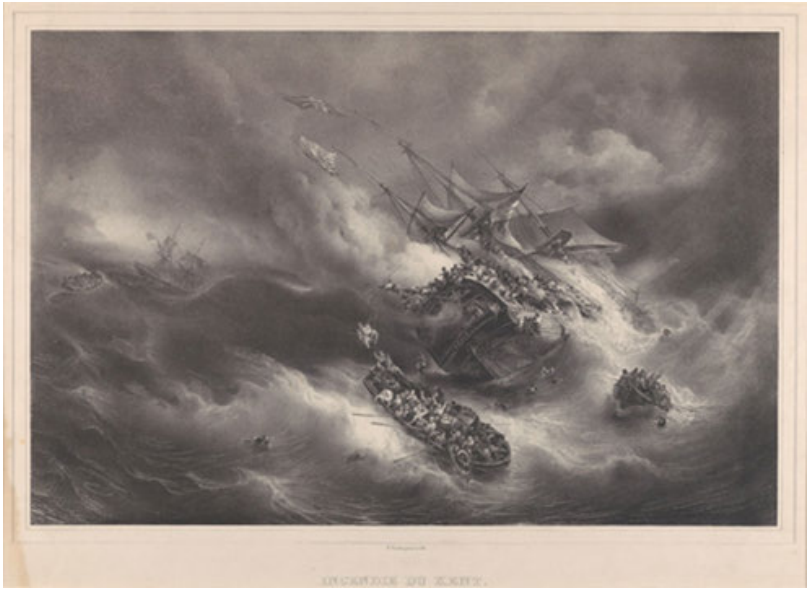

Figure 4 Gudin, Jean Antoine Théodore de Gibaut frère- L'Incendie du Kent

[140] Saola (Pseudoryx nghetinhensis) is an ungulate mammal that only exists in the Annamite Mountain range in Vietnam and Laos, it was spotted and later scientifically recognized only some three decades ago (1992). Saola is nicknamed the "Asian Unicorn". Its spectacular horns, beauty, rarity, and mysterious ecology all render it alluring. However, threatened by poaching, the saola population is believed to be "no more than a few hundred" and has been listed as "critically endangered" by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) red list. In the "near-future" setting of *Waste Tide*, the saola has already gone extinct. (Robichaud et al.)

[141] The painting depicts a fire in 1825 that broke out on "Kent," a ship belonging to the British East Indian Company. With the help of a two-masted ship that can be seen in the distance on the left, some 550 people were eventually rescued.

environment.

Hardin's position was lambasted for ignoring the colonial history of exploitation. For instance, in *Wasted Lives*, Bauman points out the hypocrisy of such concern about overpopulation: "It is always the excess of *them* that worries *us*" (45). Paul Ehrlich, the author of *The Population Bomb*, exclaimed that the planetary life-support capacity is "not just determined by the number of people alive on the planet. It also depends on how those people behave. When this is considered, an entirely different picture emerges: the main population problem is in wealthy countries" (qtd. in Bauman, 42). Simply speaking, it is not so much a matter of overpopulation as overconsumption. In *Waste Tide*, the "Lifeboat" metaphor is refurbished from the position of the unprivileged to act as an initiation for Clotsfoot Blossom's mission:

> Our job at Clotsfoot Blossom is to sound the drum and strike the gong, to play the clown, to swallow fire, to use whatever tricks we have at our disposal to catch everyone's attention. We must let people know that the ship is on the verge of sinking, but those responsible for our condition think they can get away untouched. Unless we tie their fates to ours, we will be the ones left behind to pay for their mistakes. (12)[142]

Although the rise of the waste tide is uncontestably a direct consequence of technological "progress," the flow of waste is clearly conditioned by the current socio-economic and political systems of globalization. As Kaizong, a history major who believes that "all history is contemporary history," recalls from a lecture by his professor:

> Globalization is not something new. It's a trend that has been going on for hundreds, thousands of years. You can see it through the Age of Exploration, through commerce, through writing and religion, through insects, migratory birds and wind, even through bacteria and viruses. But the problem is that we've never achieved consensus, never tried to build a fair system so that everyone benefits. Instead, we've engaged in a perpetual cycle of looting, exploitation, and forceful extraction: from the Amazon, from Africa, from Southeast Asia, the Middle East, Antarctica, even outer space. (45)

[142] The quotations are quoted from the English edition of *Waste Tide*, except for the quote from the "Afterword," which can only be found in the first Chinese edition of the book.

The memory of this lecture pinpoints the colonialist logic that underwrites globalization. Kaizong remembers the lecture occurs after conversing with Uncle Chen Xianyun, a senior in the Chen clan, after the latter explains to Kaizong why the family clan model of business persists in Guiyu. "It was about a sense of security," said Uncle Chen, "Remember, from the beginning of history, we have had only one society: a society based on the law of the jungle" (44). Uncle Chen's sense of society (the clan) is founded in fundamental insecurity and his blunt social Darwinism renders the idealist Kaizong silent. Confronted with the environmental violence on Guiyu, Kaizong reluctantly acknowledges that: "he knew, deep down, that Uncle Chen had a better handle on the truth. It wasn't a truth written down in books, but something rooted deeply in the soil, tested by blood and fire" (44). As discussed in Chapter One on *Wolf Totem*, Uncle Chen's Hobbesian worldview also has its roots in the national existential crisis of modern China. As historian Xu Jilin observes, the late nineteenth century in China witnessed the arrival of social Darwinism and the rise of vulgar materialism (195). However, Kaizong fundamentally resists conceding that social life must be governed by the law of the jungle. Indeed, the story dramatizes his personal growth (and home-seeking journey) that finally leads him into environmental activism.

Waste Tide takes the position of the downtrodden and represents phenomena of environmental injustice in the context of the Global South. It captures various environmental issues, such as species extinction and climate change, together with the regional environmental deterioration provoked by monopoly capitalism. Several examples are presented, including Terra Green's business expansions in the Philippines and the Rimbuna Hijau Group's manipulation of the logging industry in Papua New Guinea. Like Guiyu's case, the multinational companies first crush local small businesses and monopolize capital, which leads to fundamental impoverishment of the local environment and community. As discussed in Chapter Two, ecological destruction is almost always accompanied by the collapse of indigenous community and culture. *Waste Tide* reveals Scott's experience in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, and how an idyllic "paradise" has been destroyed in the process.

> […] Scott found it much more difficult to locate an unspoiled patch of paradise than he had anticipated. The roar of chainsaws filled the jungles, chasing birds and beasts deeper into the interior. The pipes laid down by Oil Search Ltd were like a web of exposed capillaries, crossing forests, rivers, and villages to suck the black essence of the ancient past out of rich soil to slake the unquenchable thirst of the developed world. Even the natives were no longer honest and simple. After the destruction of the rainforests they depended on for their livelihood, they had no choice but to sell their labor and join the logging company, wielding electric chainsaws

> to cut down the mother trees that had once borne the names of their ancestors. (105)

The episode, which appears like a journalistic report, is an example of sci-fi realism. In this case, the novel presents the reality of environmental injustice on indigenous land that accompanies global environmental degradation. Like deforestation, the transnational trade of toxic waste also takes advantage of the economic inequalities of economic globalization, as political economist Jennifer Clapp writes: "It is not a case of a race from the top to the bottom, but rather a problem of entrenched regulatory differences and their exploitation through global economic channels" (10). Transnational waste dumping illustrates the problems of what Ulrich Beck calls "risk society," in that it emerges in the "political vacuum" of global capitalism: "The dangers grow, but they are not politically reforged into a preventive risk management policy" (48). This is further explored in David Naguib Pellow's *Resisting Global Toxics: Transnational Movements for Environmental Justice* (2007), where he traces the risk of global toxic transfer through the "treadmill of production," an industrial assembly line that grows increasingly covetous in exploiting the natural environment. The global waste transfer is "an extension of unequal relations and hierarchical practices that characterize the everyday, routine functioning of the global political economy" (102). As in Guiyu, the different social groups act out their assigned roles in the global economy. In *Waste Tide*, the representation of waste workshops offers a bird's eye view of the global "treadmill of production":

> […] the crushed plastic would then be melted down, cooled, formed into pellets to be sold to coastal factories, where they would be turned into cheap plastic products, the bulk of which were exported to countries around the world so that people everywhere could benefit from the affordable "Made in China" merchandise; when those wares broke down or became stale, they turned into trash to be shipped back to China, and the cycle began again. (72)

The waste industry transfers pollution across borders, but it also creates what Zygmunt Bauman calls "wasted lives." The heroine, Mimi, is a waste worker who migrates from her rural hometown to Guiyu. Throughout the process, she suffers from alienation, psycho-physical illness, and social stigmatization. The workers are derogatively called "waste people" and are despised by the locals, even though the local waste factories rely on their labor to profit. Through the waste process industry, a "hierarchy of castes" is established upon the subaltern, rural migrant workers stigmatized as "untouchable," like the Dalit in the Indian caste system.

The social injustice in Guiyu is an extension of the global political-economic order that is established based on racial and class hierarchies. Bauman traces the cause of garbage removal and social exclusion back to the very configuration of modernity itself because modernization has been "a history of designing and a museum/graveyard of designs tried, used up, rejected and abandoned in the ongoing war of conquest and/or attrition waged against nature" (27). The waste crisis in modern society is rooted in the anthropocentric exploitation of nature but is also accompanied by the exclusion of certain groups of people. While *Waste Tide* confronts the readers with the inequalities behind globalization, Hao Jingfang's Hugo-Award winning novelette, "Folding Beijing" foregrounds the extreme class disparity in China's urbanization by depicting the lives of the "wasted lives." The next subsection will draw on recent social phenomena in China to analyze their representation of "wasted lives." It reveals how both ecofiction texts reflect the socio-ecological problems occurring during Chinese urbanization using sci-fi realism.

3.3.2 "Folding Beijing": the "Wasted Lives" and China's Rural–Urban Inequality

The protagonist of "Folding Beijing" is a middle-aged man known as Lao Dao (lit: Old Dao) who ekes out a living as an urban waste worker. Lao Dao's parents were rural migrants who came to build the folding city and were among the fortunate few to have stayed. The folding city consists of three disparate spaces that take turns to fold and collapse. The five million residents in First Space enjoy living on one side of the Earth, and Second Space (twenty-five million people) and Third Space (Fifty million people) share the other side. Also, time is also unevenly distributed: every 48 hours, the privileged First Space enjoys a 24-hour day (6 am to 6 am). Residents in Second Space (middle class) live in the time slot from 6 am to 10 pm, leaving the evening hours from 10 pm to 6 am to the city's large population in Third Space. Unlicensed migration between spaces is strictly forbidden, but Lao Dao ventures to travel between Spaces in desperate need of money. Destitute (and thus unmarried) as Lao Dao is, he adopts a foundling from the waste processing station, names her Tangtang (lit: Sweety), and sees her as his child. As Tangtang is turning two years old, Lao Dao needs money to send her to kindergarten. Lao Dao's task is to dispatch a love letter for Qin, a graduate student from Second Space to a young woman named Yiyan living in First Space. It is destined to be an unrequited romance because Yiyan is already engaged to a rich man old enough to be her father. Feeling embarrassed, Yiyan pays Lao Dao extra money, asking him to convey a white lie to Qin. After a risky journey that almost kills him, Lao Dao accomplishes the task within the designated 48-hour limit and returns with more money he could earn in three years. The denouement lends the tragic story a hopeful hue as

Lao Dao can finally afford to send Tangtang to a kindergarten.

Here the folding city of Beijing is not a garbage-besieged city but a placeless stack of spaces that have none of the features of the historic city of Beijing. In Yi-fu Tuan's distinction between place and space, "place" is a special ensemble that evolves from humans interacting with each other and their environment over time. Thus, place involves meaning-making and affective responses; by contrast, space is a geometrical abstraction bleached of history, experience, and emotions ("Space and Place" 199). The contrast between place to space helps us understand the condition of homogenization in "the folding city," where modernization under linear temporality also causes the "place" to be flattened into spaces, and the past is obliterated and discarded (Olwig 51). In this way, the breakneck speed of China's urbanization also involves widespread demolition and reconstruction – a process that leaves humans living in a floating existence, alienated from time and place. The folding city is also a dystopian space where humans are segregated according to their socioeconomic status, and the urban landscape forms accordingly.

The different Spaces resemble the rigidified social classes in contemporary Chinese society, but in a more literal way. Lao Dao's position reminds us of Beijing's highly controversial administrative policy in 2016 that aimed to "clear the low-end population" (清理低端人口).[143] The concept of "low-end population" was clarified to mean people who are employed in "low-end industries," which mainly referred to rural migrant workers who were employed in low-pay sectors providing essential services for urban life. As social scientist Lu Xueyi reveals, the modern structure of social strata in China is still "in an embryonic form" despite its fast urbanization in the last four decades. In 2002, agricultural laborers were still the vast majority of Chinese society (44 percent), and the middle class only accounted for 15 percent of the population, resulting in a social structure that is highly unequal and risky (153). A recent study (2020) conducted by Li Yaojun for the United Nations University shows that the level of absolute class mobility has increased in China in the past decade, but social class rigidity is rising among youngest male cohort. There is "a picture of rising opportunity coupled with rising inequality." (20) "Folding Beijing" takes the class disparity and rigidity further by showing how resources, living spaces, and even time are distributed to people according to their social status. The resource distribution consists of a pyramid social model,

[143] A key event that drew attention to the "low-end population" was a serious fire that broke out in the tenement buildings of Xinjian Village, Daxing District in Beijing in November 2016. Nineteen people were killed in the fire. After that, Beijing administrators soon held an emergency meeting to prevent similar safety hazards in the ghettoized urban periphery, but the measures chosen were to evict the rural migrant workers rather than to protect people of socioeconomic disadvantage. Meanwhile, the word "low-end population" was identified in several official documents, which caused wide complaints about its bluntly derogatory implication. ["The Making of the 'Low-end Population,'" China Media Project, Nov 2017_https://chinamediaproject.org/2017/11/30/the-official-origins-of-low-end-population/ Accessed Aug. 22, 2021.]

in which the vast majority shares the smallest portion of wealth. During Lao Dao's sojourn in First Space, he is brought to a banquet hall where a huge screen displays a documentary on the five-decade history of the folding city. A panoramic view of the city represents First Space on the one side and Second Space on the other, while the existence of Third Space is completely effaced. Third Space, whose main industry is waste recycling, is squeezed into the night hours to digest the urban rubbish.

The living conditions of Third Space are not purely imaginary. On the contrary, as we have already seen in the discussion of *Waste Tide*, it has a strong allusion to reality. For instance, the usual working hours for urban cleaners (especially street cleaners) in China start as early as 4 am – before the day starts. A study based on Dalian indicates that about 90 percent of urban cleaners are above 45 years old and of rural background, and about one-third of them are female. Although they provide essential services for the cities, their working conditions are harsh, the wages are extremely meager, and social welfare is scarce (Niu et al. 106). Urban cleaners and waste workers are easily ignored by city dwellers, but their situation reveals what is wrong with modern society. As cultural theorist Wang Min'an wrote: "They crouch and sink into the darkness of night or dusk, expressionless like a reflection; this is both their reflection and that of the society" (Wang 352). Above all, the waste provides a critical view to rethink urban consumerism – a mechanism that contributes to the rapid growth of waste, but it also reflects how the environmental burden is transferred between the rural and urban populations in China.

Similarly, the rural–urban divide is revealed in *Waste Tide*, where Mimi strikes Kaizong not as "love at first sight" but as the revelation of the "foreign" world in the same country. Her pensive countenance among chaotic waste is captured as a monochrome photograph, which leaves Kaizong with an unforgettable impression when he first arrives at Guiyu. Her brooding expression would otherwise conjure a Chinese version of an iconic "solitary reaper" in Wordsworth's pastoral imagination, yet Mimi's origin as a country girl sharpens the contrast with her status as post-modern detritus. Here, this "solitary reaper" is not one who reaps from the industrial field but one who is being reaped, to borrow from an internet buzzword, "reaping chives (*ge jiucai*)."[144] In the toxic environment of Guiyu, pastoral poetics fail or mutate. As Lawrence Buell contends, although narratives about toxic pollution find companions with some pastoral ideals, they are often "narratives of rude awakening" from a world where any

[144] 割韭菜(cutting/ eaping chives) is primarily "a self-deprecating description of individual investors who reinvest in the stock market after initial losses." Yet its metaphoric meaning extends to more negative directions that capture the social inequality in contemporary China; for instance, the conflicting relationship between employees who are exploited by tighter and tighter working rules by big firms while investors devour gargantuan profit with soaring thirst. ["Cut chives," China Digital Times, 2018 https://chinadigitaltimes.net/2018/09/word-of-the-week-cut-chives/ Accessed 22 Aug 2021.]

"simple pastoral"[145] is impossible (Buell 37).

In Guiyu the waste workers are segregated from the local community, and in the folding city, not only is the underclass's living space compressed but so is their visibility in society. In First Space, Lao Dao learned about the profit-driven logic behind the folding city from a manager.

> […] This kind of automation is absolutely necessary if you want to grow your economy—that was how we caught up to Europe and America, remember? Scaling! The problem is: Now you've gotten the people off the land and out of the factories, what are you going to do with them? In Europe, they went with the path of forcefully reducing everyone's working hours and thus increasing employment opportunities. But this saps the vitality of the economy, you understand?"
>
> "The best way is to reduce the time a certain portion of the population spends living, and then find ways to keep them busy. Do you get it? Right, shove them into the night. There's another advantage to this approach: The effects of inflation almost can't be felt at the bottom of the social pyramid. Those who can get loans and afford the interest spend all the money you print. The GDP goes up, but the cost of basic necessities does not. And most of the people won't even be aware of it." (147)

Thus, the population in Third Space is deliberately kept at a low-end lifestyle to keep the momentum of economic development. A manager proposes a plan for automatic waste processing, but it is vetoed by the administrator due to concern over unemployment and the social disquiet that autimation would cause. Employing people for waste processing is not just economical but also necessary to keep the other Spaces (especially First Space) prosperous and stable. In *Waste Tide*, TerraGreen's proposal to increase productivity and ameliorate the environment is rejected because the bosses prefer personal material gains to long-term environmental wellbeing. Both "Folding Beijing" and *Waste Tide* touch upon the inequality behind the waste recycling industry, and neither of the texts sees technology as the fundamental solution. In both cases, technological methods have already been employed to maintain the unequal system, but further technologization only leads to the increased polarization of social

[145] "Simple pastoral" is a term Leo Marx employed to describe his observation about a popular viewpoint in the US, which on the one hand dips into an aesthetic consumerist imagination about natural beauty while reassuring themselves with an optimistic techno-boosterism that they believe would solve environmental problems.

inequality. As it turns out, in Guiyu, advanced technology is employed by the multinational company to control more capital and further subjugate both locals and migrant workers.

In addition, both stories provide insightful observations about the downside of a speed-driven postmodern society. The tiered structure of the folding city can be considered a prescient case of "involution(*neijuan*),"[146] another buzzword expressing a widespread feeling of ennui and disillusionment in China from 2020. As Anthropologist Xiang Biao comments, *involution* is a system with no retreating mechanism – it is an "endless cycle of self-flagellation" leading nowhere. (Xiang, qtd. in Liu, "China's 'Involuted' Generation"). In September 2020, a report entitled "The takeaway riders trapped in the system (外卖骑手, 困在系统里)" by *People* (*Renwu*) magazine went viral on Chinese social media platforms, prompting heated discussions. The article reveals the cruelty behind the flourishing food delivery industry in Chinese cities. With the increasing use of algorithmic optimization on the takeaway platforms, takeaway riders are highly prone to traffic accidents due to constricting delivery time and wage cuts.

The millions of takeaway riders[147] whose lives are manipulated by algorithmic optimization are essentially the victim of capital rather than of the technology itself (Li, "Trapped in Capitalism"). As both *Waste Tide* and "Folding Beijing" show, the structural exploitation in waste processing, like the fast-food delivery industry, is characterized by insidious slow violence. The food (and the technology) arrives quickly, but the killed and injured workers leave lasting legacies. Both *Waste Tide* and "Folding Beijing" pinpoint that environmental injustice is tied to factors such as nationality, class, race, and gender. While "Folding Beijing" focuses on the rural–urban and class disparity through waste and pollution in China, *Waste Tide* reveals the complexity of the environmental degradation on both national and transnational scales.

3.4 Reading Ecosickness in *Waste Tide*: A New Materialist Critique

In the context of the Global North, the physical and emotional remoteness from waste renders the stigmatized lives and diseased bodies of people who live with/in waste too often absent from mainstream media representation

[146] 内卷, involution, is originally a term defined by American anthropologist Clifford Geertz as the intensification of input without due output in agriculture. In Geertz's 1963 book *Agricultural Involution: The Processes of Ecological Change in Indonesia*, he analyzed the economic problem and population growth in Java under Dutch colonization: the intensified input of human force in the rice paddies only leads to stasis of productivity.
Involution has become a buzzword popularized in a post-pandemic Chinese society in 2020, when people, especially the young people realize that they are set to work harder and harder not to realize a better life but to barely keep a job.

[147] According to the Employment Report launched by Meituan, one of China's biggest food delivery platform companies, there are 2.7 million riders registered under Meituan in 2018, and the number surged to 3.987 million in 2019. Moreover, some 336 thousand people joined the industry as riders in 2020 since the pandemic broke out. [Zhao et al. "2019 and 2020 Employment Report of Meituan Riders," Meituan Institute, https://mri.meituan.com/research/report Accessed Aug. 24, 2021]

or philosophical inquiries. This contributes to the comfortable "out of sight, out of mind" impression that waste cannot be a crisis (Bell 104). Therefore, earlier theories of pollution, such as Mary Douglas's canonical *Purity and Danger* (1966) and Michael Thompson's *Rubbish Theory* (1979), are all premised on the cultural conceptualization of waste. Currently, observes Lucy Bell, cultural theories on waste are dominated by an Anglo-American preoccupation that is "premised on a physical and ideological distance from waste" (102). It is not until the last decade that a new materialist turn in academia has called attention to the materiality of waste and contamination. For example, Sarah Harrison's *Waste Matter: Urban Margins in Contemporary Literature* (2016) explores the living experience of the urban poor and their proximity to waste in postcolonial cities and cities of the first world. However, apart from Zygmunt Bauman's theory of "wasted lives," global waste transfer is almost absent in cultural theories.

Tackling the waste issues requires an alternative waste theory that is informed by environmental justice and the materiality of waste because, "when commodities are turned into rubbish, the materials do not return to their original state, they no longer possess their earlier conditions of freedom and spontaneity." (Wang, "On Rubbish" 344) Rather, what is left after commodification is a singular, "altered materiality" (Ibid. 344). We need to take into consideration the insidious nature of hazardous chemicals in the "altered materiality" of waste and realize how certain people's living conditions are affected adversely by waste disposal. In the following section I will draw together the scholarship on new materialism (Stacy Alaimo's transcorporeality) and affective ecocriticism (Heather Houser's ecosickness) to understand the slow violence in the global waste industry.

3.4.1 The Transcorporeal Landscape and Ecosick Workers

Waste Tide attends to the day-to-day experience of people living "in/with/of waste," first through the eyes of two "outsiders." A visit to the waste workshops presents Guiyu's surreal picture to Scott Brandle and Kaizong: the locals own luxurious cars and extravagant mansions on one side of the peninsula. On the other side, the migrant workers live in tightly packed, ghetto-like sheds among a messy hoard of e-waste. This is a place polarized by the nouveau riche and destitute migrant workers, though both depend on the toxic waste for livelihood. While everyone suffers from environmental contamination, the migrant workers are constantly exposed to the hazards and pollutants in their working and daily lives:

> Everything was shrouded in a leaden miasma, an amalgamation of the white mist generated by the boiling aqua regia in the acid baths and the black smoke from the increasing burning

> of PVC, insulation, and circuit boards in the fields and on the shore of the river. The two contrasting colors were mixed by the sea breezes until they could no longer be distinguished, seeping into the pores of every living being. (31)

Here, the human-generated environment (white mist and black smoke) forms a mixture with what is usually known as "the natural" (the sea breezes, for instance). The environment is not a passive object or resource for human manipulation, but a body itself, like the bodies of the workers laid bare to rampant infiltration by chemicals and pollutants. This repugnant version of the human–pollutant corporeal interchange leads us to rethink human and nonhuman relationships according to a new materialist episteme of transcorporeality. As Stacy Alaimo proposes, transcorporeality means that "various bodily natures" have always been interconnected and mutually permeated (2–4). The environment is not outside the human but where the human and nonhuman, microbes and chemicals, imbricate and interact. As part and parcel of this environment, the human *soma* is not an autonomous, unaffected realm solely governed by the *cogito*; instead, it is a corporeal existence among the more-than-human materiality. Environmental destruction is not merely environmental devastation but also the self-destructive violence of humans, since in the Anthropocene there is no longer a "Nature" segregated from human elements. As Ulrich Beck notes, nowadays, "destructions of nature can no longer be shifted off onto the 'environment' either, but as they are universalized by industry, they become social, political, economic and cultural contradictions inherent in the system" (154).

The toxic materiality of e-waste challenges the conventional waste theories that interpret waste in an abstract, metaphorical way, where waste is seen as inanimate, passive object managed by rational human subjects. The hazardous elements of e-waste assault human and nonhuman bodies and leave the living environment uninhabitable. With the understanding of transcorporeality, e-waste (especially toxic chemicals) has "material agency" to act upon, move, and transform the boundaries set between humans and nonhumans, or subject and object, beyond an anthropocentric vision. By referring to transcorporeality, I do not intend to rehearse the cliché of human–nature holism; instead, I propose to theorize the experience of living with/on waste as a salient example of environmental violence, because transcorporeality helps to acknowledge "the often unpredictable and unwanted actions of human bodies, nonhuman creatures, ecological systems, chemical agents, and other actors" (Alaimo 2). When the global socioeconomic order assigns certain communities (human and nonhuman) to live in a toxic environment, the political economies and ideologies that support the system are also the cause of slow violence.

In this way, transcorporeality also calls for more ethical inquiry and practice from the "more uncomfortable and perplexing place where the 'human' is always already part of an active, often unpredictable, material world" (Ibid. 16–17). In *Waste Tide*, the transcorporeal experience of Scott Brandle in the stench in Guiyu precipitates a feeling of déjà vu, evoking his memories about Manila, where he instituted another program of "legalized looting."

> Hot, polluted air assaulted Scott, accompanied by an overwhelming stench. The mask filtered out particles and dust but was powerless against odours. For a moment, he seemed to be back in the suburbs of Manila, two years earlier, except that the smell here was ten times more concentrated. He tried to remain still, but sweat continued to ooze out of him, mixing with unknown chemicals in the air until it formed a viscous film that stuck to his skin and clothes and made taking even a single step difficult. (32)

The episode vividly depicts Scott's physical and emotional dis-ease when exposed to the toxic environment of the e-waste workshops. The malodorous hazards possess invasive material agencies, which the waste workers are exposed to on a daily basis.

> Scott observed the men and women living among the trash—the natives called them the waste people. The women did their laundry in the black water with their bare hands, the soap bubbles forming a silver edge around floating mats of duckweed. Children played everywhere, running over the black shores, where fiberglass and the charred remains of circuit boards twinkled; jumping over the abandoned fields, where embers and ashes from burnt plastic smoldered; swimming and splashing in dark green ponds, where polyester film floated over the surface. They seemed to think this was the natural state of the world and nothing disturbed their joy. (31)

Through Scott's eyes we receive a documentary-like picture of the quotidian for the migrant workers. The women and children's direct bodily exposure to the eutrophicated and contaminated river is a "transcorporeal landscape" (Alaimo 48) because their basic living activities are materially intertwined with and permeated by the toxic living environment. The women's calmness in conducting housework and the children's rambunctious spirit form a sharp contrast with the remains of circuit boards, ashes of burnt plastic, and ruins of polyester film. Most poignantly,

their contact with the omnipresent toxins is seen as "natural."

In the case of toxic e-waste, the transcorporeal permeation summons attention to the perilous effects on human and more-than-human health. The toxicity of synthetic materials has been a concern in the United States since the 1990s. With the widespread use of synthetic materials in mass-produced furniture and household products, earlier "human canaries" started to develop psychophysical discomforts and illnesses due to over-exposure to synthetic materials. Lynn Lawson studied this phenomenon in *Staying Well in a Toxic World* (1993) and named the symptom "environmental illness/multiple chemical sensitivities" (EI/MCS). This is indeed a "modern" problem, caused by the widespread use of synthetic chemicals and derivatives from petroleum or coal tar after World War II. These newly created chemicals, foreign to human bodies, become a new problem arising in late industrial society (36). However, Larson's assumption that "the more developed the country, the greater the jeopardy [of EI/MCS]" (10) is nowadays fundamentally changed because transnational transfer of toxicity has been common since the 1990s.

In Heather Houser's *Ecosickness in Contemporary U.S. Fiction: Environment and* Affect (2014), she proposes the concept of "ecosickness" to pinpoint environmentally induced somatic afflictions. Houser formulates a transcorporeal "sickness", preferring the relational connotations of this word to the alternatives – "disease" and "illness". According to Houser, "if disease is synonymous with diagnosis and illness with personalized experience, sickness is a relation" (11). Houser names "ecosickness" as a "pervasive dysfunction; it cannot be confined to a single system and links up to the biomedical, environmental, social, and ethicopolitical; and it shows the imbrication of human and environment" (Houser 11). In this way, *Waste Tide* is also a narrative of ecosickness in that the migrant workers, including the heroine (Mimi), are direct victims of ecosickness: "The fine white powder generated by the machines stuck to her skin, where the grains seemed to embed themselves deep in her pores, irritating and rash-inducing, and she could neither wash the particles away nor scratch out the resulting itch" (72). But being exposed to the toxic chemicals is part of her daily work:

> Mimi widened her nostrils and gave a light whiff—she didn't dare to breathe in too much of the fumes—the smell was sweet, pungent, irritating to the nose, and she felt as though maggots were wriggling in her throat. Mimi quickly dunked the lit plastic piece into water, and a column of smoke rose up. Gagging, she tossed the piece into the bucket labelled "PPO." Here in Nansha Village, Mimi was required to process tens, even hundreds of buckets of plastics trash like this daily. After a full day's work, it sometimes seemed that she threw up

more than she ate. (70)

Mimi's prevalent dis-ease is a feature of her experience of working in Guiyu, like many others who are employed in the industry. However, psychophysical sickness is not recognized in economic considerations. In the story, the bosses would rather employ workers than machines due to the high expense of "electronic noses": "The instrument might break down and require repairs, while workers could simply be sent home with a few yuan if they fell sick, not even requiring medical insurance" (70). Ecosickness narratives do not only draw attention to the environmental–somatic dis-eases but also attend to the readers' affective response. It opens a terrain to investigate bodily feelings of the extratextual, material world of people who live with/in waste, as well as the feelings of characters in the textual world, and the readers' responses. Although toxin-induced sickness is a widespread symptom of slow violence, it is hard to quantify. Only the most serious cases can be medically diagnosed and considered, so ecosickness narratives become important for registering the complexity of these phenomena.

When Kaizong befriends Mimi, "he saw the pallid, sickly complexions of the young women and their rough, spotted hands, the result of corrosive, harsh chemicals." Growing up in the United States, Kaizong is familiar with environmental illness, and he can imagine "the particles of heavy metal stuck to the walls of her blood vessels," and "her deformed olfactory cells and damaged immune system" (115). Like Mimi, thousands of waste workers in Guiyu are treated like low maintenance machines, working tirelessly for wages unworthy of their toil. In reality, according to studies, residents and migrant workers in Guiyu suffer from more frequent cases of cancer and various chronic health issues, such as "skin damage, headaches, vertigo, nausea, chronic gastritis, and gastric and duodenal ulcers" (Huo et al. 1113). Research conducted in 2011 demonstrates that pollution of e-waste also caused high risk of adverse birth outcomes in Guiyu, such as stillbirth (four times higher risk than that in Xiamen) and health damage of newborn babies (Xu et al. 94). Although these scientific statistics show the adverse connections between e-waste pollution and human health, the quantitative documentation is not enough to register the prevalent, longitudinal, adverse transcorporeal impact of the toxins on human bodies and people's lived experiences. Narratives of individual experience, fictional or documentary, capture the affective dimension that catalyzes a "transcorporeal ethics" (Alaimo 3). Based on ecosickness writing in contemporary American fiction, Houser maintains: "The human body is a stage on which environmental risk scenarios play out, resulting in greater attention to how marginalized populations like the urban poor, people of color, and indigenous groups bear a disproportionately significant burden of those threats" (10). In Guiyu, it is the rural migrant workers whose bodies

are under threat from toxins and pollutants.

3.4.2 The "Heart of Darkness" of Technology Development

Ecosickness reminds us of the perpetual permeation between humans and more-than-human existence, but slow violence – its social aspect – reveals to us the socioeconomic inequality both within and across national borders. *Waste Tide* does not just sketch realistic details of people living in the actual global e-waste recycling industry, but also provides strong affective narratives that compel readers to rethink the ethical issues surrounding technology, consumer society, and globalization. The exploitation of nature and of underprivileged people is displayed in Xialong, the rural migrants' living area in the novel. Standing in front of the stone gate of Xialong, Scott recalls Dante's lines written on the entrance to Hell: "*Per me si va ne la città dolente, per me si va ne l'etterno dolore, per me si va tra la perduta gente.*" (Through me the way to the city of woe, Through me the way to eternal pain, Through me the way among the lost) (32). It is a place that resembles the living Hell (Inferno) in Dante's *Divine Comedy*, and Silicon Isle (硅屿, Guiyu) in Chinese also sounds like "the ghostly domain" (鬼域, guiyu). (Song, "Representations of the Invisible" 560) The gate of Xialong prescribes both a physical place and a symbolic space that is untouchable to the urban consumers who produced the waste.

During China's "national rejuvenation," millions of rural laborers who were made redundant on the land become principal human forces in big and small cities without due citizenship, proper housing, or medical care (Solinger 155). Like many ghettoized urban peripheries in the Third World countries such as Brazil, Cuba, or India (Davis, "Planet of Slums" 60), the squalid shantytown of Xialong segregates the "wasted lives" from the affluent urbanites. Such "compartmentalization by class" as well as compartmentalization of space (Buell, "Writing for an Endangered World" 40) illustrates the prominent rural–urban inequalities in China's economic rise. As Pellow notes: "In fact, all environmental injustices are the result of a combination of racial and class (among other) inequalities" (Pellow 53).

Waste Tide questions the inequality behind the global capitalism that makes the ghostly "Silicon Isle" by introducing the wealthy American entrepreneur Scott Brandle to the e-waste slums. The migrant workers stopped to look at him for they "were confused as to why this well-dressed laowai would appear here, like some vision of Jesus of Nazareth passing through waves of heat, clouds of toxic miasma, and streets full of filth" (32–33). The biblical scene of a Messianic Jesus is purposefully evoked to emphasize the racial and national elements in the global socio-economic inequalities, while also foregrounding the neo-colonialism which enables the unidirectional

transfer of hazardous e-waste. The fact that the poor in the Global South live in the pollutants and waste discarded by the rich, as Pablo Mukherjee comments, is "the historical condition of unevenness" that "is felt and lived as a toxic environmental condition – as the condition of postcoloniality itself" (90, qtd. In Harrison 3). The exporting of toxicity looms behind the celebrated environmental success story of recycling in the West, and the disproportionate ecological toll of the alleged recycling industry provides a prism to reflect upon the slow violence that belies the global political economy.

Ecosickness illustrates anxiety about toxic pollution and is a new concept that should be part of the toxic discourse. However, the toxic discourse misses the real target if it does not address the phenomenon of slow violence. Although Buell is aware of the conflicting and sometimes opposing standpoints between rich and poor nations, or between industries and individuals, he still assumes toxic discourse acts as a "common denominator," "a shared vocabulary," and "a shared concern" (34). Buell adds that "the eloquence of testimony of ordinary citizens' anxiety about environmental degradation can have an influence on public policy, especially when the media are watching" (53). Yet Buell's position might seem overly optimistic since, as Rob Nixon reveals, environmental resistance within developed countries has done little to prevent waste accumulating in the developed world. Western corporate and institutions (including the World Bank) have chosen to export toxic waste for it is a "double gain" [148] – cheaper than processing in-country, while also easing "the growing pressure from rich-nation environmentalists who were campaigning against garbage dumps and industrial effluent that they condemned as health threats and found aesthetically offensive" (Nixon 2).

Because "exploitation of humans and the environment is a unified practice and is the foundation of racism and class inequalities," it has become "a cornerstone of modern nation-building itself" (Pellow 5). The character of Mimi in *Waste Tide*, coming from the most vulnerable social stratum, identifies with the jellyfish that are born in toxic water near the Tide Gazing Bay. These jellyfish were born in the toxic water near a power plant, where they have mutated. Even so, the jellyfish are freely sucked into the power station's pumping system where they die. Mimi, who is shocked by the situation, questions the cruel negligence of the owners and authorities. A local boatman answers: "They can't even afford to care about human lives, let alone the lives of jellyfish." (80) This conversation leaves Kaizong hesitant about what he was taught – he had believed that the jellyfish would grow stronger, adapting to the harsh environment, and that the pollutants and overheated water would serve as "the

[148] "I think the economic logic behind dumping a load of toxic waste in the lowest-wage country is impeccable and we should face up to that … I've always thought that countries in Africa are vastly under-polluted; their air quality is probably vastly inefficiently low compared to Los Angeles … Just between you and me, shouldn't the World Bank be encouraging more migration of the dirty industries to the Least Developed Countries?" Lawrence Summers, confidential World Bank memo, December 12, 1991 (qtd. in Nixon, "Slow Violence" 1).

impetus for the revolution of the species" (80). He realizes that Mimi is a victim of just that type of logic. Readers who are concerned about animal welfare might be dissatisfied with *Waste Tide*, for the novel does not give much attention to the nonhuman existence. However, Anthropocentric violence against nonhuman lives is a major concern in some of Chen's other stories, such as "Balin" (2015) and "The Year of the Rat" (2009)[149]. *Waste Tide*, on the other hand, is more concerned about the problem of slow violence, and the uneasy relationship between environmental protective actions and uneven global socio-economic development. As Mimi exclaims: "what kind of parents leave their babies in such a dangerous, poisonous place? Don't they care about their children?" (80)

The novel also foregrounds the harm brought by the military-industrial complex, which compels the readers to reflect upon the use of technology in the modern military. Mimi's body and mind is ravaged by the smuggled military e-waste, which alludes to the dark history of military nerve agents. Even the jellyfish in Tide Gazing Bay connote the "jellyfish babies" born in the aftermath of the American nuclear tests on Marshall Island. This notorious testing program brought both immediate and long-term devastation on the indigenous people, depriving them of their personal health, their offspring, and their homeland. Ecosickness disperses throughout time and generations as one of the most inhumane effects of slow violence. The transient life of the colorful jellyfish in Guiyu resembles the jellyfish babies that are described as "the most colorful, ugly things you have ever seen" that "only live for a few hours. When they die, they are buried right away. They do not allow the mother to see this kind of baby because she will go crazy. It is too inhumane" (Keju-Johnson, qtd. In Ishtar, 24). The health hazard brought by e-waste evolves into a most unnerving scene in Chen Qiufan's posthuman imagination of military technology. The criticism is unequivocally directed towards the United States, known for its military-industrial complex and for the use of the latest technology in several regional wars, such as Agent Orange in the Vietnam War, depleted uranium in the Gulf War, and carpet bombing in the Iraq War.[150] The global "military and economic domination" of the United States, as Fredric Jameson puts it, provides the infrastructure or base for postmodern culture, and "in this sense, as throughout class history, the underside of culture is blood, torture, death, and terror"(5).

Straight after Scott's arrival in Xialong, he witnesses an accident where a worker is killed by a military robot hand. The robot hand is made of a unique, hardened alloy manufactured by Foster-Miller, Inc., an American-

[149] "Balin" was first published in Chen Qiufan's story collection *A History of Future Illnesses* (*Weilai bing shi*, 2015), it is translated by Ken Liu in *Clarkesworld* magazine in April 2016. "The Year of the Rat" was first published in *Science Fiction World* (*Kehuan shijie*) magazine in 2009, and its English translation can be found in *Invisible Planet: Contemporary Chinese Science Fiction in Translation* (2016).

[150] Rob Nixon proffers an elaborate analysis of the slow violence in the US-led military industry in his chapter "Ecologies of the Aftermath: Precision Warfare and Slow Violence" (See *Slow Violence*).

owned military robotics company. The man is clasped in the robot's hand by his neck when it accidentally triggers. He died by overheating, in excruciating pain. His colleagues attempted to come to his rescue with a plasma-cutting torch, not knowing that the material was impervious. Suddenly, "the robot claw loosened with a loud bang. Everyone jumped. Then the man's crushed head drooped to the ground" (38). The horrific scene is an instance of what Buell terms "gothification," which "becomes most lurid when the victim never had a choice" (Buell, "Writing for an Endangered World" 42). The man clasped by military e-waste is allegorical of the uncanny encounter between human and machine created by military technology. Indeed, in this incident, the only way to stop the machine is by connecting to the control board through a propriety interface, but nobody had the necessary tool. The situation captures the Catch-22 of technological progress.

3.5 Displacement: Nostalgia and Solastalgia in Guiyu

To fully comprehend the nature of slow violence in the waste processing industry we must recognize the crude materiality of waste, yet information or statistics cannot espouse ethical consideration without narratives that "move" and "affect" people. Because "emotions are the instruments with which personal, social, and ethical attachments are built or come undone" (Houser 24), ecosickness narratives explore through affect to draw attention to toxicity and awaken environmental commitment in our time. Affect theory derives from Spinoza's philosophy and focuses on the "in-between-ness", or "the capacity to act and be acted upon" (Gregg& Seigworth 1). This is pertinent to our always and already "bio-mediated" bodies in the case of ecosickness. The rediscovery of affect is informed by recent developments in cognitive psychology, artificial intelligence, and media theory, which promote a comprehensive understanding of social phenomena (Angerer 8). In a way, understanding affect helps reconcile the fissure between empirical science and cultural studies. In this thesis, I use affect to refer to bodily sensations together with the more cognitively processed emotions. My investigation of the affective dimension of ecosickness is presented as a prerequisite for critiquing slow violence.

Empirical studies have observed that narratives about inhabiting a contaminated environment were characterized by repressed feelings, such as "outrage, acquiescence, impotence, denial, desperation" (Edelstein 11–13). These negative and often stifled feelings show how people's lives are impinged by aggravated pollution and socioeconomic predicament. Sianne Ngai argues that the age of mechanical reproduction makes affect publicly visible, as a kind of innervated "animatedness" – with both intentional and unintentional aspects (31). In the three

stories here, the predominant feelings are not highly animatable (or agitable) affect, but stifled feelings, including depression, anxiety, loss, mourning, nostalgia, and solastalgia. These feelings of psycho-terratic dis-eases are important in understanding the experience of people stuck in socio-economic inequalities of slow violence. What strikes the reader the most is the prevalent feeling of displacement in these texts, which challenges the narratives of *xiangchou* (and nostalgia) in the texts. The following section analyzes the affective narratives of displacement in texts of ecofiction, especially *Waste Tide* and "The Smog Society."

3.5.1 *Waste Tide*: Seeking *Xiangchou* in a Fast-urbanizing Society

Waste Tide exposes the mixture of nostalgia and solastalgia that has been a persistent theme in this thesis, and where each of these emotions annotates a certain aspect of displacement. Kaizong and Mimi, though from distinct backgrounds, share the common symptom of displacement in Guiyu. Even before being infected by the neuro-virus, Mimi suffers from ecosickness, experiencing the symptoms of stress and anxiety: "She couldn't control the state of tension life on Silicon Isle has caused in her; even while sleeping, she could feel twinges of pain from her stiff back. Mimi has to constantly remind herself to adjust her breathing to relax her body" (92). Mimi's "state of tension" is clearly a state of affective discomfort beyond her conscious control. Such omnipresent ecosickness is elusive, propelling her to take the xenophobic hostility of the locals as a plausible reason for her unease. However, what she suffers is slow violence that is more radical than social isolation. As a migrant worker, Mimi lives in a condition of displacement, and her uneasiness combines a feeling of homesickness with unnameable physical afflictions. In Silicon Isle, Mimi becomes addicted to an electronic drug called "Halcyon Days," which soothes her with transient sensations that resemble feelings of homecoming.

> The world, seen throughh the glasses, took a sepia tone, as though bathed in a sunset, but subtler; the outlines and edges of everything blurred a bit and sparkled; a powerful emotional torrent surged out of her heart, as though a long-buried underground spring had been tapped. Abruptly, she understood that she was experiencing the taste of nostalgia.
>
> Although the rational part of her mind knew that she was still in Silicon Isle, everything around her had changed to be filled with the flavour of yesteryear, as if two points in space-time had been folded and merged into one. The sky, the trees, the earth, and even the trash seemed to have been given new life, radiating a warm, lovely feeling.

> Mimi felt that her mother was right next to her, holding her—somehow she was once again a child—and caressing her; she could smell the faint fragrance of her mother, like bamboo leaves. There was no more anxiety, no more tension; she wanted to immerse herself in this hallucinatory sensation forever. (93–94)

"Halcyon Days" proffers the embodied feeling for Mimi of being brought back to her childhood experience of being at home. The unbearably squalid environment in Guiyu, when filtered (or screened) by nostalgia, precipitates the affect associated with home, as if her enlivened memory of her childhood hometown transfigures the place she is now situated. However, "Halcyon Days" is only a painkiller, and the soothing ambiance of her childhood hometown an illusion, because her hometown had in fact lost all trace of that happy domesticity due to economic difficulties. (As the story indicates, Mimi's father had been working in a faraway city for years and the family relationship had also become estranged.) Without the nostalgia sustained by the electronic drug, Mimi suffers from the complex of an unfulfilled desire for returning to childhood, and feelings of insecurity, tension, and distress.

Mimi becomes the direct victim of the slow violence of ecosickness and solastalgia due to the patriarchal, capitalistic economic order. The systematic inequality is reflected and reinforced by technological applications. The rich people in *Waste Tide* change prosthetics much as we would now change phones, using them to experience augmented satisfaction or stimulation. There is also a black market in illegal electronic drugs for "those [like Mimi] desperate to escape reality or yearning for stimulation, most of them the poor of the third world, sought them out eagerly" (94). However, the painkilling electronic drugs recoil painfully on the desperate users: "Every downloaded dose lasted only five minutes, because, supposedly, extended use could damage the user's vestibular system." In the transient bliss of "Halcyon days" Mimi faints, and as she gradually regains her consciousness, she realizes that "everything cruelly fell back into the dull, banal, ugly, and acrid here and now" (94). Among the affect-inducing digital drugs, "Halcyon Days" appeals to Mimi by offering the sensation of nostalgia, which mitigates the effects of a world of augmented reality.

What Mimi seeks is peace of mind, and in this way she shares a similar motivation with Kaizong, the novel's more conventional root-seeking hero. As a Chinese-born American migrant, he has always found himself a loner and an outsider, caught between dissonant spaces and time: "It was as if two film reels had been forcefully edited together in a montage, consciously or otherwise, jumping over the time in between" (46). Compelled by a perpetual sense of detachment, Kaizong chooses to major in history, which to him is a safe "world separated from

reality by time" (47). But he harbors a longing to revisit his childhood hometown, Guiyu: "When he saw the job listing offered by TerraGreen Recycling, he had clicked 'Apply' without hesitation, compelled by a desire he had long suppressed." (47) Apart from Kaizong's longing to return, he also wants to bring the "superior technology and management experience" of the multi-national company to Guiyu to make the latter a better place: "He believed that the effort would allow him to feel that sense of belonging, to recover that sense of being present in the world, and even, he hoped, to repair the growing estrangement between himself and his parents" (47). Kaizong's feeling of *xiangchou* links this posthuman story with the rural writing tradition in modern Chinese literature, which discloses the text's concern about the rural-urban bifurcation in contemporary China.

Chen Qiufan discloses in an author's afterword that Kaizong's nostalgia echoes his own experience.[151] Chen moved to Beijing for university and then settled there, and what he has experienced mirrors the millions of Chinese who have migrated from the rural regions to the expanding cities in the past few decades – except that Chen is among the fortunate few to have received elite education at China's top university (Peking University). Having been away from his hometown in Shantou, Guangdong Province for over 10 years, he writes: "nowadays, being in my thirties, I can deeply sympathize with the old saying: 'you become nervous when coming closer to your hometown'" (258). Through Kaizong's homecoming and maturation, Chen is also exploring his own hometown attachment and reflecting on the rapidly transforming society. With a major in Chinese literature, Chen is not unaware of *xiangchou* as a classical (and modern) Chinese literary tradition, yet his own novel exceeds the confines of this writing mode. Chen expresses the trademark solastaglic realization that the "home" is now irretrievably changed, swept away by the powerful forces of post-reform China:

> [A]part from my parents' love and the taste of local food, everything else has changed, it becomes homogenized, like all the other fast-developing cities and towns in this country: it becomes polluted, congested, full of impatient and avaricious atmosphere, and insecure feelings… [T]he landscapes in my childhood memories have been completely torn into ruins in constant demolition[152]. (258–259)

[151] I asked Chen Qiufan in an online talk about where the protagonists' ostensible nostalgia comes from. He replied: "It was from my personal experience I believe. I always feel like an outsider no matter where I am." Song Mingwei. "What Remains invisible when Chinese sci-fi enters global vision?" (Hosted by Song Binghui), Chinese Comparative Literature Talk Series, Tencent Meeting, 2020.8.29, 9:00–11:00 am. (Chen Qiufan was among the audience and joined the Q&A session after the talk.)

[152] "十二年过去了，似乎只有父母的恩情和舌尖上的味道是不变的，而故乡的其他一切都变了，变得与这个国家里其他成百上千个高速发展的城镇一样，污染、拥堵、浮躁、拜金、不安全感……光鲜崭新的外立面包裹着千篇一律的建筑，而童年的记忆随着一个个巨大的'拆'字化为废墟，消弭在烈日与暴雨下。" (Translations are mine, so are the other quotes from Chen's "Afterword.")

While pining over the demolished landscapes, Chen Qiufan does not suggest restoring these buildings. As he further specifies, the mourning is really directed to the collective memory that is preserved in the materiality of the old buildings. (Thus, restoration is futile since the social world it housed cannot be brought back.) His reflection upon the wreckage caused by urbanization and development characterizes a reflective nostalgia (in Boym's terms). As a modern nostalgic subject living in a fast-forwarding society, he identifies the "hometown" as a locus of irreversibly lost temporality when its material carrier has been eradicated: "my hometown has already vanished in its physical sense, it only exists in my memory as an ineffaceable period of time[153]" (258).

Indeed, narrating the "hometown" becomes the only way to preserve it: "This is 'a non-existent hometown' constructed with words and images, it does not just belong to me, it belongs to everyone who passionately remembers and searches for his or her hometown[154]"(259). However, David Der-wei Wang's "imaginary nostalgia" reminds us that the retrieval of the *authentic* hometown through narratives of *xiangchou* is deceptive, despite the author's sincerity, since there will always remain an unmendable "gap between the words and the world, memory and desire, history and originary being" (112). Still, Chen's gesture of nostalgia is as important as the nostalgic object itself. In the production, circulation, and reproduction of *xiangchou* narrative and emotion, what the hometown was becomes less important than the shared longing. *Xiangchou* shines through the rapid modernization in China against its backdrop of urbanization, demolition, and constant construction – symptomatic conditions of the acceleration era.

That Chen's historical consciousness is equivocal, can be seen in Kaizong's training as a historian, albeit one who has begun to doubt history's capacity to retrieve what matters from the past. He reflects at one point that "history is the process through which events are bleached of their emotional color" (51). Upon their arrival in Guiya, Kaizong and Scott Brandle are taken to the town's museum. The museum presents a linear history of Guiyu's modern "progress" from an agrarian society (fishing and farming) to an industrial town ready for the information age. For Kaizong, with its well-rehearsed success story of Guiyu, the museum is "too bright, too clean," and glosses over the reality of toxic contamination, ecosickness, and slow violence. As Kaizong reflects, in the official history in Guiyu, "there was no Basel Convention, no dioxins and furans, no acid fog, no water whose lead content exceeded the safe threshold by 2,400 times, no soil whose chromium concentration exceeded the EPA

153 "我的故乡已经从这个物理世界上永远地消失了，它只存在于我的记忆里，代表了一段不可磨灭的时光。"
154 "这是一座用文字和想象力创造出来的'不存在的故乡'，它不仅仅属于我，也属于每一个热爱、怀念并追寻自己故乡的人。"

limit by 1,338 times," and of course, "nothing about the men and women who had to drink this water and sleep on this soil" (22). It is history without humans. The mandate of development mythology is subverted in Kaizong's historicist vision, in which displacement, psycho-terratic distress, and ecosickness are foregrounded.

3.5.2 "The Smog Society": Nostalgia, Solastalgia, and Depression

As Patrick Colm Hogan observes: "story structures are fundamentally shaped and oriented by our emotion systems" (*Affective Narratology* 1–2). Hogan's affective narratology helps us to note that Chen's "The Smog Society" and *Waste Tide* tell stories about the characters' experience of displaced living in a seriously contaminated environment. In both stories, it is the feelings of nostalgia and solastalgia that determine the characterization and storyline. Chen Qiufan's stories about living with/in waste and pollution provide significant texts to unravel the multiple implications of solastalgia.

In *Waste Tide*, Mimi's psycho-terratic dis-ease is treated by an electronic drug that sustains hometown nostalgia. In "The Smog Society" (霾 2010), the protagonist, a middle-aged man named Lao Sun, lives in perpetual nostalgia and solastalgia in Beijing. In his monotonous retired life smothered by smog, he constantly revisits his memories of his late wife, who was clearly trying to elicit conversations from the increasingly reticent husband before she committed suicide. It is clear that both of them suffer from undiagnosed depression. The narrative oscillates between vivid flashbacks of the couple's past conversations and the monochrome, gloomy present: "Strange how the present seemed so blurry when he could see and hear everything from his memories so clearly. Sometimes, they'd play over and over in his mind. No wonder they said old people got nostalgic." (427) Clearly both Lao Sun and his wife suffered from serious psychological problems living under serious air pollution, and lingering on the nostalgic memories of the past becomes a ritual for both Lao Sun and his wife.

> "The sky was always blue back then, and the clouds were white. There weren't so many buildings. There were big paulownia trees on both side of the road, and when the wind blew, their leaves would rustle, sha sha. You'd take me nice places on your bike. There weren't so many cars back then, either. The roads were so wide and open, you could see all the way from one side to the other. The sun wasn't nasty. There were birds and cicadas. We'd ride to the city outskirts and lay down on the grass wherever we liked. It felt so good. Lao Sun, you remember, right?"

"Mm." (430)

The story correlates the ecosickness induced by serious smog problems with other forms of intimate loss. Both Lao Sun and his wife's depression is exacerbated by the omnipresent pollution, which also causes a feeling of alienation: "For Lao Sun, aside from bronchitis, acute emphysema, asthma, pharyngitis, strokes, and the other physical ailments, the most immediate consequence of smog was the sense of removal from the world" (425). His wife's recollection of the "good old days", narrated in the past tense, haunt Sun in his post-work life. The strong nostalgic tone underpinning the narrative is less a "structure of feeling", in Raymond Williams' terms, than a "Band-Aid" for what has been lost during the country's economic development over the last four decades.

The story depicts a dismal world where air pollution stifles and segregates people living under a dome. Everyone is obstructed by masks and everything is blurred by the thick, polluted air, which isolates people from each other and from their surroundings: "The detachment, the numbness, the estrangement, and the apathy now all had an obvious physical excuse for existing" (425). In addition to the high-rise modern "concrete forests", the smog also contributes to breaking people into alienated, separate units, resembling helpless tiny "parasites burrowed into the smog" (420). The couple miss the opportunity to have a child because Lao Sun wants to wait until their economic conditions get better and they move somewhere with a better environment. However, he realizes too late that "by the time you earn all your money and get all the things you ought to have, some things are lost forever" (427).

Lao Sun joins an NGO named "The Smog Society", attracted by its claim that: "Smog Causes an Increase in City Residents' Depression Rates" (425). He becomes a volunteer air quality surveyor, and The Smog Society later submits to the government a comprehensive research report on the causal relations between smog and mental health. However, a week later the organization is mysteriously disbanded. Meanwhile, rumors about the smog start to spread: "some said that the smog above the city was actually an enemy country's new climate-altering weapon, while others said it was a side effect of their own country's new secret weapon tests gone wrong." Still, some other theories take the smog as "a massive gaseous life form" that is causing calcium loss in human bones. All these theories are later decried as rumors, and the government punishes the rumor-spreaders, pledging to "return blue skies to the people" in five years. The Smog Society's report disappears without a trace.

This story is prescient when read in parallel with Chai Jing's self-funded documentary "Under the Dome" (穹顶之下, 2015), which raised nationwide public concern about the aggravating air pollution in China before it

was banned – four days after its release.[155] In this respect, the smog in Lao Sun's city also denotes the detachment from the truth due to censorship. At the end of the story, accepting that "smog is caused by how we feel (霾由心生)," Lao Sun dresses up as a clown and performs for the children in a kindergarten. Basking in the children's happy laughter, Lao Sun is overcome by nostalgic memories: "Something had trickled down his face and into his mouth, salty." He plays the song his wife used to ask him to sing, feeling "the smog seemed to be thinning too" (433).

Comparing to Lao Sun's nostalgia about the past (in mixture of solastalgia), both Kaizong and Mimi in *Waste Tide* are characterized by a type of nostalgia and yearning for emplacement. Indeed, it is this shared sense of solastalgia that draws them towards each other. After Mimi is discharged from the hospital, at the dinner table, she naturally puts in her rice porridge some chilli paste, the traditional food from her hometown, which is an epiphany moment for Kaizong:

> Kaizong looked at Mimi and seemed to finally understand the subtle contours of his own feelings for her: they were like a pair of prisoners in sympathy, captive of this land that didn't belong to them; they were strangers in Silicon Isle, and yet, they could not deny the complex web of feelings that tied them to the place. (191)

While nostalgia concerns the modern conception of temporality, solastalgia unravels "the active relationship between human emotion and the biophysical state of a given place" (Albrecht, *Earth Emotions* 32). Initially, Kaizong landed in Silicon Isle due to nostalgic complex, but soon he realizes that his nostalgic object – the yearned-for hometown – has been destroyed due to contamination. Kaizong is displaced in this here-and-now, and it is his solastalgia that urges him to stand on Mimi's side.

Amidst the twofold suppression of patriarchy, family clan and neoliberal capitalism, arises the first human cyborg Mimi-1, which almost conjures a class war where the subaltern rises against the systemic violence. However, the story does not escalate into a utopian posthuman revolution. As Jiang Zhenyu argues, "unlike their 'cyberpunk' predecessors (such as Philip K. Dick), for the Chinese sci-fi writers, it is the Chinese experience in reality, rather

[155] Released on 28 February 2015, "Under the Dome" gained over 200 million recorded viewings in merely two days. However, after initial acclaim from government officials, the government chose to smother the documentary and related discussions after four days. The documentary has had a resounding influence on the Chinese people's understanding of their daily suffering from smog. Although the government pledged to alleviate air pollution, censorship poses a major obstacle to environmental amelioration in China. Subsequently, maligning rumors appeared around Chai Jing, which rendered her unable to further her investigation into the smog issues.

than religion, humanism, sex, or drugs, that provides the counter-discourse against scientism and late capitalism" (33). It is the same on Kaizong's side in that the initial aura of the hometown is soon complicated and dispersed by reality. Silicon Isle is no longer habitable but a place of environmental contamination and social segregation. Although the family clan culture provides a sense of security to the locals, it also supports xenophobism, provincialism, and violence against the migrant workers. The local spirituality also shows its two-sidedness: whereas some customs console people when grieving for their deceased families, the local sacrificial ritual discloses the hypocrisy and cruelty of the patriarchs.[156]

Instead of an immaculate utopia, Silicon Isle is a place where premodern spirituality, modern vulgar materialism, and posthuman existence meet. In literary critic Yu Xuying's understanding, "hometown becomes a symbolic object through which Chen forestalls the posthuman era," a textual venue "to examine the human condition" (Yu 85). The conflicts between foreigners and locals, humans and posthumans are resolved in rather "human, realistic ways," (Ibid. 85) and eventually the business takeover is completed through the cooperation of capital and government. But I would also like to add that "hometown" is as significant as the (post)human imagination itself because the rural–urban inequality and slow violence are the most important aspects of the story in these encounters. More is left to explore here in Chen's examination of human conditions, especially in the affective faculties of (post)human existence, which will be discussed in the last section.

3.5.3 Rethinking the Human Conditions in the Age of Solastalgia and Acceleration

To conclude this chapter, I would like to expand on the text's representation of human existence in the age of solastalgia and technological acceleration. I follow Glenn Albrecht's understanding of the tension between terraphthoric and terranascient emotions to approach Chen's narratives of human emotions and socio-ecological issues. In the story, the age of solastalgia is also a time of technological acceleration, where humans are confronted with constant exposure to the thrill and the boredom of the digital age:

> […] their tension, anxiety, anticipation, confusion, satisfaction, suspicion, jealousy, anger refreshed rapidly while their glasses reflected the data jumping across their screens. Their looks were empty but deep, without thought of the relationship between their lives and values, yearning for change but also afraid of it. […] They all possessed the same bored, apathetic

[156] For instance, Kaizong learned about an unofficial history of Silicon Isle in which the famous Confucian scholar, Han Yu (768–824), practiced palirromancy, a ritual that takes living animals (or even people) as a sacrifice to forecast his career prospect (120–122).

face. (289)

Here, people enjoy unprecedented convenience, yet a surfeit of stimuli only leads to ennui and nihilism. The consumerist, amusing-to-death culture cannot fulfill humanity's shared longing for a meaningful life: "They were not happy, however, whatever the reason, it seemed that the capacity for joy had degenerated, had been cut off like an appendix, and yet the yearning for happiness persisted stubbornly like wisdom teeth" (290). Contrary to the consumerist hype of "for all tomorrow's parties,"[157] Kaizong is an embodiment of the nostalgic lifestyle. Because of his conservative parents, he lives an old-fashioned life, unlike his American friends who change prosthetics for entertainment, or people in Guiyu who pursue second-hand electronic devices. In a way, such nostalgic abstinence could counteract late capitalist consumerism. The transient journey from electronic products to e-waste exemplifies what Bauman configures about "liquid modern life"; that is, "a daily rehearsal of universal transience" (97). "A spectre hovers over the denizens of the liquid modern world and all their labours and creations: the spectre of redundancy. Liquid modernity is a civilization of excess, redundancy, waste and waste disposal" (97). The hazardous e-waste is generated as the halo of the "latest technology" wanes, and its dramatic degeneration from appealing gadget into toxic rubbish delineates the trajectory of this liquid modern life.

Towards the end of the story, it veers toward the shared natural disaster of an impending typhoon. Unfortunately, the degraded ecosystem of Guiyu makes it vulnerable to the typhoon. Contamination has altered the drainage system the ancients designed using the wisdom of *fengshui*. However, "the soil had grown poisoned, salinized, and decertified; and the ditches had collapsed, become clogged, or been repurposed for acid baths. The overflowing rainwater could no longer be smoothly diverted." As a result, "the surging currents threatened to devour and destroy everything," especially the residential area toward the center of the terrain (309). In front of the assembled worker protestors, divided by opinions, human Mimi debates with posthuman Mimi-1 feverishly about whether to rescue the local residents hit by the flood. When Mimi announces her decision to save the locals, regardless of the latter's unfair treatment of them, even the complainers "let out a held breath" with relief.

Mimi's choice can be seen, in Albrecht's terms, as a terranascent one. She says: "We're human, the same as them. We laugh, we cry, we pity, we sympathize. We can even risk our lives to rescue them" (314). Despite its resemblance to Hollywood-style platitudes, Mimi's sentient attempts to grasp the predicament of humanity in a

[157] In the novel, "for all tomorrow's parties" is the advertising slogan of SBT (Silicon-Biotechnology), a company producing prosthetics. "All tomorrow's Parties" was originally a song by The Velvet Underground and Nico in 1977. It was the title of a story by the renowned sci-fi writer William Gibson, "the father of cyberpunk". Chen is clearly paying tribute to Gibson here.

time of ecological apocalypse and technological acceleration. To Chen Qiufan, "love is neither quantifiable nor structured. Whether as a subjective reaction or the dynamic interaction between subject and object, love is always an existence in-between. However vividly the machine imitates, it cannot replicate feelings."[158] As Haiyan Lee puts it, sentient is central to human as one community: "As an inborn quality, sentiment puts all of humanity on a par, however divided they may be socially and politically. It is the lowest common denominator to which human beings can always appeal to argue for ultimate parity." ("Revolution of the Heart" 3) Therefore, conscience and compassion are foundational for humans to survive and prosper as a species, as posthuman Mimi-1 proclaims in a debate with her human doppelganger: "Pity, sympathy, shame, fairness… morality. These things have long been engraved in your posterior cingulate cortex, your frontal gyrus, and superior temporal sulcus, and the dorsolateral and ventromedial regions of your prefrontal cortex." Mimi-1 blames modern technology for destroying the biological substrate of the terranascient emotions, because "technology addicts indulging in overdoses of dopamine have destroyed their synaptic connections and become ill with moral failings." The posthuman diagnoses the human problem in human terraphthoric actions, accusing the zero-sum competition as "diseased thinking" and "a planetwide plague." However, its haughty prescription is equally problematic: "I chose this path to cure you so that the game may continue" (325–326). If technological indulgence lies in the crux, how can technological optimization fix the problem?

The posthuman regimen for the global plague of the heart is but another technological utopia, which has already accumulated devastating, inhumane history, such as the neurological torturing of the experimental subjects suffering from Project Waste Tide. In the end, the capricious posthuman Mimi-1 is exterminated in the sacrifice of Mimi. Mimi's biological life is saved, but "the minefield in Mimi's brain has been eliminated by this carpet bombing, the damage to her logical thinking, emotional processing, and memory was severe. Currently, she was the mental equivalent of a three-year-old" (344). If cyborg Mimi-1 emerges as a Third-World woman fighter who raises against patriarchy and neoliberal capitalism (Liu 215), its sacrificial death is also highly allegorical: The heat of the electromagnetic pulse that causes a "carpet bombing" in her brain resembles the baleful history and reverberating harm of slow violence in the Global South.

The waste workshops in Silicon Isle are finally taken over by corporations and administrations, who pledge

[158] "好莱坞的陈词滥调并没有过时，'爱'依旧是足够强大的力量。爱没有办法量化，也没有办法结构化。无论是自我个体的反应，还是主客体之间的动态结构，它都是双向互动的存在。而机器，永远只在模仿，即使模仿得足够像，也无法复制情感。" (Chen, Qtd in Yao) [Yao, Yujie (姚妤婕). "Chen Qiufan: Sci-fi is the anodyne to the Age of Acceleration (陈楸帆：科幻是加速主义时代的安慰剂)," Jiemian Xinwen, 15 Aug. 2020 https://www.jiemian.com/article/4830249.html Accessed Sept. 20, 2021.] Translations are mine.

to improve the working conditions in the factories. Meanwhile, Kaizong chooses to join Clotsfoot Blossom to track the mobile trash island in the Pacific, which is Sisyphean labor. The pandora's box of the posthuman era is snaped, yet a posthuman future is already lurking somewhere around the corner: the trash island seems to gain agency and plays hide-and-seek with the human hunters. Chen Qiufan's attitude towards the posthuman liberation is ambivalent: "I don't know what informed my choice of the ending, perhaps in my intellectual upbringing I also lack identification with the cyberpunk spirit, more probably I choose this ending because there are too many similar cases in reality."[159] In a way, his equivocal attitude about the "cyberpunk spirit" comes from what he perceives as "reality," but it is also revealing about his understanding of human affect and emotions.

Sailing out of Guiyu, Kaizong's nostalgic ailing persists – this time it is for Mimi, for the love that is lost and can never regain. Kaizong insists on wearing his damaged prosthetic eye[160] in remembrance of this artless young woman he met in Silicon Isle. With optical defects due to overheating, the eye has "a tinge of yellow-green" and thus "saw everything through the filter of Silicon Isle, a hue that belonged to Mimi, an imperfect beauty. He hoped to forever remember everything that had happened, like the scars on his face" (343).

Learning to love the imperfection of the world, as Chen Qiufan quotes from Slavoj Žižek[161], is the antidote to the disastrous world. When shoved by the whirlwind of global modernization, we humans can perhaps only anchor ourselves by looking back on the past so as to examine the present. If the material affluence of the human society is attained at the expense of ecological wellbeing, notes Glenn Albrecht, then "emotional and psychic security" will also be lost (10). Human dominance of the planet in the Anthropocene, propelled by terraphthoric impulses, is now evolving into an ecological and existential crisis. The three stories read in this chapter reveal how environmental pollution has impacted human lives from the perspectives of unprivileged people. Although these narratives foreground slow violence as the social symptom of ecological crises, they also highlight the importance of terranascent emotions, such as love, topophilia, nostalgia/ *xiangchou*, and solastalgia, hoping to call for concerted environmental actions.

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[159] "我不知道是什么促使我选择了这一结局，也许在我的精神资源中，也同样缺乏对于朋克精神的体认，但更可能的是来自现实太多类似桥段的潜移默化。"（Chen, Qiufan 陈楸帆. *Zai zhongguo zhi saibo bu pengke* 在中国，只赛博不朋克 ("In China, Be Cyber but not Punk"), New York Times Book Review, Aug. 8, 2013 https://cn.nytimes.com/books/20130808/cc08cyberpunk/ Accessed Aug 24, 2021.）

[160] He gets his first prosthetic eye when his right eye is injured accidentally by the crowd gathered for Mimi, and the eye is then controlled and damaged by Mimi-1 on the steamboat.

[161] Part Three, Furious Storm: "… you see perfection in imperfection itself. And that is how we should learn to love the world." (Žižek in *Examined Life*, qtd. in *Waste Tide*)

Conclusion

The environmental deterioration in mainland China, both urban and rural, poses many painful questions to me as I grew up in rural Anhui province, before moving to the large city of Hangzhou for university. The central question that I ask in this thesis is, what does the environmental imagination look like in post-2000 China, given the worsening environmental conditions that are everywhere visible to the Chinese people? As I have argued, a conception of nature and humanity's place within it that is grounded in cultural traditions of *tianyuan shanshui* (fields, gardens, mountains, waters) was sustained into the twentieth century through *xiangchou* narratives centered on an idealized "natural" home. My reading of contemporary ecofiction reveals that the rhetoric of *xiangchou* still casts its discursive, affective, and ideological spell on the "green imagination" in China. However, this spell is now dissolving as the psycho-terratic sense of displacement goes beyond the capacity of *xiangchou* to sustain the rural idyll. In short, China's green imagination, embedded in the cultural convention of *xiangchou*, reaches a crisis in the "age of solastalgia."

My inquiry into the eco-discourses of *xiangchou*, nostalgia, and solastalgia was developed through examples from the corpus of post-2000 ecofiction. Moreover, these texts were chosen to highlight three key ecological issues: extinction, deforestation, and pollution. My choice of texts was determined not just by their literary influence but also by their biocultural and geographical significance. With regard to species extinction problems, I concentrated on stories (and events) about charismatic apex predators (the South China tiger and wolves). In particular, the two novels about wolves that I analyze in Chapter One (Jia Pingwa's *Remembering Wolves* and Jiang Rong's *Wolf Totem*) highlight the changing feelings about these predators in China (from loathing to lamentation, from fear to solastalgia) and how these changes in affect signal a shift in the ecological imaginary at the turn of the twenty-first century.

To comprehend the impact of deforestation, in Chapter Two I examine Alai's intersecting histories in his *Hollow Mountain* series, set in the Gyalrong Tibetan region of Southwest China, one of the most ethnically and ecologically diverse regions in China. Alai's works document the historical alienation of ethnic villagers, the violence against trees and animals, and the lasting ecological loss caused by active deforestation in the region. That Alai deploys the discourse of *xiangchou* to rebut Sinocentric insularity is an intriguing aspect of his narratives of environmental injustice.

Finally, to approach the ubiquitous problem of environmental pollution in modern China, I turn in Chapter Three to three SF stories set in urban contexts (Beijing and the coastal South) in fictional near futures.

These places, situated at the prosperous economic forefront of China's integration into the global society, are also where contamination and slow violence intensify. Hao Jingfang and Chen Qiufan's stories use *xiangchou* as an affective thread to narrate the displaced experience of communities and ecologies made vulnerable by processes of industrialization and globalization. My thesis traces the socio-cultural, ethical, and biopolitical considerations in these ecofiction works.

My thesis attempts to show how contemporary Chinese ecofiction gives voice to the feeling of solastalgia, which is the feeling that comes from one's home disappearing during modernization. Solastalgia captures the particular living conditions of the Anthropocene that are no longer comprehensible through traditional discourses of *xiangchou* and nostalgia. Solastalgia is indicative of an embryonic "kind of feeling and thinking," in Raymond Williams' terms, that is yet to ossify as social consciousness and actualize revolutionary potential. ("Marxism and Literature"131–132). However, identifying these feelings (*xiangchou*, nostalgia, solastalgia) does not mean that they are easy to pin down (as ideologies are) or distinguish from each other, and much of this thesis has been concerned with teasing out their interrelationships by a close consideration of contemporary fictional works in which they feature. These works reveal that these feelings are often co-present with each other, and their relations are complex. The transmutation of nostalgia/*xiangchou* to the mixture of psycho-terratic feelings of displacement and distress (such as solastalgia) signals "changes in structures of feeling" (Ibid, 132) in contemporary China.

Through my case studies, I have developed the poetics and politics of *xiangchou* (and solastalgia) to configure the bioethical and biopolitical challenges in China confronted by an era of eco-degradation. If the overwhelming concern of the modernizing intelligentsia in late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century China was for new forms of human society, then the post-2000 ecofiction present a different crisis – the crisis posed by an ecological collapse – that challenges the humanist ideals of that earlier moment. Though still largely seen as "the study of humanity," contemporary Chinese literature now also turns its attention to the "ten thousand things (*wanwu*)" with whom humans cohabit. For instance, in Chapter One, the narrators in both stories about the wolves are both caught up in a stark dialectic of emasculated men and potent predators (wolves). Nevertheless, the message behind their ecological failings is clear. The existence of humans as a collective (species or nation) depends utterly on the thriving of nonhuman beings.

Moreover, my thesis has also foregrounded the particular concern that these texts have for environmental injustice. This injustice is also part and parcel of the social and political injustice in human society, which is in turn overdetermined by factors of gender, race, class, and geography. While global ecological crises occur on the colossal

scale that Timothy Morton calls the "hyperobject" (and confound human apprehension), environmental degradation also reveals itself in the form of immediate eco-disasters and insidious slow violence that permeates the daily lives of certain species and human communities. The ecofiction studied in this thesis reveals the different forms of slow violence in issues such as species extinction, deforestation, and pollution.

What my thesis has shown is that, as they document slow violence and environmental injustice, Chinese ecofictional narratives also employ, reconfigure, and contest *xiangchou*. In Jia Pingwa's *Remembering Wolves*, the feeling of *xiangchou* is mobilized to reveal the poverty (social, cultural, and ecological) in rural regions. Gao Ziming, far from a nature-loving modern hero, is a sickly urbanite desperate for a cure that he imagines will come from the authentic natural environment of his rural hometown. However, as it turns out, although the "hometown" is still there, it is now desolated by the extinction of the wolves that had given the people their identity. In both Jiang Rong's *Wolf Totem* and Alai's "Hollow Mountain" series, *xiangchou* narratives display the tensions between Han Chinese agrarian modernity (instrumental production) and the vulnerable ecosystems on ethnic minority lands. In *Wolf Totem*, converting the grassland into cropland and preventing the pastoral people from migrating their herds is exposed as ecologically disastrous, and the narrow perception of an idyllic rural utopia becomes problematic. In the "Hollow Mountain" series, when the local forests are stripped from the mountains, the animals lose their habitats, and the local communities also become ecological refugees suffering both economic ruin and solastalgic distress. In this case, Alai distinguishes the difference between various narratives of nostalgia (such as *huaijiu*, *xiangchou*, and *sixiangbing*) by revealing the power relations behind these discourses.

In Chapter Three, Chen Qiufan's *Waste Tide* vividly depicts the "wasted lives" of rural migrant workers made ecosick by toxic e-waste. Similarly, Hao Jingfang's "Folding Beijing" takes readers to the "nonplace" of a folding city, where the urban poor (the second generation of rural workers) continue to suffer from both social and environmental violence. But the radical quality of their psychophysical displacement renders these characters beyond the reach of a *xiangchou* they try to invoke.

The environmental crisis, as tackled in Chen Qiufan's *Waste Tide*, is predominantly an issue of global slow violence: overconsumption and the neo-colonialist exploitation of contemporary capitalism. Chen's stories figure the insidious contamination and health impact of toxic waste and elements (such as smog), by emphasizing the transcorporeal porosity of the body to the material world. In the new materialist framework, the global waste transfer is not simply a natural chain of the global economic order but demonstrates exactly where its problem lies. Toxic transfer from the Global North to the South (and from the urban to the rural or urban outskirts)

embodies the fundamental exploitation of local communities and lives. In this context, stories that represent the problems, and feelings about displacement (nostalgia, solastalgia, and depression) can convey "how it feels" to live in a toxic environment. Indeed, in a post-COVID world, the vulnerability and porosity of the body are even more pronounced, and waste production due to COVID is another inherent risk at the time of a global pandemic.

To bring a planetary vision to the contemporary Chinese ecological and cultural situation (and vice versa) is to understand the local in the global, and the global in the local. Environmental solutions need to attend to local and regional environmental imaginations, while also holding the bigger picture of environmental degradation in mind. In contemporary Chinese ecofiction, the rise of "earth emotions" (such as solastalgia) does not obliterate the operation of local emotions (such as *xiangchou*), but it does give readers a chance to pause before subscribing to the aesthetics of certain emotions (which are always politically and ethically charged). My thesis does not conclude that any particular emotion is, *a priori*, "green" or good. Rather, it suggests that recognizing and harnessing the political potential of "earth emotions" are significant tasks for environmental humanities scholars and science communication. The latest United Nations report (May 2022) highlights that four key climate change indicators (greenhouse gas concentrations, sea-level rise, ocean heat, and ocean acidification) have broken records in 2021, and related issues, such as food and water crises, extreme weather, and potential inter-species transmissions of new viruses, demand urgent political and economic action (the World Meteorological Organization). But such issues still only function in human deliberations to the extent that they become affectively coded. It is in this way that contemporary Chinese ecofiction offers possibilities to change the narrative of Chinese ecological imperilment.

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Appendices I: Images Cited

Figure 1.1 Partial Enlarged Detail of Zhou Zhenglong's photograph of the South China tiger (Photo used with kind permission of Prof. Liu Liyuan)

Figure 1.2 Global Tiger Distribution (Historical and Current), https://www.panthera.org/cat/tiger Accessed Jan. 16, 2022. (Credit: © www.panthera.org)

Figure 2.1 "Time Island" (Producer). Screenshot at 00:28, *Dingzhen de shijie* 丁真的世界 (*Dingzhen's World*), Nov. 26, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tvg5oNN0fug Accessed Jan. 16, 2022. (Photo used with kind permission of "Time Island" platform. Credit: © Time Island platform)

Figure 2.2 A simple map of the three traditional provinces of Tibet overlaid on a map of modern provincial boundaries of the People's Republic of China. (Credit: © Wikipedia Commons)

Figure 3 Gudin, Jean Antoine Théodore de Gihaut frère. *L'Incendie du Kent* https://www.rmg.co.uk/collections/objects/rmgc-object-140480 Accessed Jan. 16, 2022.
(Credit: © National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London)

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Appendices II: Copies of Publication (derived from the thesis)

National Extinctions: China, Australia and Narratives of Extinction

Fan Ni and Tony Hughes-d'Aeth

Abstract China and Australia have many differences, but each became nations in the modern sense in the early twentieth century. In this chapter, we explore the particular role that animal extinctions play in the respective national narratives of China and Australia. The connection between species extinction and nation might seem surprising at first, but in the national era, the environment is often seen as expressive of a national spirit or essence, and nationalism typically draws on the environment to provide a natural basis for its imagined unity. In this chapter, we compare environmental writing in China and Australia by focusing on two celebrated novels which detail extinction, Jiang Rong's *Wolf Totem* (狼图腾 Láng Túténg, 2004) and Julia Leigh's *The Hunter* (1999). Drawing on Ursula K. Heise's book *Imagining Extinctions* (2016), we propose that these two novels of the disappearing wolf—one Mongolian and one Tasmanian—are narratives of national extinction which give expression to 'hopes that a part of one's national identity and culture might be preserved, revived, or changed for the better if an endangered species could be allowed to survive or an extinct one could be recovered' (Heise, 2016, 49). Moreover, we also contend that extinctions increasingly take on a transnational significance, particularly in the case of novels such as *The Hunter* and *Wolf Totem* which, as well as being celebrated within their national contexts, became global novels (each adapted into films) and circulated in the global literary and cinematic systems.

Keywords Species extinction · Jiang Rong's *Wolf Totem* · Julia Leigh's *The Hunter* · National narratives

In the national era, the environment is often seen as expressive of some national spirit or essence, and nationalism typically draws on the environment to provide a natural basis for its imagined unity. In literary studies, the analysis of creative literature in environmental terms is known as eco-criticism, and it emerged in the

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United States in the 1980s, spreading quickly through the Anglophone world and then beyond, including East Asia in the 1990s. During this time, there was also an ecological turn within literature, with literary texts dramatising environmental problems with increasing frequency, attempting to deal with issues such as species and habitat loss, pollution and contamination, and more recently, climate change. So, in the contemporary period, we have a growth in both eco-writing and eco-criticism (Buell, 2001; Glotfelty 1996).

In this chapter, we would like to compare environmental writing in China and Australia by focusing on two novels which detail extinction, Jiang Rong's *Wolf Totem* (《狼图腾》*Láng Túténg*, 2004) and Julia Leigh's *The Hunter* (1999). We want to explore whether extinction has a particular *national* quality by comparing these two novels. Here, we are drawing on the proposition made by Ursula K. Heise in her book *Imagining Extinctions* that 'narrating the endangerment of culturally significant species becomes a vehicle for expressing unease with modernization processes' and that extinctions are used as a 'synecdoche' for loss within 'the cultural history of modernity' (32).

> [E]legiac stories about declining species often index histories of modernization and colonization … [In] extinction narratives … the loss of a particular species comes to stand in for the broader perception that human relationships to the natural world have changed for the worse. As such stories unfold, part of national identity and culture itself seems to be lost along with the disappearance of a nonhuman species … worries about nature, on one hand, and on the other hand, hopes that a part of one's national identity and culture might be preserved, revived, or changed for the better if an endangered species could be allowed to survive or an extinct one could be recovered. (48–49)

Heise cites Judith Butler's assertion in *Precarious Life* that we should view 'the obituary as an act of nation-building' (Butler, 24; qtd in Heise, 34). In that sense, species extinctions can be perversely sanctified as acts of national mourning. But as well as the way that extinction narratives function as what Fredric Jameson called 'national allegory', we also wish to consider whether it is possible that extinctions might also be increasingly taking on a transnational significance. This possibility is made more plausible by the fact that both *The Hunter* and *Wolf Totem*, as well as being celebrated within their national contexts, became global novels, and then global films, circulating in the global cultural sphere.

Wolf Totem is semi-autobiographical and draws on the experience of its author (Jiang Rong is the pen-name of Lü Jiamin) during the Cultural Revolution. The novel details the ambitious (and indeed disastrous) project of the Chinese government in the 1960s and 70s to turn the grasslands of Inner Mongolia into crop farms. The novel's narrator Chen Zhen is, like Lü himself, a man sent from Beijing to Inner Mongolia, where he lived with a nomadic Mongolian family. There, Chen becomes fascinated with the relationship that the Mongolian herders have with the grassland wolves, who are the apex predators in this bioregion. While the wolves would seem to be the natural enemies of the herders, instead (at least in the novel) they revere the animal and it forms an essential part of their spiritual life. As the story presents, they worship the wolf, as their totem. As the conversion of grasslands to farmlands gathers pace, the wolves themselves are also hunted into extinction from the inner

Mongolian plateau. In that sense, the wolves are significant not just for themselves, but as a metonym for a whole way of life, the ancient dispensation of human nomadic farming in the steppes of Eurasia.

Julia Leigh's novel *The Hunter* is set in Tasmania and also concerns the extinction of an ancient apex predator, the thylacine, known variously as the Tasmanian Tiger or the Tasmanian Wolf. The thylacine was the largest marsupial predator in Australia at the time of colonisation. It was once widespread in Australian but had become extinct on the mainland, probably around 3000 years ago, roughly coinciding with the arrival of the dingo. However, it survived in Tasmania, only to be driven to extinction by the arrival of European colonists, who exterminated the animal as a threat to livestock, in particular sheep. The last known thylacine died in 1936, though for a long time there were unconfirmed sightings, and the presence of the animal took on the quality of myth. In this respect, the case of the thylacine is quite similar to the extinction of wolves in Japan. The Hokkaido wolf became extinct in the late nineteenth century, while the last known Honshu wolf died in 1905, but sightings of these wolves continued throughout the twentieth century. Such 'ghost species', says Heise, exemplify the way that 'the extinction of a charismatic species is integrated in cultural history and become[s] a symbol of crisis' (39), that is, the crisis in identity caused by the alienating effects of industrial modernity. Leigh's novel is set in the present and follows a character identified in the text as 'M' who has been sent to covertly capture a thylacine on behalf of an unnamed bio-science company who wants to acquire the genetic material from this animal, again, for an undisclosed purpose. To mount his expeditions, M befriends a single mother, and her two children, at the foot of the ranges where the thylacine is thought to be still living. In the end, M does indeed find the thylacine, killing her and harvesting her reproductive organs.

There are significant differences between *Wolf Totem* and *The Hunter*. *The Hunter* is a slender, taut novel—almost a novella—written in a spare style, while *Wolf Totem* is lush and sprawling. While *Wolf Totem* was a runaway bestseller in China, *The Hunter* was only modestly successful as a publishing phenomenon. On the other hand, as literary fiction, Leigh's novel has received significant critical attention and is taught in universities and schools, and has attracted the attention of international writers like Toni Morrison, J. M. Coetzee, Don DeLillo and Hillary Mantel. *The Hunter* is widely admired as a penetrating study of the limits of the natural and for its exploration of the human–animal interface. *Wolf Totem*, by contrast, is considered a popular rather than an intellectual novel. And, despite its popular success, *Wolf Totem* has also been controversial. Some scholars praise the book's environmental concern because the story defends the indigenous knowledge of grassland ecological balance, showing how the state-decreed conversion of the grassland into cropland became a human and environmental catastrophe (Zhang, 2013; Lei, 2005; Li, 2013). However, other scholars have disparaged the book for showing dehumanising tendencies (Ding, 2011; Li, 2005), and the German sinologist Wolfgang Kubin (qtd in *Eastern Morning Post,* 2006) found the book to display a proto-fascist linkage of race and destiny.[1] Notable Mongolian writer Guo (2015) and some other scholars (e.g. Ye, 2006) have also disputed the ethnography in the novel, claiming there is no evidence that the wolf held a totemic place within the traditional belief systems of Mongolian nomads.[2]

Yet, while *Wolf Totem* and *The Hunter* are in many ways very different novels, there are also some striking parallels. Each of these novels stands out as probably the most significant eco-novel in their respective national literary cultures. Both books were adapted as successful films, with the film *Wolf Totem* released in 2015 (a Chinese-French co-production, directed by Jean-Jacques Annaud) and *The Hunter* released in 2011, starring the American actor Willem Dafoe as M. At the level of their narratives, both books, as has been noted, revolve around the extinction of an ancient apex predator which becomes suddenly inconvenient to new forms of human agriculture and is vanquished as a result. They are both, indeed, novels about wolves. Even though the thylacine, or 'Tasmanian Wolf', is a marsupial rather than a placental mammal, its resemblance to canine species is an arresting example of convergent evolution in which an almost identical body pattern evolves separately. Thus, in terms of the symbolic coordinates of settler Australia, the thylacine is a wolf and evokes the associations of that animal. More particularly, we might say that Leigh's novel, like Jiang Rong's, is concerned with a *totemic wolf*. Another aspect that *The Hunter* shares with *Wolf Totem* is the way that M's passage to the thylacine, just like Chen's passage to the wolf, is mediated by his adoption into a localised family. In each case, this host family causes a revaluation in the subject. In M's case, the family (Lucy and her two children) does not ultimately divert M from his ecocidal goal, but they do detain him and form a seemingly unwanted complication to his instrumental needs.

A less obvious similarity is that both *Wolf Totem* and *The Hunter* are *postcolonial* novels, where we understand 'post' to mean 'in the aftermath'. Kylie (2010) has drawn out the postcolonial dimension of *The Hunter*, even though it is not necessarily evident at first blush, and we return to this matter below. In the case of *Wolf Totem*, colonialism is not a lens which features prominently in the analysis of Chinese literature. But in *Wolf Totem,* colonisation does indeed form the novel's explicit content as it depicts the destruction of an indigenous people, their way of life and the natural world by an invading agricultural modernity. The point of witness is that of the humanitarian anthropologist, Chen, who is both an emissary of the invader and its critic. But Chen is also ethically complicated by his own pursuit of ethnographic knowledge, and despite his subjective misgivings, he can be understood to be conquering the indigene in a different way. He is not making off with their land, but their sacred knowledge; in short, their *totem*. In this sense, he does not seem so different from M in *The Hunter* who has been tasked with tracking and capturing the thylacine, and acquiring its genetic information. This element is exacerbated by a lengthy afterword in *Wolf Totem* in which the author claims that the wolf totem is not only a feature of Mongolian cosmology, but in fact the ancient (and now forgotten) totem of the Han Chinese people (See 'Rational inquiry: A lecture and dialogues on wolf totem'理性探掘: 关于狼图腾的讲座与对话 364–408).

Double Displacement: *The Hunter*

It is notable that *The Hunter* only deals in the very slightest terms with Indigenous Australians, when M is briefly sent musing on their fate by his encounter with a ring of blackened stones (57) in a remote part of the mountains. On the one hand, this is not especially surprising, since in fairness to Leigh and her story, *The Hunter* is taking place long after the convulsive colonial violence that raged through Tasmania in the 1820s to the 1830s, a time which many historians, and indeed contemporary witnesses, described as a war—the so-called Black War, or Tasmanian War. Unlike *Wolf Totem*, or indeed a later Tasmanian novel like Rohan Wilson's *The Roving Party* (2011), *The Hunter* is not a frontier novel. But, on the other hand, as a figure, M resembles quite closely the kind of frontiersman that is a common feature in the cultural imaginary of settler-colonial states like Australia, Canada and the United States. He is able to live and survive off the land, even in the harsh alpine regions of Tasmania's west—a modern day Daniel Boone. As Rob Nixon wrote in his review of *The Hunter* for the *New York Times*, M is 'an old-style frontiersman with a high-tech twist' (Nixon, 2000; qtd in Crane, 2010: 117). So, while we are not apparently on a frontier, in the colonial sense of this word, we do find ourselves in the company of a frontiersman.

This curious situation can be partially understood if we think of the close connection that exists in the Australian psyche between the thylacine and the Aboriginal Tasmanians. There are thought to have been from three to fifteen thousand Aboriginal people living in Tasmania at the time of colonisation in 1803, but the population collapsed dramatically and numbered only around 400 by 1835, and this had sunk to 47 twelve years later. When the Tasmanian woman Truganini died in 1876, it was reported across the world that the last Tasmanian Aborigine had died, and the race was extinct. For more than a century, the story of the Tasmanian people circulated as a sad, though inevitable consequence of history arriving on the doorstep of primitive peoples. This was still more or less how the matter was popularly conceived until the 1980s. However, in the past 40 years, there has been a substantial renaissance in Tasmanian Aboriginal culture, and the declared 'extinction' of this people was shown to rely on a very narrow and racialist conception of what constituted a people. Today, as many as 23,000 people identify as Tasmanian Aboriginals.

It is important to trace two key displacements that sit underneath the way Australians might read *The Hunter.* The first is the displacement of Aboriginal genocide onto the extermination of the thylacine. At the psychic level, there is a close connection between the fates of the thylacine and the Aboriginal Tasmanians. If, for instance, one googles the words 'Tasmania Extinction', the first result is the Wikipedia page, 'Aboriginal Tasmanians', and the second is the Wikipedia page, 'Thylacine'. In her discussion of Leigh's novel, Kylie Crane notes: 'Like the Tasmanian tiger, the Tasmanian Aborigine is a mythic being … both species widely believed to be extinct' (114). The second displacement that operates in *The Hunter* is the fact that Tasmania functions as a microcosm of Australia—as if the Tasmanian island was a miniaturisation and intensification of Australia as the island continent. So, while

human, animal and plant extinctions raged throughout Australia—and continue to—it is the Tasmanian situation that has become exemplary. The Australian Jewish comedian, Jonathan Safran, once said that Jews are just like everybody else … only more so. And, according to this same logic, Tasmania is just like Australia … only more so. Theirs is a difference, in other words, born of displacement. Just as Jews became the bearers of culture's excess (its abject remainder), Tasmania carries the excess of Australia. For example, Australia was settled as a penal colony, but it is in Tasmania where convictism is widely thought to have reached its apogee. This is also what explains the appearance of the 'Tasmanian Gothic' as a literary mode, first described by Jim Davidson in 1989, and since developed by critics such as Gerry Turcotte and Philip Mead. The gothic is a mode of excess in which cultural qualities that exceed official discourse re-emerge as supernatural and persecutory agents. We can see the mechanism of double displacement (Australia onto Tasmania, and Aboriginal genocide onto thylacine extinction) as a way of processing cultural excess. And it is in this way that *The Hunter* becomes a story of what we are calling 'national extinction'. By this we mean, a story in which the elimination of a species is made to talk to the limits of nationhood, and to its excluded excess.

Wolfology and National Character: *Wolf Totem*

One of the peculiarities about *Wolf Totem* is that the protagonist expresses his obsession with the wolves both as an environmental concern and as an 'obsession with China' (to borrow the term from Hsia Chih-tsing (or C. T. Hsia 夏志清 1971)), a deep, insistent concern with the fate of the Chinese nation. By singling out the 'obsession with China', Hsia wants to designate what he sees as 'a moral burden in modern Chinese literature' engendered by 'patriotic provinciality' and powered by a compensatory 'naiveté of faith' (Hsia, 1971: 536). Hsia regards the 'obsession with China' as a flaw which mars modern Chinese literature throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and precludes the writing from developing as a cosmopolitan critique which addresses 'the illness of modern civilizations'. Although Hsia's comments would certainly be contested in China and are based on a Western modernist paradigm, his observation helps pinpoint the ambivalences of *Wolf Totem.* Most particularly, Chen Zhen's enduring concern about the fate of the Chinese nation complicates the discussion about environmentalism, identity politics and cultural criticism. In joining both complexes, the demise of the wolf and the fate of the Chinese nation, the novel clearly displays the quality we are calling 'national extinction'.

In its graphic depiction of the ecological destruction that took place in the 1960s and 1970s, *Wolf Totem* does not just act as a plea for ecological preservation in the grasslands but also serves to reflect on Chinese modernity by reinitiating the discussion of its national fate, since this destruction took place in the name of national advancement. *Wolf Totem* is thus also a novel about 'Chinese national character (*guominxin* 国民性)', a popular topic in China since the late nineteenth century. The concept of 'national character' was introduced into China from Meiji Japan by Liang

Qichao (梁启超), a prominent Chinese intellectual and political activist.[3] Liang had fled to Japan after the failure of the Reform of the Wuxu ('100 Days' Reform') (戊戌变法) in 1898 (Lv, 2020 47).[4] In a famous series of essays, Liang spoke in favour of national renewal, addressing 'the renewed people' (新民) that have discarded the old morality and embraced the modernity that gave Western nations such a decided advantage (Liang 1902, qtd from Lu, 2020). The issue of 'Chinese national character' was developed by Lu Xun (Li Dongmu, 2019 25–26) and the generation radicalised in the May Fourth Movement. The issue of national character remains a persistent feature in the Chinese intelligentsia, with contributions such as Boyang (柏杨)'s *The Ugly Chinese* (《丑陋的中国人》, 1985), and Sun Lung-kee's (孙隆基), *The Chinese National Character From Nationhood to Individuality* (or *The Deep Structure of Chinese Culture*《中国文化的深层结构》, 1983, and republished in 2003) and *The Not-yet-weaned People* (《未断奶的民族》, 1996). National character was also at the heart of the recent and controversial bestseller *The Giant Baby's Country* (《巨婴国》, 2016) by the psychologist Wu Zhihong (武志红).

This concern with national character might also be described as postcolonial. While China was never formally colonised, it was forced to cede territory and sign blatantly unequal and exploitative treaties with Western imperial powers. The humiliation of this situation for an Empire that was used to thinking itself as endowed with a heavenly universality, caused a profound crisis which can be seen in the 'national character' debates. Thus, while it seems strange that Chen Zhen, the protagonist and narrator of *Wolf Totem*, and a youth from Beijing, would seek the 'cultural roots' of the Han Chinese in the Mongolian grasslands, the historical context of national humiliation offers an explanation. As noted, the novel concludes with a 'lecture' by Chen Zhen situated as an afterword to the main narrative. This lengthy tract is usually omitted from English translations of the novel. In this lecture, Chen Zhen explains that the ancestors of the Han Chinese, the *Huaxia* (华夏) ethnicity, were nomadic people like the ancient Mongols. But as they adopted agriculture, and then a feudal hierarchy, they lost their primitive 'wolfish spirit'. So, he reasons, it is only through emulating their primordial Mongolian kin, who have kept this ancient connection to the wolf, that the Han Chinese can regain their lost vitality. In an interview, Jiang Rong (with Ding Chenxi, Yingni, 2004), stated: 'I hope we Han Chinese can therefore realize that we are actually nomadic people's descendants. Han Chinese are both the descendants of the agrarian people and that of the nomadic people'. In the novel's lecture, Chen Zhen tells his listeners: 'Wolf totem is the most precious local spiritual resources for the contemporary Chinese to change its national character. "The sleeping lion of the Orient" will be really awaken and spirited because of the revival of wolf totem spirit'[5] (377).

In this way, Chen Zhen's *guominxin* revitalisation project in *Wolf Totem* gives new meaning to the Confucian saying called 'It is from the remote rural regions that one may be able to find the lost rituals in the court' (礼失而求诸野).[6] While the character 野 originally refers to periphery, rustic spaces remote from the centre of civilisation, in modern Chinese, 野 literally means 'wild' and 荒野 is the equivalent vocabulary for 'wilderness'. In Chen Zhen's *xungen* (root-seeking) pilgrimage, it is exactly the Mongolian grassland wilderness, with its elusive, enigmatic and potent wolves, that

is the source of his rejuvenation and, as he explains in his lecture, the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. This wolf totem, as Chen sees it, is the antidote for the ossifying rituals 礼 that have destroyed the vitality of the Han Chinese. Therefore, he argues, to catch up with the 'Western modern wolf' (西方文明狼), the Han Chinese need to preserve their minority Mongolian borderland in a primitive and 'natural' state. Chen sees himself as being carrying on Lu Xun's 'Outcry' (or *Call* to *Arms*《呐喊》) to modernise China. Also, like a physician, Chen feels that he has finally diagnosed the pathogen at the root of China's illness, which is the sheep-like conformity that has settled into the Chinese 'national character'. His prescription is to inject 'the wolfish blood of the Nomadic pastoralism' (游牧民族的狼性血液) (374) into a Han Chinese made soft by centuries of agrarian settlement.

Conclusion: Extinction and Comparative Critique

It remains to draw these two novels back together. Analysing them separately reveals seemingly distinct mobilisations of the concept of extinction. *Wolf Totem* seems the more openly ideological. Its faux-anthropology provides a relatively flimsy cover for an impassioned allegory of nationalist rejuvenation. Chen's vitalist account of Chinese national character is a highly tendentious characterisation of a complex history, and manifestly absurd in most respects. Nor does the fetishisation of the wolf and the 'wolfish spirit' as a proxy for subjective and national potency seem to have much in common with ecological principles of deference, interconnectedness and relationality.

On the other hand, the novel repeatedly highlights the counter-intuitive idea that wolves are central to life on the plains. The wolves would seem, for instance, to be the natural enemy of the nomadic pastoralists in that they prey sporadically on their herds. But in the novel, the herdsmen see the bigger picture in which the wolves also control populations of gazelles that would otherwise significantly reduce the pastures their sheep depend on. At this level, the novel echoes the famous ecological essay by Aldo Leopold, 'Thinking like a Mountain', in which the removal of predators allows deer to proliferate, strip the mountain of its forest cover and cause uncontrolled erosion. Thinking like a mountain allows one to see the crucial role that predators play. This capacity to think relationally and iteratively at the level of the ecosystem—or as Leopold puts it, *like a mountain*—is presented as a revelation to Chen and a sign of the wisdom of the Mongolian nomads. By contrast, the Han Chinese socialist modernisers who have come to these ancient grasslands to transform them into grain factories are exposed as disastrously devoid of this capacity to think ecologically.

Certainly, *Wolf Totem* does repeatedly shift its ecological values toward the debate of Chinese 'national character' and, in truth, these debates are never very far away at any moment in the text. According to Shu Chunyan (2013 93), *Wolf Totem* is a notable example of political criticism under the guise of 'criticism of national character' (国民性批判) because the regime has a relatively higher tolerance for cultural criticism, and in that sense, Chen's 'often deliberately radical cultural statements' are tolerated.

However, ecological relations are not reduced to the status of pure national allegory. When the grassland is destroyed, for instance, Chen comments disconsolately: '"the sandstorm of the political system" is more terrible than the sandstorm from the desertificating grassland, for the former is one of the real causes of the latter' (356). In this statement, we see that the destruction of the grassland is caused by flaws in the national character (or its 'political system'). But we also see that the destruction of the grassland is the *evidence* of these flaws. And in this sense, the novel seeks to tether the health of the environment to the success of the state and of social life more generally.

In the case of *The Hunter*, the extent to which it functions as an ecological novel rests on a number of grounds, but seems most directly centred on the way that M is figured as the embodiment of a mentality or underlying logic. Indeed, the figure of M is cast as an agent of transnational capitalism—a soulless machine harvesting genetic information for use as biotechnology. Complicating this is the intriguing way that M also finds himself identifying with the thylacine. In the long, painstaking tracking of his quarry, we see M, as it were, *becoming animal*. In other words, identifying with the deep specificity of its world—or, in Leopoldian terms, *thinking like a thylacine* (Hughes-d'Aeth, 2002 26; Freeman, 2013: 192 & 200). But the major difference we find when comparing *The Hunter* with *Wolf Totem* is the status of nation. In *Wolf Totem*, the nation (and more specifically 'national character') was seen as causative of extinction, and crucially the nation (i.e. China) was seen as the responsible party. The effect of the narrative was to demand a reckoning with the goals and principles that could so callously ruin a world. By contrast, in *The Hunter*, extinction is not presented as caused by the folly of nationalist modernisations, even though that was certainly a major cause of the thylacine's destruction. Although there is a sensitive rendering of the Tasmanian mountain wilderness, at a certain level, the story could be anywhere, or even on another planet. The novel's international circulation has been driven by its evocativeness as ecological allegory rather than for its display of Australian local colour. Indeed, the fact of nationality is quite muted in Leigh's novel, to the extent that the question remains open whether we were correct to regard *The Hunter* as a novel of 'national extinction'.

The conundrum was partly solved by exposing how the link back to nation in *The Hunter* functions implicitly and, to a large extent, extra-textually. For, as we saw, the national component depends on the particular resonance that the thylacine has within the Australian national imaginary, and followed what we described as a logic of double displacement (Australia onto Tasmania, and Indigenous people onto the thylacine). Yet, just as the comparison with *The Hunter* helped expose the essentially (post)colonial quality of *Wolf Totem*, the fact of nation in *The Hunter*, and its effective submersion, is helpfully exposed by its comparison with *Wolf Totem.* In this respect, while it does avoid the clumsy co-option of peoples and species into the rehabilitation of 'national character' that mark Jiang Rong's novel, Leigh's novel might be accused of an opposite failing; namely, the eliding of national responsibility for the destruction of peoples and species. This destruction, after all, is not simply a glaring failing in Australia's colonial past but, to use the phrase coined by Lorenzo Veracini, a pervasive feature of its 'settler colonial present'. Similarly, the

deracinated transnational capitalism of M seems to deplete responsibility for actions that Australians have taken and continue to take that destroy the environment. A recent example was the particular role that the Adani coalmine played in the Federal election of 2018. The mine, like many extractive projects in Australia, was financed by a transnational corporation, but the voters of Queensland (where the mine was situated) voted strongly in favour of the conservative parties who supported the mine. The opposition Labour party has since adjusted its position to offer qualified support for a mine, even though the mine will have devastating ecological impacts, and the Labour party is notionally in favour of environmental protection. In this respect, at least, it might well be helpful for Australians to begin a more searching debate of their 'national character', which tends to remain postulated within national discourse as an unexamined virtue.

Notes

1. '*Wolf Totem* is fascism to a German; and this book is shameful for the Chinese people'. Wolfgang Kubin in an interview in 2006, *Eastern Morning Post*.
2. 'Historically, we Mongols first believed in Shamanism and then converted to Buddhism. Wolves are the natural enemies of us Mongols; the wolves have no team spirit but fight with each other. Also, the wolves are greedy, selfish, and cruel, propagating the wolfish spirit is misanthropic fascism. We reserve our legal rights to defend our ancestors' and our people's culture'. Guo Xuebo in his *Sina* microblog.
3. National character was closely connected to national building in Meiji Japan, and books such as *Ten Essays on National Character* (1907) by Haga Yaichi (芳賀 矢一, 1867–1927) influenced Chinese intellectuals such as Liang Qichao and Lu Xun.
4. Reform of the Wuxu year was a short-lived socio-political reform in late Qing dynasty China. Led by the then young Guangxu Emperor and a group of reform-minded young Confucian intellectuals, the reform only lasted 104 days from 11 June to 22 September, 1898.
5. The English translation that appeared in this paper is based on Howard Goldblatt's translation, but some passages (such as this line) are translated by NI Fan because Goldblatt sifted out them from the original book in the English edition. The page numbers are therefore aligned with the Chinese edition.
6. It is generally believed that Confucius (551–479 BC) spent his life travelling between different states during the Spring and Autumn period (770–476/403 BC), trying to persuade these kings to revive the rituals of the Western Zhou Dynasty and to govern the country benevolently. In *the History of the Former Han Dynasty* by Gu Ban, Confucius is reported as saying that the old rituals, though lost in the royal courts, can still be found in the most remote rural regions. (《汉书. 卷三十. 艺文志》: 仲尼有言: "礼失而求诸野。"方今去圣久远, 道术缺废, 无所更索, 彼九家者, 不犹愈于野乎?若能修六艺之术, 而观此九家之言, 舍短取长, 则可以通万方之略矣。).

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