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Not afraid of ghosts : stories of the spectral in modern Chines fiction

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Abstract: Not Afraid of Ghosts: Stories of the Spectral in Modern Chinese Fiction Thesis presented to the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences of the University of Zurich for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy by Jessica Elizabeth Imbach Accepted in the spring semester 2017 on the recommendation of the doctoral committee: Prof. Dr. Andrea Riemenschneider (main supervisor, University of Zurich) Prof. Dr. Angelika Malinar (University of Zurich) Prof. Dr. Meng Yue (University of Toronto) Zurich, 2017 This study explores literary representations of ghosts and the spectral in Mainland Chinese fiction from the Republican period (1912-1949) to the present. The first two chapters trace the politicization of Chinese ghost culture and literature within intellectual debates and fictional writings from the early 20th century. I argue that ghosts and narratives of haunting provided writers with a powerful metaphor and script to reflect on and negotiate a modernization project caught between the rejection and the strategic appropriation of China's cultural history. Reading ghosts as a fictional space, which challenges normative hierarchies between the past and the present, China and the West, chapter three discusses the phantom romance plot in late Republican Shanghai fiction and the representation of female phantoms as gendered reflections of, and on, Shanghai's commodity culture, cosmopolitanism, and the changing real and symbolic roles of women. Chapter four focuses on the conjunction of Chinese ghost culture and classism in Mao-era literary production and analyzes the socialist adaptation of the anomaly account collection in "Stories About Not Being Afraid of Ghosts" (1961). Lastly, chapter five discusses two urban ghost novels from the post- Tiananmen period (1989-) which reimagine older models of cosmography to reflect on critical issues in China today, such as heritage destruction, migration and air pollution. ii Diese Arbeit studiert unter Einbezug unterschiedlicher westlicher Theorien zu Gespenstern in der Moderne und zum Teil noch unerforschter chinesischer Quellen, die ästhetischen wie auch politischen Problemkreise, welche in der modernen chinesischen Literatur über die Figur des Gespenstes verhandelt werden. Die ersten beiden Kapitel analysieren die Auseinandersetzung mit Gespenstern im Intellektuellendiskurs der Republikzeit (1912-1949). Sie zeigen auf, wie anhand der literarischen Figur des Gespenstes unterschiedliche Modernisierungsvorstellungen zum Ausdruck gebracht wurden, welche eine Neuordnung normativer Hierarchien zwischen China und dem Westen, der Vergangenheit und der Gegenwart anstrebten. Dies lässt sich beispielhaft aufzeigen an der Figur des gefährlich-schönen weiblichen Phantoms aus der vormodernen chinesischen Literatur, welches häufig in der Schanghaier Erzählliteratur der 1930er und 1940er Jahre erscheint und hier geschlechtskonnotierten Deutungsstrategien von Chinas Modernisierungsprozess dient. In ähnlicher Weise analysiert das vierte Kapitel die Adaption vormoderner Gespensterdiskurse in der sozialistischen Literatur im Hinblick auf die Klassenkampfrhetorik der maoistischen Periode. Das fünfte Kapitel schliesslich verortet literarische Auseinandersetzungen mit Figuren des Un- und Nichtmenschlichen in der Post-Tiananmen-Ära (1989-) im Kontext aktueller gesellschaftlicher Probleme wie Kulturgüterzerstörung, Migration und Luftverschmutzung. iii Table of Contents Abstract.....ii Zusammenfassung.....iii Acknowledgments.....vi List of Illustrations.....vii Summary..... Chapter 1: The new ghosts of a new China.....1 1 Getting serious about ghosts: anti-spiritualism and ghost rhetoric from 1918-1949.....11 2 Making the case for ghosts: putting the project in context.....19 Chapter

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vi List of Illustrations Page numbers are given for in text citations, while illustrations are shown in the appendix 1. Illustration 1: “An X-ray View Behind the Scene” 38 Illustration 2: “New *Guiqutu*” 39 Illustration 3: “Record of Purity and Ghost Shadows” 39 Illustration 4: “The Eye-less Ghost” 59 Illustration 5: Untitled *manhua* by Huang Ziping 64 Illustration 6: Book cover of Yu Hua’s “The Seventh Day” 211

vii Summary The project “Not Afraid of Ghosts: Stories of the Spectral in Modern Chinese Fiction” explores literary representations of ghosts in Mainland Chinese fiction from the Republican period (1912- 1949) to the present and thus addresses the salient absence of a sustained diachronic study of ghost narratives in modern Chinese literary history. Instead of arguing that ghost narratives reveal a return of tradition or represent the repressed subconscious of China’s literary modernity, I demonstrate that these narratives reflect and negotiate experiences and visions of China’s modernization. Although various Chinese and Western ghost discourses play important roles in modern ghost fiction, this project studies ghost narratives as a fictional space that explores not only questions of genre and literary style, but also broader social and cultural realities of the unreal, invisible and marginal in modern China. In the introductory chapter I trace the emergence of a new anti-ghost rhetoric during the early Republican period within progressive intellectual circles and discuss the relevance of the symbolic distinction between ghosts and humans to literary production. Chapter two focuses upon a rarely discussed ghost fiction project of the “*Analects Fortnightly*” journal, which reveals how the increasing politicization of ghosts had the unintentional effect of making ghost fiction more attractive to writers who advocated against the equalization of art and politics. More specifically, the “*Analects*” Chief Editor Shao Xunmei hailed ghost stories as a critique of May Fourth literary humanism. Furthermore, I contend through a close reading of Shao’s editorial and four short ghost stories that the difficulties and shortcomings of Shao’s project are the most suggestive of the social, cultural and political vectors informing modern ghost fiction. This insight segues into chapter three, which discusses the phantom romance plot in 1930s and 1940s modernist and popular fiction by Shanghai writers. Drawing upon various psychoanalytic theories of fetishism, I argue that these texts explore new cultural functions of femininity and spectrality to address sexual difference, viii commodity culture, and colonialism. Moreover, I seek to show that diverging arrogations of female phantom narratives by male authors writing in the 1930s and by female authors in the 1940s stem less from differences in literary milieu than from gendered experience. Highlighting the politics of textuality and languaging in socialist literary production, chapter four discusses not only ghost fiction, but more broadly stories told about ghosts in socialist literature. Among the texts discussed is also the socialist ghost story collection “*Stories About Not Being Afraid of Ghosts*” (Bu pa *gui de gushi* , 1961) which I argue was strategically modeled on late imperial anomaly account collections to express a symbolic distinction between the rational, ordered world of “languaged” humans and the deceitful, secretive trickery of ghosts. I conclude with a short story by Zong Pu, which evocatively captures the effects of this symbolic conjunction of revolutionary subjectivity and languaged life by narrating the story of a female scientist accused of being a counter-revolutionary as an aphasic disturbance. In the last chapter on ghost fiction from the post- Mao period I turn to the two urban ghost novels “*White/Night*” (Baiye , 1995) by Jia Pingwa and “*The Seventh Day*” (Di qi tian , 2013) by Yu Hua, which I discuss from the vantage point of post-secularist theories. While Jia’s novel thematizes the ancient Mulian mystery play to develop a highly original perspective on labor migration and cultural heritage discourses in the context of urban transformation, Yu Hua’s novel imagines a utopian ghost community, which seeks to overcome social inequality and environmental degradation. Together, both

novels highlight the ethical importance of inhuman perspectives in developing new cultural approaches to social and environmental issues. ix Chapter 1: The new ghosts of a new China Ghosts are figures of crisis. Their return reminds us that neat distinctions and regulated boundaries between different times, places and identities may under certain circumstances not be as solid and impermeable as they seem. While ghosts vary in appearance and mode of manifestation depending upon cultural context, the often terrifying, but at times comforting or philosophically stimulating experience of haunting signals not simply a disruption of the everyday, but harbors the potential to change our perceptions of reality, our beliefs and values. Just as ghosts in literature are the product of their historical and cultural environments, they are also powerful figures for critiquing the status quo, as they can reveal what is hidden, repressed and marginalized by hegemonic paradigms and discourses, especially in times, when criticism of ghost beliefs and attacks on aesthetics of the fantastic are a central pillar of mainstream ideology. In Chinese literature, ghosts have a long and varied history. As figurations of cosmological (dis-)order, cultural nostalgia, and historical trauma, among other things, ghosts figure not only prominently in a variety of genres, but have also attracted the disdain of state ideologues and religious reformers. However, it is only at the beginning of the 20th century that ghosts, both as religious and literary subject matter, became a symptom of national crisis and were condemned to decompose, as it were, alongside the “Confucian rubble” that the May Fourth iconoclasts eagerly shoveled into the dustbin of history. Culminating in one of the most famous slogans of Chinese socialist culture “The old society forced humans to be ghosts, the new society turns ghosts into humans!”¹ the history of modern Chinese literature has primarily been one of “ghost beating”

¹ This line is from the revolutionary folk opera “The White-haired Girl” (Baimaonü 白毛女, 1945), which was adapted numerous times for stage and screen and eventually became one of the “model operas” (yangbanxi 样板戏) during the Cultural Revolution. See: He Jingzhi 何敬之 and Ding Yi 丁毅, *Baimao nü* [The White-Haired Girl] (Beijing: Renmin wenzue, 1956), 94. For a history of this play see: Meng Yue 孟悦, “‘Baimaonü’ yanbian de qishi - Jianlun Yan’an wenyi de lishi duozhixing < > - [The Transformations of ‘The White-Haired Girl’ and Its Significance: On the Polyphony of History in Yan’an Literature],” in *Zai jiedu: Dazhong wenyi yu yishi xingtai* 再解读：大众文艺与意识形态 [Reinterpretation: Popular Literature and Art and Ideology], ed. Tang Xiaobing 唐晓波 (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1993), 68–89. 1 (dagui 大鬼).

² While classical literature boasted a motley inventory of supernatural beings and reveled in accounts of marvelous journeys across space and time, modern Chinese literature was from the early 20th century conceived of as first and foremost concerned with the representation of the social reality the Confucian elite had ignored for centuries. As literature became a powerful, political tool for nation-building, ghosts made way for humans and the fantastic and the strange were increasingly replaced with realist modes of writing. However, the dialectic of tradition and modernity, even within May Fourth reform discourse, was not a simple matter of replacing the old with a new China. And often pronouncements of the death of tradition were more strategic than diagnostic. A new rhetoric of appeasing, beating and eradicating ghosts reflected China’s difficult process of detaching itself from its own past, while simultaneously reinventing a national culture. In his introduction to a recent anthology of ghost-related essays by 20th century Chinese intellectuals Chen Pingyuan observes that leftist intellectuals read ghost stories not only for their scientific interest, for instance in folklore studies, but always also from “the vantage point of contemporary political struggle.”³ Ghosts and haunting provided a powerful metaphor and script for a modernization project caught between the rejection and the strategic appropriation of China’s cultural history. But the importance of ghost stories and haunting as an allegorical repository of crisis narratives is not only explained by their ability to capture the struggles of a (semi-)colonial modernization project, but also by the fact that the aesthetic translation of the figure of the human plays such a crucial role in modern Chinese literary thought. The cultivation of exemplary subjectivity has been a central concern of literary production and criticism in China from the early-20th century onward. In socialist realist fiction in particular this led to the representation of idealized, larger-than-life figures, who embody an organic synthesis of the dialectics between art and life. As Peter Button has persuasively argued, the protagonist of the 2 *Hu Shi* 胡适, “Zhengli guogu yu ‘dagui’ — Gei Hao Xu xiansheng xin ‘ ’ [The Organization of National Heritage and ‘Beating Ghosts’ — a Letter to Mr. Hao Xu],” in *Hu Shi quanji* [The Complete Works of Hu Shi], vol. 3 (Hefei: Anhui jiaoyu, 2003), 144–55. 3

³ Chen Pingyuan 陈平原, ed., *Shen shen gui gui* [Deities and Ghosts] (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1992), 3. 2 socialist Bildungsroman in 1940s and 1950s China ultimately realizes human subjectivity in the universality of Freedom, Equality, and (materialist) History. At the same time, this “unfolding of the human project”⁴ also predicated itself on the subjugation of the class enemy. As the examples discussed in the following section will show, the human-ghost (ren gui 人鬼) dichotomy became in the early Republican period convenient short-hand for the well-known binary oppositions of modernity such as past-present, urban-rural, but also for the struggle between opposing world-views, notably between the Communist Party and its political enemies. Moreover, the Maoist ideology of “class racism”⁵ found in China’s centuries-old ghost culture an important symbolic resource for the configuration of the feudalist and imperialist world-view. For instance, during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (wuchan

jieji wenhua dageming (1966- 1976, henceforth Cultural Revolution) class enemies were labeled “ox ghosts and snake spirits” (niugui sheshen), terms derived from Buddhist demonology. However, that the opposition between humans and ghosts gained such prominence within Maoist rhetoric owed not only to Mao’s personal preference for demonic vocabulary. Rather the historical roots of the symbolic pairing lie in both secular thought and aesthetic theory. The fact that the same intellectuals who spoke out against ghost beliefs, were also involved in the abolition of traditional fictional styles and subject matters such as ghosts, is indicative of the conceptual conjunction of the political and the aesthetic in phantom matters. For instance, Lu Xun (1881- 1936)⁶ participated in a campaign in the progressive journal “New Youth” (Xin Qingnian) against spiritist societies, which enjoyed brief popularity from the late 1910s to the early 1930s and was at the same time, as is well known, a leading protagonist of the literary reform movement, which advocated for the adoption of the vernacular as literary language and increasingly favored literary realism over other narrative modes. ⁴ Peter Button, *Configurations of the Real in Chinese Literary and Aesthetic Modernity* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 258. ⁵ Haiyan Lee, *The Stranger and the Chinese Moral Imagination* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014). ⁶ Chinese characters and life dates of authors named in the main text are given at first mention. In a few cases, however, life dates are unknown. ³ This study is, nevertheless, neither an examination of the failures of literary realism nor does it follow the common indictment of realism as thematically banal and metaphysically naïve. In fact, many of the texts discussed actually follow what David Wang has coined the “realist paradigm.”⁷ Rather, it examines ghost narratives as a fictional space, where the separation between the real and unreal is not necessarily negated, but rather strategically confronted and blurred. In some cases, this was a strategy to not only distinguish oneself from the politicized literary aesthetics on the Left, but also to simply add color and excitement to the vocabulary of high-brow literary entertainment—a page of advice the poet Shao Xunmei (1906-1968) took from the so-called “Saturday school” (libailiu pai) of popular literature, as I will discuss in chapter two. Other cases reveal a more philosophically reflexive exploration of the role of beliefs and desires in the literary expression of historical experience and social reality, of cultural memory and trauma, and of environmental transformation. Such negotiations can all be found in contemporary ghost fiction by Su Tong (1963-), Han Shaogong (1953-), Can Xue (1953-), Jia Pingwa (1952-), Mo Yan (1955-), and many others, but also in the fiction of Shanghai-based writers from the 1920s to the 1940s such as Shi Zhecun (1905-2003), Mu Shiying (1912- 1940) and the female writer Shi Jimei (1920-1968), who was a dominating figure of Shanghai’s 1940s literary scene, but whose literary oeuvre has only recently been recognized as an important part of Shanghai’s late Republican literary culture.⁸ Ghosts also play an important yet rarely acknowledged role in revolutionary Yan’an novels by Zhao Shuli (1906-1970) and Ouyang Shan (1908-2004) and even make occasional appearances in highly ideological fiction from the 1960s such as Zhou Libo’s (1908-1979) short stories. Indeed, while the quantity of newly written ghost fiction diminished during the 20th century, aesthetic projects engaged with phantoms and the spectral have actually become more numerous and diverse, as not ⁷ David Dewei Wang, *The Monster That Is History: History, Violence, and Fictional Writing in Twentieth-Century China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 282. ⁸ Nicole Huang, *Women, War, Domesticity: Shanghai Literature and Popular Culture of the 1940s* (Leiden: Brill, 2005). ⁴ only do familiar ghosts reappear, but they are also joined for instance by the ghosts of Western gothic fiction and Freudian psychoanalysis. An incisive example of these multiple vectors shaping modern Chinese ghost fiction is the short novel “The Completion of the Ritual” (Yishi de wancheng), 1989) by Su Tong. The story begins with an anthropologist traveling to a remote village, where he learns of an ancient ritual of human sacrifice, which was abolished in 1924. Enthusiastic about his discovery, he convinces the villagers to restage the ritual, in which, similar to a game of drawing straws, all the participants take turns at pulling ghost money ingots from a pile. Whoever draws the note with the character “ghost” (gui) will be beaten to death by the other villagers in a sacrificial ceremony. It is, of course, no surprise that the anthropologist himself is elected ghost, as he is not only an outsider to the village, but also the only participant, who looks at the ritual for knowledge rather than religious experience.⁹ Indeed the villagers immerse themselves in the ritual proceedings to the point where they nearly beat the anthropologist to death. But despite successfully convincing the villagers at the last minute to halt the ritual and insisting that it is merely a staged fiction, the anthropologist cannot shake his “ghost” fate, begins to hallucinate and is eventually injured fatally in a car accident the moment he tries to leave the village, bringing the ritual after all to its intended conclusion. There is plenty of eerie symbolism, which makes the narrative instantly recognizable as a ghost story. For instance, at the beginning of the story the anthropologist meets an old man, who turns out to be a ghost of a former villager. In the Chinese cultural tradition, seeing a ghost is taken as a sign of bad luck or imminent death. Death and its symbolic representation in the color white are also prominent. The narrative takes place during winter, the anemic folklorist wanders around the village in a rice-colored wind-breaker, and the narrator immediately draws the conclusion that the hills surrounding the village are ancient graves. ⁹ See also Haiyan Lee’s discussion of the distinction between Erfahrung and Erlebnis in *The Stranger and*

the Chinese Moral Imagination, 59-70. 5 Another prominent ghost fiction theme, in the Western as well as the Chinese literary tradition, are the blurred boundaries between past and present. As a temporal figure, the ghost lends itself naturally to the exploration of time, especially of how we make sense of the past. Ghost narratives are a way of processing societal change, trauma and institutional amnesia. Apart from Su's novel there are many examples of historical ghost fiction in the contemporary period such as Mo Yan's "Reunion of Comrades" (Zhanyou chongfeng , 1998), Can Xue's "Snake Island" (Shedao , 2004) and Wang Anyi's (1954-) "A Celestial Match" (Tianxian pei , 1997). In "The Completion of the Ritual" history enters through the brutal fictional ritual of human sacrifice, which parallels the prosecution of counter-revolutionary "ox ghosts and snake spirits" during the Cultural Revolution. This can be seen in the importance attributed to the written character *gui*, but also the ritual itself mirrors the public show trials of "black gang elements" at the time, because it moves from the assembly where the designated culprit is exposed, to the public procession on the streets to the choreographed group violence against the "ghost." By restaging and reframing political theater as a religious ritual, Su's novel ingeniously highlights how secular Maoist ideology at its most radical moment turned itself into a relentlessly violent cult.¹⁰ Su Tong's novel illustrates how modern ghost fiction not only draws on very diverse, indigenous and foreign literatures and discourses of the spectral, but also how our readings need to take into account the complicated histories entangled with the multiple meanings of ghosts in the modern period. From a cursory survey of texts featuring ghostly figures and constellations of haunting from the early 20th century to the present, it becomes apparent that there is no set of generic conventions or recurring motifs that would allow us to systematically assign texts to one ¹⁰ While Chen Xiaoming reads Su Tong's novel as the swan song of 1980s avant-garde fiction, given the novel's realist style and its mystical theme, it is perhaps more apposite to read "The Completion of the Ritual" in relation to the "root-searching literature" (*xungen wenxue*) of the 1980s, which explored archaic and mystical themes as a remedy to what they perceived was a sterile and anemic socialist culture. By framing the figure of the anthropologist as a ghost and malignant trespasser, "The Completion of the Ritual" takes a critical stance toward the literary obsession with an ancient and mystical China. See Chen Xiaoming , "Zui hou de yishi - 'Xianfengpai' de lishi ji qi pinggu —— ' ' [The Last Ritual: History and Evaluation of the 'Avant-Garde Literary Movement']," *Wenxue pinglun* 5 (1991): 30-35. Su Tong's story is also discussed in Wang, *The Monster That Is History*, 281-82, and in Lee, *The Stranger and the Chinese Moral Imagination*, 69. 6 specific genre of ghost literature (e.g. *zhiguai*, gothic novel). Unlike modern Japanese literature, the fantastic as a literary mode is equally unsuitable, mainly because modern Chinese ghost fiction rarely leaves the reader hesitant or in doubt about what is real and what is not, which for instance Todorov's reader-response theory of the fantastic regards as one of its defining characteristics.¹¹ In fact, the crucial question raised by these texts is never whether ghosts exist or not, but rather why we should engage with the spectral or not, as the case may be. In sum, the concerns and questions modern Chinese ghost fiction raises exceed deduction from a single set of philosophical influences and literary conventions. But what all of modern Chinese ghost fiction does to varying degrees have in common is the same generative matrix that is as much shaped by Chinese ghost beliefs and aesthetics as by secular ideologies of modernization and orientalist fantasies of a spiritual East. One of the main goals of this study is to trace the trajectories of this heterogeneous matrix that has generated a variety of new ways of writing and thinking about ghosts that are neither a continuation or an actualization of classical literature any more than they are a (self-orientalizing) sinicization of, for instance, the Western Gothic tradition. What then further unifies the fictional writings discussed in this study to a certain extent is their long-standing unfavorable reception by mainstream literary critics and historians. Because of the mutual imbrication of the political and the aesthetic in the human/ghost dichotomy, the list of accusations leveled against ghost fiction include the fostering of religious superstitions, the promotion of anachronistic aesthetics and world-views, misogyny and anti-nationalistic sentiments, and the pandering to the lower tastes and desires of lesser educated readerships. Thus it is possible to broadly define the very diverse imaginative writings discussed in this study in terms of their dangerous affinities to increasingly suspect ideologies, although socialist realist fiction in particular tends to vehemently declare an anti-ghost stance and contemporary ghost fiction is, unlike cinema, rarely censored. ¹¹ Susan Jolliffe Napier, *The Fantastic in Modern Japanese Literature: The Subversion of Modernity* (London, New York: Routledge, 1996); Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975). 7 Therefore, despite being a marginal subject matter in modern Chinese fiction, i.e. vernacular fiction from the beginning of the 20th century to the present,¹² the study of ghosts and other figurations of spectrality, a term I define later on, is important in three main respects. Firstly, it sheds light on issues of authority and memory in the shaping of modern Chinese literary history, as a large number of the texts discussed in the following chapters have not yet received sufficient critical attention and are often regarded as mere supplements or irrelevant to China's literary modernity. The second and third points relate to the broader political and aesthetic implications ghosts had and continue to have on the configuration of the relationship between art and life in modern China.

On the one hand, ghosts focus our attention upon the shifting parameters of China's literary modernity, its ideologies of representation and their various limitations. What can and should be represented, and what not? Although not further elaborated on in the subsequent chapters, representation is a key notion in my analysis of ghost fiction, because writing in a certain way about humans and ghosts always also has broader implications beyond being a matter of aesthetic preference and commercial value. A more detailed discussion of the relationship between the spectral and representation follows, but for now I wish to merely point out the distinction between the aesthetic and political meaning of representation, for which Gayatri Spivak has famously invoked the difference between the German terms *Darstellung* and *Vertretung*. While *Darstellung* means describing something and rendering it perceptible and communicable, *Vertretung* means standing in or speaking on someone's behalf and is often used in a legal context—it is, to use one of Spivak's own examples the difference between “a proxy and a portrait.”¹³ Because the literary representation of ghosts in modern China raises issues not only connected to *Darstellung*, but also to *Vertretung*, the study of ghosts, thirdly, also helps us to consider how literature became in 20th century China an enormously influential medium for the definition and assessment of social value. Writing ghost fiction does not only involve acknowledging or rejecting literary realism, but also means participating in the production of social, aesthetic, and political value. Through various ways of writing about human and ghost experiences, writers could both establish or contest the production of worth and worthlessness on both a personal and a national level. While not all ghost fiction involves the same political and social vectors, it is important to bear in mind throughout this study that writing about ghosts did in some cases also mean putting one's reputation, and even one's life, in danger. One well-known example for the very real influence a textual ghost could have is the heated debate on the play “Li Huiniang” (1961), a Kun opera adaptation of the late sixteenth century drama “Red Flowering Plum” (*Hongmei ji*, Zhou Chaojun), which led to the prosecution of its writer Meng Chao during the Cultural Revolution.¹⁴ In a final twist, the moral of the story of the anthropologist in Su Tong's “The Completion of the Ritual” appears to be that only denial of the reality of ghosts in modern China is truly “delusional.” The title of this study is a reference to the Mao-era ghost story collection “Stories About Not Being Afraid of Ghosts” (*Bu pa gui de gushi*, 1961, henceforth “Stories”), which Mao himself commissioned. Contrary to what the title might suggest, this anthology of premodern ghost stories was not conceived of as an “anti-superstition” campaign, but was meant to shore up cadre support for the party's struggle against the “ghosts” of revisionism, internal and abroad. But by doing so through the medium of Chinese ghost stories, the collection inadvertently actually also draws attention to how writers in earlier times wrote ghost stories not only for religious or entertainment purposes, but also to promote their own moral-philosophical views, to challenge aesthetic conventions or to assert their cultural authority. In this study I therefore propose a different, more subversive understanding of “not being afraid of ghosts” in modern China as the

¹⁴ For a discussion of this play see Maggie Greene, “A Ghostly Bodhisattva and the Price of Vengeance: Meng Chao, ‘Li Huiniang’, and the Politics of Drama, 1959-1979,” *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture*, 2012, 149–199; and Zhang Lianhong, *Lilian jinghun: Xin Zhongguo xiqu gaizao kaolun* [Improving the Spirits: A Historical Study of Theater Reform in New China] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2013).

⁹ recognition of the relevance and importance of ghosts to China's literary modernity, regardless of whether these literary acts of courage, to stay with the metaphor, aim at extending or further narrowing boundaries between the human and the spectral, as both positions exposed themselves to criticism. Throughout this study, I use the somewhat misleading term “ghost fiction.” By this I do not mean texts, which were written by an author other than the one printed on the book's cover or that they are the product of automated writing. Rather, I define ghost fiction as imaginative literary works in which phantom figures not only play a central role, but also do actual ghost work, i.e. act as trespassers of boundaries real and metaphysical, or embody a state of exception and crisis. Taking my cue from the Greek verb *krinó* (“*krinó*”), which means “to distinguish,” “to differentiate,” but also “to evaluate” and “to judge,” ghosts are figures of crisis both in the sense of a sudden disruption of continuity, which may be temporal, spatial, or perceptual, but also in the sense of a challenge to what is accepted as real and true. This reading of ghosts as expressions of crisis is not only backed up by my “Benseler” Greek dictionary, but relies more importantly on two arguments, one historical, one theoretical. As we have seen, ghosts are deeply entrenched in the history of 20th century China's political ideology. This first became apparent during the early Republican period, when public intellectuals, scholars, and writers began to take an interest in ghost beliefs, ghost stories

and even the Chinese character for *gui* “ghost”, which unlike *youling* (“phantom” or “ghost”) is not a term significant to premodern aesthetic visions. The theoretical argument is based on Jacques Derrida’s (1930-2004) concept of spectrality, which he developed most fully in his controversial study “Specters of Marx” (1993), and offers a helpful conceptual link between ghosts and critiques of modernization. Although each chapter will provide supplementary context to the texts under discussion and relies upon a variety of analytical frameworks, the development of anti-ghost rhetoric in the Republican period and Derrida’s concept of spectrality are two important through-lines of this study. In the following I will first provide a 10 short introduction to Republican period discussions of both figurative and non-figurative ghosts with a special focus upon literary contexts. In the second part, I contextualize this project within the field of spectrality studies and previous scholarship, where I also outline the content of each chapter.

1 Getting serious about ghosts: anti-spiritualism and ghost rhetoric from 1918-1949 Within China’s modernization discourse, ghosts become a heavily politicized topic. While the Chinese lexicon actually has numerous terms for ghosts, these debates focused most often upon the term *gui* („ghost“). Why does *gui* become important? And how is *gui* employed as an aestheticopolitical term? Here, I propose some tentative answers to these questions by analyzing usages and critiques of *gui* in mainly Republican-era sources. This section aims at providing some general context for the subsequent chapters in which I investigate various usages and meanings of ghosts in literature against the backdrop of an increasingly *gui*-hostile literary environment. Although hard-and-fast distinctions between ghost, phantom, revenant, spook, spirit, etc. would be difficult to make in any language, in modern Chinese “ghost” is conventionally translated as *gui*, while *hun* , *hunpo* and *youling* refer more frequently to the immaterial soul, the spirit, or metaphorical meanings derived thereof. While the compound *guishen* (ghosts and gods) already suggests that even the divine *shen* are more closely associated with the ghostly than gods in the Graeco-Roman tradition, the *hulijing* , “were-fox”, the *yuanhun* , “vengeful spirit”, the *jiangshi* , “zombie” and the myriad of circumstantially determined ghosts such as the *shuigui* , “ghosts of the drowned”, and many more all belong to the at times dangerous, at times jocular world of supernatural beings that have no single equivalent in English. Earliest usages of the character *gui* suggest that it could mean both foreign in the sense of non-Chinese as well as in the supernatural sense of not belonging to the world of the living.¹⁵ While the meaning of the 15 *Mu-chou Poo*, “The Concept of Ghost in Ancient Chinese Religion,” in *Religion and Chinese Society*, ed. John Lagerwey, vol. 1 (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2004), 173–91. 11 character is highly debated, the Chinese term *gui* has been shown to be a derivative of the verb *wei* , “awe inspiring”. From a literary historical perspective, the term *hun* is more important, especially in the compounds *huanhun* , “returning soul” or “revenant”, and *yuanhun* , “vengeful spirit”.¹⁶ But because *gui* had over time acquired a number of derivative meanings, often derogatory in nature, and are also more closely associated with religious practices than other ghost figures, May Fourth secularizers singled out *gui* as their primary target of attack and not, for instance, a belief in *hun*. A particular thorn in the eyes of the “New Youth” (*Xin Qingnian*) literati was the “Shanghai Spiritist Society” (*Shanghai lingxuehui*) and their experiments with such things as spirit calligraphy (*jizi*), spirit painting (*jihui* or *jihua*), and spirit photography (*linghun zhaoxiang*). In their attacks neither *hun* nor *youling* appear and instead *gui* take center stage. Lu Xun writes in 1918: Nowadays, there is a whole group of people talking about ghosts [*guihua*]. They hate science, because science teaches us reason and understanding as well as a clear thought process, which doesn’t allow for any aimlessness [*guihun*]. [...] They even go as far as to propose the death sentence for science, and yet still unexpectedly invoke the two teachings. That is why on a boxer pamphlet it is clearly stated: “Master Confucius and Celestial Master Zhang [famous Daoist hermit] are sending you their words from Shandong, spread it fast, there is no false word!” [...] In my opinion, to rescue this China, which „is about to be divided and its people extinct” the method of “Master Confucius and Celestial Master Zhang sending word from Shandong” is completely inappropriate. Only science can oppose this nonsense [*guihua*]! Real science cannot be easily dismissed!¹⁷ ¹⁶ The semantics of *gui* and *hun* are also discussed in Judith T. Zeitlin, *The Phantom Heroine: Ghosts and Gender in Seventeenth-Century Chinese Literature* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007), 4–5. ¹⁷ Lu Xun , “*Sanshisan* [Thirty-Three],” in Lu Xun *quanji* [The Complete Works of Lu Xun], 1st ed., vol. 1 (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1987), 298–302. ¹² Also, in contrast to earlier critiques of various Chinese ghost beliefs, their anti-superstition campaign did not distinguish between the political, the social, and the cultural. Indeed, under the fiery pen of these reformers a new *gui*-ghost appeared that was not only the antithesis of the secular and the scientific, but a cultural obstacle of the Chinese people. Chen Duxiu (1879-1942), for instance, noted in his critique of the “return to the application of Euro-American theories of the soul” that spiritist societies were advocating that nothing exerted such a detrimental effect on China’s soul (*xin*) as ghost beliefs.¹⁸ *Gui* became a master signifier that encompassed not only all old forms of ghostly literary and non-literary discourses, but also generated a plethora of new figurative uses. The old ghosts were joined by “living ghosts” (*huogui*) such as “foreign devils” (*yanggui*), “opium ghosts” (*yanguai*), “romantic ghosts” (*fengliugui* , i.e. brothel clients) and most infamously the “Japanese devils” (*riben guizi*

). While this “living ghost” rhetoric was not new in itself, and I will return to the genre of satirical ghost novels shortly, a semantic shift in its use was taking place. For instance, in the essay, in which Hu Shi (1891-1962) lists China’s “five ghosts,” poverty, disease, ignorance, corruption and chaos, he uses *gui* synonymously with *choudi* , “enemy”. And, defending his archival research on the Dunhuang manuscripts Hu polemically added that “the numerous carnivorous and misguiding ghosts inside this ‘rotten pile of paper’ are more harmful to humans than Pasteur’s bacteria” and “while inserting new knowledge and new [ways of] thinking is necessary, [the task of] extinguishing ghosts (*dagui*) is even more pressing.”¹⁹ Hu uses *gui* no longer merely to comment on public mores, but insinuates that ghosts, who symbolize China’s social problems and ideological hurdles, are the greatest obstacle on China’s path towards modernization. The political stakes involved in this debate on ghosts and *gui* is further evidenced in linguistic and paleographic scholarship of the time. Zhang Taiyan (1868-1936) and Shen 18 Chen Duxiu, “You *gui* lun zhiyi [Questions and doubts concerning the existence of ghosts],” in Shen *shen gui gui*, ed. Chen Pingyuan (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1992), 1. 19 Hu Shi, “Zhengli guogu yu ‘dagui’ — Gei Hao Xu xiansheng xin,” 146. 13 Jianshi (1887-1947) pushed in a more clearheaded fashion for a worldly interpretation of the character’s semantics.²⁰ Shen especially argued that in its earliest usages *gui* was not primarily and only in very limited contexts used as ghost or spirit and should rather be read as referring more often to the worldly realms of wild animals, foreign tribes, and human feelings of fear and disgust. Whilst Shen’s scholarly work can be situated within the movement for the “organization of national heritage” (*zhengli guogu*) around Hu Shi and Gu Jiegang (1893-1980), Shen’s work on the character *gui* was not directly driven by any political agenda. Yet, Shen’s linguistic argumentation against a supernatural understanding of *gui* echoed a widely shared sentiment among leading intellectuals that ghost beliefs needed to be attacked on all scientific fronts. In literary circles ghosts were a more overtly political topic. On the occasion of turning fifty Zhou Zuoren (1885-1967) published two doggerels or “ragged poems” (*dayou shi*), in which he mockingly depicts himself as “half Confucian, half Buddhist”, who “walks the streets all day listening and talking to ghosts and sits by the window all year round drawing snakes [i.e. writing *caoshu* , i.e. cursive script]”.²¹ Zhou drew stark criticism from leftist intellectuals, not only for espousing such a world-weary view of the intellectual figure as doing nothing but “playing with collectibles” and “growing sesame,” but especially for his use of the terms “fox spirits” and “ghosts.”²² This attack is all the more remarkable considering that Zhou had been one of the leading voices of the leftist literary movement, notably calling for “human(ist) literature” or a “literature of Man” (*ren de wenzue*) in 1918.²³ Nevertheless, reading Zhou’s poem alongside his 20 Zhang Taiyan’s article is from 1907, while Shen Jianshi’s article was first published in Chinese in 1935, and in English in 1936. Zhang Taiyan, “Da Tie Zheng [Reply to Tie Zheng],” in Zhang Taiyan *quanji* [The Complete Works of Zhang Taiyan], ed. Xiong Yuezhi , vol. 4 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1982), 369–75; Shen Jianshi, “‘Gui’zi yuanshi yiyi zhi shitan [A preliminary inquiry into the archaic meanings of the character ‘gui’ ’],” in Shen Jianshi *xueshu lunwen ji* [The Collected Scholarly Works of Shen Jianshi] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), 186–202. 21 Zhang Juxiang and Zhang Tierong , eds., Zhou Zuoren *nianpu* (1885-1967) [A Chronological Biography of Zhou Zuoren] (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 2000), 440. 22 The repercussions Zhou had to endure after “talking ghosts” would become an important historical precedent for the *Analect* writers of the ghost story special issues I discuss in chapter two, for instance in “On Ghost Texts” (*Tan gui bian*) by Xu Wugui (literally “Noghost Xu,” a not very oblique penname I could however not trace to any known author). 23 Zhou Zuoren, “Ren de wenzue [A Literature of Man],” in *Zhongguo xin wenzue daxi* [Compendium of Modern Chinese Literature], vol. 1 (Hong Kong: Xianggang wenzue yanjiushe, 1968), 219–25. 14 lecture script “Spirits of the Past” (*Guoqu de youling*,) Hu Feng (1902-1985), Zhou Zuoren’s former student, mocked his teacher by rhetorically asking: “Are the ghosts that Mr. Zhou speaks of and those that he hears of, not the same ghosts he warned us about in his very own translation [of the Russian writer Vasili Eroshenko’s lecture]?”²⁴ Similarly, in a short study on ghosts in Shakespeare’s works, the literary critic Liang Shiqiu (1903-1987) sarcastically remarks that his leftist colleagues were so fervently against ghosts that if Shakespeare were alive in China at this moment his ghosts would not be allowed on stage.²⁵ And in the editorial to the ghost story special issue (*Gui gushi zhuanhao*) of the “*Analects Fortnightly*” (*Lunyu banyuekan*), in which Liang’s article appeared, the editor Shao Xunmei disparagingly concludes that anti-superstition campaigns had dealt an almost fatal blow to ghosts in literature as well, although he was convinced that ghosts indeed should have a place in modern fiction. Ghost criticism has to be viewed within the larger context of China’s new culture movement and its intellectual-elitist enterprise of creating a modern Chinese vernacular fiction. The normative temporalities underlying the reformer’s cultural-evolutionary model of civilizational development meant that “strange” and fantastical fiction had become a symptom of Chinese culture’s “backwardness.” To literary reformers, ghosts were not simply a problematic subject matter, but also symbolized China’s literary heritage as a whole—a sentiment that is astutely captured in Lu Xun’s caricature of Chinese literature as conveying nothing but the “optimism of zombies” (*jiangshi de leguan*).²⁶ Conventional

historiography of modern Chinese literature unsurprisingly assumes a gradual triumph of the realist vernacular novel and acknowledges other genres, which in David Wang's terminology were just as vital to the "dissemination of modernity,"²⁷ 24 Hu Feng, *Hu Feng zawan ji* [Collection of Hu Feng's Miscellaneous Writings] (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 1987), 17–19. 25 Liang Shiqiu, "Lüe tan Shashibiya zuopin li de gui [Some Remarks on Ghosts in Shakespear's Works]," *Lunyu banyuekan* [Analects Fortnightly], 92 (1936): 950–51. 26 Lu Xun, "Xinqingnian bidu shu [Necessary Readings for the Youth]," in *Lu Xun quanji*, vol. 3 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1987), 12. 27 David Dewei Wang, *Fin-de-Siecle Splendor: Repressed Modernities of Late Qing Fiction, 1848-1911* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 22. 15 if only as literary "anachronisms." The main criticisms leftist intellectuals leveled against these "other" literatures—very broadly defined as encompassing popular fiction written in a classical style as well as "serious" modern vernacular fiction with "fantastic" narrative elements, as found in works of Shi Zhecun, Mu Shiyong and Xu Xu (1908-1980)—were that they catered to a leisure culture providing readers with escapist fantasies deemed incompatible with their didactic project of creating a national literature. However, *gui* could to a certain degree also be of scholarly interest. The rediscovery of the rather obscure and infamously difficult to read Qing novel "What literary reference is this?" (*He dian* , Zhang Nanzhuang , 1879) by the leftist intellectual Liu Bannong (1891- 1934) is particularly illuminating in this respect because the novel is not only set in the ghost world, but actually uses the ghost world as a pretext for its excessive creation of neologisms with *gui* as affix.²⁸ While Liu Bannong found it necessary to censor sexually explicit expressions from the novel, he did not take issue with its ghost discourse, as Zhang's ghost parody relies chiefly on the lexical ambiguity of *gui* as both "ghost" and "nonsense." As a signifier of irreverence towards Confucian literary practices and its scrupulous deference to canonical works (as the title puns on,) *gui* are read as part and parcel of a popular literary practice that resisted this dogmatic and calcified establishment and serve (rightly or not) as historical proof of a proto-vernacular literary tradition.²⁹ At the same time, there was renewed interest in the early Qing novel "A Tale of Ghost Beheading" (*Zhangui zhuan* , 1688, Liu Zhang),³⁰ in whose generic lineage *He dian* was placed, and the sub-genre of ghost satire more generally.³¹ A number of new imitative works

²⁸ In fact, the novel had never been as obscure as its rescuers Liu Bannong and Lu Xun thought, because apart from the original at least four editions had already been in circulation prior to Liu's modern edition of 1926. See Roland Altenburger, "Chains of Ghost Talk: Highlighting of Language, Distancing, and Irony in *He Dian*," *Asiatica Venetiana* 6 (February 2001): 23–46. ²⁹ For further discussion of *Hedian* see also Wang, *Fin-de-Siecle Splendor*. ³⁰ This novel was reprinted at least twice during the socialist period prior to the Cultural Revolution. In a brief summary accompanying the 1959 edition, the editors point out that fiction such as *Zhan gui zhuan* helps renew the contemporary reader's appreciation of the "value and beauty" (*kegui ke'ai*) of the present, while they also freely acknowledge that they excised vulgar expressions: "a common problem in popular fiction of the time." The novel has been translated into German (du Bois-Reymond 1923) and French (Danielle Éliasberg 1976). ³¹ David Wang describes this genre as "comic ghost fiction," see Wang, *Fin-de-Siecle Splendor*, 205. 16 appeared by writers of very diverse literar

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Not Afraid of Ghosts:
Stories of the Spectral in Modern Chinese Fiction

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by Jessica Elizabeth Imbach

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Abstract

This study explores literary representations of ghosts and the spectral in Mainland Chinese fiction from the Republican period (1912-1949) to the present. The first two chapters trace the politicization of Chinese ghost culture and literature within intellectual debates and fictional writings from the early 20th century. I argue that ghosts and narratives of haunting provided writers with a powerful metaphor and script to reflect on and negotiate a modernization project caught between the rejection and the strategic appropriation of China's cultural history. Reading ghosts as a fictional space, which challenges normative hierarchies between the past and the present, China and the West, chapter three discusses the phantom romance plot in late Republican Shanghai fiction and the representation of female phantoms as gendered reflections of, and on, Shanghai's commodity culture, cosmopolitanism, and the changing real and symbolic roles of women. Chapter four focuses on the conjunction of Chinese ghost culture and classism in Mao-era literary production and analyzes the socialist adaptation of the anomaly account collection in "Stories About Not Being Afraid of Ghosts" (1961). Lastly, chapter five discusses two urban ghost novels from the post-Tiananmen period (1989-) which reimagine older models of cosmography to reflect on critical issues in China today, such as heritage destruction, migration and air pollution.

Zusammenfassung

Diese Arbeit studiert unter Einbezug unterschiedlicher westlicher Theorien zu Gespenstern in der Moderne und zum Teil noch unerforschter chinesischer Quellen, die ästhetischen wie auch politischen Problemkreise, welche in der modernen chinesischen Literatur über die Figur des Gespenstes verhandelt werden. Die ersten beiden Kapitel analysieren die Auseinandersetzung mit Gespenstern im Intellektuellendiskurs der Republikzeit (1912-1949). Sie zeigen auf, wie anhand der literarischen Figur des Gespenstes unterschiedliche Modernisierungsvorstellungen zum Ausdruck gebracht wurden, welche eine Neuordnung normativer Hierarchien zwischen China und dem Westen, der Vergangenheit und der Gegenwart anstrebten. Dies lässt sich beispielhaft aufzeigen an der Figur des gefährlich-schönen weiblichen Phantoms aus der vormodernen chinesischen Literatur, welches häufig in der Schanghaier Erzählliteratur der 1930er und 1940er Jahre erscheint und hier geschlechtskonnotierten Deutungsstrategien von Chinas Modernisierungsprozess dient. In ähnlicher Weise analysiert das vierte Kapitel die Adaption vormoderner Gespensterdiskurse in der sozialistischen Literatur im Hinblick auf die Klassenkampfrhetorik der maoistischen Periode. Das fünfte Kapitel schliesslich verortet literarische Auseinandersetzungen mit Figuren des Un- und Nichtmenschlichen in der Post-Tiananmen-Ära (1989-) im Kontext aktueller gesellschaftlicher Probleme wie Kulturgüterzerstörung, Migration und Luftverschmutzung.

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Summary

The project “Not Afraid of Ghosts: Stories of the Spectral in Modern Chinese Fiction” explores literary representations of ghosts in Mainland Chinese fiction from the Republican period (1912-1949) to the present and thus addresses the salient absence of a sustained diachronic study of ghost narratives in modern Chinese literary history. Instead of arguing that ghost narratives reveal a return of tradition or represent the repressed subconscious of China's literary modernity, I demonstrate that these narratives reflect and negotiate experiences and visions of China's modernization. Although various Chinese and Western ghost discourses play important roles in modern ghost fiction, this project studies ghost narratives as a fictional space that explores not only questions of genre and literary style, but also broader social and cultural realities of the unreal, invisible and marginal in modern China.

In the introductory chapter I trace the emergence of a new anti-ghost rhetoric during the early Republican period within progressive intellectual circles and discuss the relevance of the symbolic distinction between ghosts and humans to literary production. Chapter two focuses upon a rarely discussed ghost fiction project of the “Analects Fortnightly” journal, which reveals how the increasing politicization of ghosts had the unintentional effect of making ghost fiction more attractive to writers who advocated against the equalization of art and politics. More specifically, the “Analects” Chief Editor Shao Xunmei hailed ghost stories as a critique of May Fourth literary humanism. Furthermore, I contend through a close reading of Shao's editorial and four short ghost stories that the difficulties and shortcomings of Shao's project are the most suggestive of the social, cultural and political vectors informing modern ghost fiction. This insight segues into chapter three, which discusses the phantom romance plot in 1930s and 1940s modernist and popular fiction by Shanghai writers. Drawing upon various psychoanalytic theories of fetishism, I argue that these texts explore new cultural functions of femininity and spectrality to address sexual difference,

commodity culture, and colonialism. Moreover, I seek to show that diverging arrogations of female phantom narratives by male authors writing in the 1930s and by female authors in the 1940s stem less from differences in literary milieu than from gendered experience. Highlighting the politics of textuality and languaging in socialist literary production, chapter four discusses not only ghost fiction, but more broadly stories told about ghosts in socialist literature. Among the texts discussed is also the socialist ghost story collection “Stories About Not Being Afraid of Ghosts” (*Bu pa gui de gushi* 不怕鬼的故事, 1961) which I argue was strategically modeled on late imperial anomaly account collections to express a symbolic distinction between the rational, ordered world of “languaged” humans and the deceitful, secretive trickery of ghosts. I conclude with a short story by Zong Pu, which evocatively captures the effects of this symbolic conjunction of revolutionary subjectivity and languaged life by narrating the story of a female scientist accused of being a counter-revolutionary as an aphasic disturbance. In the last chapter on ghost fiction from the post-Mao period I turn to the two urban ghost novels “White/Night” (*Baiye* 白夜, 1995) by Jia Pingwa and “The Seventh Day” (*Di qi tian* 第七天, 2013) by Yu Hua, which I discuss from the vantage point of post-secularist theories. While Jia's novel thematizes the ancient Mulian mystery play to develop a highly original perspective on labor migration and cultural heritage discourses in the context of urban transformation, Yu Hua's novel imagines a utopian ghost community, which seeks to overcome social inequality and environmental degradation. Together, both novels highlight the ethical importance of inhuman perspectives in developing new cultural approaches to social and environmental issues.

Chapter 1: The new ghosts of a new China

Ghosts are figures of crisis. Their return reminds us that neat distinctions and regulated boundaries between different times, places and identities may under certain circumstances not be as solid and impermeable as they seem. While ghosts vary in appearance and mode of manifestation depending upon cultural context, the often terrifying, but at times comforting or philosophically stimulating experience of haunting signals not simply a disruption of the everyday, but harbors the potential to change our perceptions of reality, our beliefs and values. Just as ghosts in literature are the product of their historical and cultural environments, they are also powerful figures for critiquing the status quo, as they can reveal what is hidden, repressed and marginalized by hegemonic paradigms and discourses, especially in times, when criticism of ghost beliefs and attacks on aesthetics of the fantastic are a central pillar of mainstream ideology.

In Chinese literature, ghosts have a long and varied history. As figurations of cosmological (dis-)order, cultural nostalgia, and historical trauma, among other things, ghosts figure not only prominently in a variety of genres, but have also attracted the disdain of state ideologues and religious reformers. However, it is only at the beginning of the 20th century that ghosts, both as religious and literary subject matter, became a symptom of national crisis and were condemned to decompose, as it were, alongside the “Confucian rubble” that the May Fourth iconoclasts eagerly shoveled into the dustbin of history. Culminating in one of the most famous slogans of Chinese socialist culture “The old society forced humans to be ghosts, the new society turns ghosts into humans!”¹ the history of modern Chinese literature has primarily been one of “ghost beating”

1 This line is from the revolutionary folk opera “The White-haired Girl” (*Baimaonü* 白毛女, 1945), which was adapted numerous times for stage and screen and eventually became one of the “model operas” (*yangbanxi* 样板戏) during the Cultural Revolution. See: He Jingzhi 贺敬之 and Ding Yi 丁毅, *Baimao nü* 白毛女 [*The White-Haired Girl*] (Beijing: Renmin wenxue, 1956), 94. For a history of this play see: Meng Yue 孟悦, “‘Baimaonü’ yanbian de qishi - Jianlun Yan’an wenyi de lishi duozhixing < 白毛女 > 演变的启示-兼论延安文艺的历史多质性 [The Transformations of ‘The White-Haired Girl’ and Its Significance: On the Polyphony of History in Yan’an Literature],” in *Zai jiedu: Dazhong wenyi yu yishi xingtai* 在解读:大众文艺与意识形态 [*Reinterpretation: Popular Literature and Art and Ideology*], ed. Tang Xiaobing 唐小兵 (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1993), 68–89.

(*dagui* 打鬼).² While classical literature boasted a motley inventory of supernatural beings and reveled in accounts of marvelous journeys across space and time, modern Chinese literature was from the early 20th century conceived of as first and foremost concerned with the representation of the social reality the Confucian elite had ignored for centuries. As literature became a powerful, political tool for nation-building, ghosts made way for humans and the fantastic and the strange were increasingly replaced with realist modes of writing.

However, the dialectic of tradition and modernity, even within May Fourth reform discourse, was not a simple matter of replacing the old with a new China. And often pronouncements of the death of tradition were more strategic than diagnostic. A new rhetoric of appeasing, beating and eradicating ghosts reflected China's difficult process of detaching itself from its own past, while simultaneously reinventing a national culture. In his introduction to a recent anthology of ghost-related essays by 20th century Chinese intellectuals Chen Pingyuan observes that leftist intellectuals read ghost stories not only for their scientific interest, for instance in folklore studies, but always also from “the vantage point of contemporary political struggle.”³ Ghosts and haunting provided a powerful metaphor and script for a modernization project caught between the rejection and the strategic appropriation of China's cultural history. But the importance of ghost stories and haunting as an allegorical repository of crisis narratives is not only explained by their ability to capture the struggles of a (semi-)colonial modernization project, but also by the fact that the aesthetic translation of the figure of the human plays such a crucial role in modern Chinese literary thought.

The cultivation of exemplary subjectivity has been a central concern of literary production and criticism in China from the early-20th century onward. In socialist realist fiction in particular this led to the representation of idealized, larger-than-life figures, who embody an organic synthesis of the dialectics between art and life. As Peter Button has persuasively argued, the protagonist of the

2 Hu Shi 胡适, “Zhengli guogu yu ‘dagui’ — Gei Hao Xu xiansheng xin 整理国故与‘打鬼’—给浩徐先生信 [The Organization of National Heritage and ‘Beating Ghosts’ — a Letter to Mr. Hao Xu],” in *Hu Shi quanji* 胡适全集 [The Complete Works of Hu Shi], vol. 3 (Hefei: Anhui jiaoyu, 2003), 144–55.

3 Chen Pingyuan 陈平原, ed., *Shen shen gui gui* 神神鬼鬼 [Deities and Ghosts] (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1992), 3.

socialist *Bildungsroman* in 1940s and 1950s China ultimately realizes human subjectivity in the universality of Freedom, Equality, and (materialist) History. At the same time, this “unfolding of the human project”⁴ also predicated itself on the subjugation of the class enemy. As the examples discussed in the following section will show, the human-ghost (*ren gui* 人鬼) dichotomy became in the early Republican period convenient short-hand for the well-known binary oppositions of modernity such as past-present, urban-rural, but also for the struggle between opposing world-views, notably between the Communist Party and its political enemies. Moreover, the Maoist ideology of “class racism”⁵ found in China's centuries-old ghost culture an important symbolic resource for the configuration of the feudalist and imperialist world-view. For instance, during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (*wuchan jieji wenhua dageming* 无产阶级文化大革命 1966-1976, henceforth Cultural Revolution) class enemies were labeled “ox ghosts and snake spirits” (*niugui sheshen* 牛鬼蛇神), terms derived from Buddhist demonology.

However, that the opposition between humans and ghosts gained such prominence within Maoist rhetoric owed not only to Mao's personal preference for demonic vocabulary. Rather the historical roots of the symbolic pairing lie in both secular thought and aesthetic theory. The fact that the same intellectuals who spoke out against ghost beliefs, were also involved in the abolition of traditional fictional styles and subject matters such as ghosts, is indicative of the conceptual conjunction of the political and the aesthetic in phantom matters. For instance, Lu Xun 鲁迅 (1881-1936)⁶ participated in a campaign in the progressive journal “New Youth” (*Xin Qingnian* 新青年) against spiritist societies, which enjoyed brief popularity from the late 1910s to the early 1930s and was at the same time, as is well known, a leading protagonist of the literary reform movement, which advocated for the adoption of the vernacular as literary language and increasingly favored literary realism over other narrative modes.

4 Peter Button, *Configurations of the Real in Chinese Literary and Aesthetic Modernity* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 258.

5 Haiyan Lee, *The Stranger and the Chinese Moral Imagination* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014).

6 Chinese characters and life dates of authors named in the main text are given at first mention. In a few cases, however, life dates are unknown.

This study is, nevertheless, neither an examination of the failures of literary realism nor does it follow the common indictment of realism as thematically banal and metaphysically naïve. In fact, many of the texts discussed actually follow what David Wang has coined the “realist paradigm.”⁷ Rather, it examines ghost narratives as a fictional space, where the separation between the real and unreal is not necessarily negated, but rather strategically confronted and blurred. In some cases, this was a strategy to not only distinguish oneself from the politicized literary aesthetics on the Left, but also to simply add color and excitement to the vocabulary of high-brow literary entertainment—a page of advice the poet Shao Xunmei 邵洵美 (1906-1968) took from the so-called “Saturday school” (*libailiu pai* 李百六派) of popular literature, as I will discuss in chapter two. Other cases reveal a more philosophically reflexive exploration of the role of beliefs and desires in the literary expression of historical experience and social reality, of cultural memory and trauma, and of environmental transformation. Such negotiations can all be found in contemporary ghost fiction by Su Tong 苏童 (1963-), Han Shaogong 韩少功 (1953-), Can Xue 残雪 (1953-), Jia Pingwa 贾平凹 (1952-), Mo Yan 莫言 (1955-), and many others, but also in the fiction of Shanghai-based writers from the 1920s to the 1940s such as Shi Zhecun 施蛰存 (1905-2003), Mu Shiying 穆时英 (1912-1940) and the female writer Shi Jimei 施济美 (1920-1968), who was a dominating figure of Shanghai's 1940s literary scene, but whose literary oeuvre has only recently been recognized as an important part of Shanghai's late Republican literary culture.⁸ Ghosts also play an important yet rarely acknowledged role in revolutionary Yan'an novels by Zhao Shuli 赵树理 (1906-1970) and Ouyang Shan 欧阳山 (1908-2004) and even make occasional appearances in highly ideological fiction from the 1960s such as Zhou Libo's 周立波 (1908-1979) short stories. Indeed, while the quantity of newly written ghost fiction diminished during the 20th century, aesthetic projects engaged with phantoms and the spectral have actually become more numerous and diverse, as not

7 David Dewei Wang, *The Monster That Is History: History, Violence, and Fictional Writing in Twentieth-Century China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 282.

8 Nicole Huang, *Women, War, Domesticity: Shanghai Literature and Popular Culture of the 1940s* (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

only do familiar ghosts reappear, but they are also joined for instance by the ghosts of Western gothic fiction and Freudian psychoanalysis.

An incisive example of these multiple vectors shaping modern Chinese ghost fiction is the short novel “The Completion of the Ritual” (*Yishi de wancheng* 仪式的完成, 1989) by Su Tong. The story begins with an anthropologist traveling to a remote village, where he learns of an ancient ritual of human sacrifice, which was abolished in 1924. Enthusiastic about his discovery, he convinces the villagers to restage the ritual, in which, similar to a game of drawing straws, all the participants take turns at pulling ghost money ingots from a pile. Whoever draws the note with the character “ghost” (*gui*) will be beaten to death by the other villagers in a sacrificial ceremony. It is, of course, no surprise that the anthropologist himself is elected ghost, as he is not only an outsider to the village, but also the only participant, who looks at the ritual for knowledge rather than religious experience.⁹ Indeed the villagers immerse themselves in the ritual proceedings to the point where they nearly beat the anthropologist to death. But despite successfully convincing the villagers at the last minute to halt the ritual and insisting that it is merely a staged fiction, the anthropologist cannot shake his “ghost” fate, begins to hallucinate and is eventually injured fatally in a car accident the moment he tries to leave the village, bringing the ritual after all to its intended conclusion.

There is plenty of eerie symbolism, which makes the narrative instantly recognizable as a ghost story. For instance, at the beginning of the story the anthropologist meets an old man, who turns out to be a ghost of a former villager. In the Chinese cultural tradition, seeing a ghost is taken as a sign of bad luck or imminent death. Death and its symbolic representation in the color white are also prominent. The narrative takes place during winter, the anemic folklorist wanders around the village in a rice-colored wind-breaker, and the narrator immediately draws the conclusion that the hills surrounding the village are ancient graves.

9 See also Haiyan Lee's discussion of the distinction between *Erfahrung* and *Erlebnis* in *The Stranger and the Chinese Moral Imagination*, 59-70.

Another prominent ghost fiction theme, in the Western as well as the Chinese literary tradition, are the blurred boundaries between past and present. As a temporal figure, the ghost lends itself naturally to the exploration of time, especially of how we make sense of the past. Ghost narratives are a way of processing societal change, trauma and institutional amnesia. Apart from Su's novel there are many examples of historical ghost fiction in the contemporary period such as Mo Yan's "Reunion of Comrades" (*Zhanyou chongfeng* 战友重逢, 1998), Can Xue's "Snake Island" (*Shedao* 蛇岛, 2004) and Wang Anyi's 王安忆 (1954-) "A Celestial Match" (*Tianxian pei* 天仙配, 1997). In "The Completion of the Ritual" history enters through the brutal fictional ritual of human sacrifice, which parallels the prosecution of counter-revolutionary "ox ghosts and snake spirits" during the Cultural Revolution. This can be seen in the importance attributed to the written character *gui*, but also the ritual itself mirrors the public show trials of "black gang elements" at the time, because it moves from the assembly where the designated culprit is exposed, to the public procession on the streets to the choreographed group violence against the "ghost." By restaging and reframing political theater as a religious ritual, Su's novel ingeniously highlights how secular Maoist ideology at its most radical moment turned itself into a relentlessly violent cult.¹⁰

Su Tong's novel illustrates how modern ghost fiction not only draws on very diverse, indigenous and foreign literatures and discourses of the spectral, but also how our readings need to take into account the complicated histories entangled with the multiple meanings of ghosts in the modern period. From a cursory survey of texts featuring ghostly figures and constellations of haunting from the early 20th century to the present, it becomes apparent that there is no set of generic conventions or recurring motifs that would allow us to systematically assign texts to one

10 While Chen Xiaoming reads Su Tong's novel as the swan song of 1980s avant-garde fiction, given the novel's realist style and its mystical theme, it is perhaps more apposite to read "The Completion of the Ritual" in relation to the "root-searching literature" (*xungen wenxue* 寻根文学) of the 1980s, which explored archaic and mystical themes as a remedy to what they perceived was a sterile and anemic socialist culture. By framing the figure of the anthropologist as a ghost and malignant trespasser, "The Completion of the Ritual" takes a critical stance toward the literary obsession with an ancient and mystical China. See Chen Xiaoming 陈晓明, "Zui hou de yishi - 'Xianfengpai' de lishi ji qi pinggu 最后的仪式——'先锋派'的历史及其评估 [The Last Ritual: History and Evaluation of the 'Avant-Garde Literary Movement']," *Wenxue pinglun* 5 (1991): 30–35. Su Tong's story is also discussed in Wang, *The Monster That Is History*, 281–82, and in Lee, *The Stranger and the Chinese Moral Imagination*, 69.

specific genre of ghost literature (e.g. *zhiguai*, gothic novel). Unlike modern Japanese literature, the fantastic as a literary mode is equally unsuitable, mainly because modern Chinese ghost fiction rarely leaves the reader hesitant or in doubt about what is real and what is not, which for instance Todorov's reader-response theory of the fantastic regards as one of its defining characteristics.¹¹ In fact, the crucial question raised by these texts is never whether ghosts exist or not, but rather why we should engage with the spectral or not, as the case may be.

In sum, the concerns and questions modern Chinese ghost fiction raises exceed deduction from a single set of philosophical influences and literary conventions. But what all of modern Chinese ghost fiction does to varying degrees have in common is the same generative matrix that is as much shaped by Chinese ghost beliefs and aesthetics as by secular ideologies of modernization and orientalist fantasies of a spiritual East. One of the main goals of this study is to trace the trajectories of this heterogeneous matrix that has generated a variety of new ways of writing and thinking about ghosts that are neither a continuation or an actualization of classical literature any more than they are a (self-orientalizing) sinicization of, for instance, the Western Gothic tradition.

What then further unifies the fictional writings discussed in this study to a certain extent is their longstanding unfavorable reception by mainstream literary critics and historians. Because of the mutual imbrication of the political and the aesthetic in the human/ghost dichotomy, the list of accusations leveled against ghost fiction include the fostering of religious superstitions, the promotion of anachronistic aesthetics and world-views, misogyny and anti-nationalistic sentiments, and the pandering to the lower tastes and desires of lesser educated readerships. Thus it is possible to broadly define the very diverse imaginative writings discussed in this study in terms of their dangerous affinities to increasingly suspect ideologies, although socialist realist fiction in particular tends to vehemently declare an anti-ghost stance and contemporary ghost fiction is, unlike cinema, rarely censored.

11 Susan Jolliffe Napier, *The Fantastic in Modern Japanese Literature: The Subversion of Modernity* (London, New York: Routledge, 1996); Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975).

Therefore, despite being a marginal subject matter in modern Chinese fiction, i.e. vernacular fiction from the beginning of the 20th century to the present,¹² the study of ghosts and other figurations of spectrality, a term I define later on, is important in three main respects. Firstly, it sheds light on issues of authority and memory in the shaping of modern Chinese literary history, as a large number of the texts discussed in the following chapters have not yet received sufficient critical attention and are often regarded as mere supplements or irrelevant to China's literary modernity. The second and third points relate to the broader political and aesthetic implications ghosts had and continue to have on the configuration of the relationship between art and life in modern China. On the one hand, ghosts focus our attention upon the shifting parameters of China's literary modernity, its ideologies of representation and their various limitations. What can and should be represented, and what not? Although not further elaborated on in the subsequent chapters, representation is a key notion in my analysis of ghost fiction, because writing in a certain way about humans and ghosts always also has broader implications beyond being a matter of aesthetic preference and commercial value. A more detailed discussion of the relationship between the spectral and representation follows, but for now I wish to merely point out the distinction between the aesthetic and political meaning of representation, for which Gayatri Spivak has famously invoked the difference between the German terms *Darstellung* and *Vertretung*. While *Darstellung* means describing something and rendering it perceptible and communicable, *Vertretung* means standing in or speaking on someone's behalf and is often used in a legal context—it is, to use one of Spivak's own examples the difference between “a proxy and a portrait.”¹³ Because the literary representation of ghosts in modern China raises issues not only connected to *Darstellung*, but also to *Vertretung*, the study of ghosts, thirdly, also helps us to consider how literature became in 20th

12 As many studies have already shown, the conventional periodization of modern Chinese literature into “recent” (*jindai* 近代 1840-1911), “modern” (*xiandai* 现代, 1911-1949) and “contemporary” (*dangdai* 当代, 1949-present) has to a certain extent hindered consideration of Chinese literature in broader geographical and temporal contexts, see Li-hua Ying, *Historical Dictionary of Modern Chinese Literature* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2009). Consonant with this study's emphasis on the continual appearance of literary ghost discourses throughout the 20th century, I use the term “modern” to refer to both the *xiandai* and *dangdai* periods.

13 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 259.

century China an enormously influential medium for the definition and assessment of social value. Writing ghost fiction does not only involve acknowledging or rejecting literary realism, but also means participating in the production of social, aesthetic, and political value. Through various ways of writing about human and ghost experiences, writers could both establish or contest the production of worth and worthlessness on both a personal and a national level. While not all ghost fiction involves the same political and social vectors, it is important to bear in mind throughout this study that writing about ghosts did in some cases also mean putting one's reputation, and even one's life, in danger. One well-known example for the very real influence a textual ghost could have is the heated debate on the play "Li Huiniang" (1961), a Kun opera adaptation of the late sixteenth century drama "Red Flowering Plum" (*Hongmei ji* 红梅记, Zhou Chaojun), which led to the prosecution of its writer Meng Chao during the Cultural Revolution.¹⁴ In a final twist, the moral of the story of the anthropologist in Su Tong's "The Completion of the Ritual" appears to be that only denial of the reality of ghosts in modern China is truly "delusional."

The title of this study is a reference to the Mao-era ghost story collection "Stories About Not Being Afraid of Ghosts" (*Bu pa gui de gushi*, 不怕鬼的故事, 1961, henceforth "Stories"), which Mao himself commissioned. Contrary to what the title might suggest, this anthology of premodern ghost stories was not conceived of as an "anti-superstition" campaign, but was meant to shore up cadre support for the party's struggle against the "ghosts" of revisionism, internal and abroad. But by doing so through the medium of Chinese ghost stories, the collection inadvertently actually also draws attention to how writers in earlier times wrote ghost stories not only for religious or entertainment purposes, but also to promote their own moral-philosophical views, to challenge aesthetic conventions or to assert their cultural authority. In this study I therefore propose a different, more subversive understanding of "not being afraid of ghosts" in modern China as the

14 For a discussion of this play see Maggie Greene, "A Ghostly Bodhisattva and the Price of Vengeance: Meng Chao, 'Li Huiniang', and the Politics of Drama, 1959-1979," *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture*, 2012, 149-199; and Zhang Lianhong 张炼红, *Lilian jinghun: Xin Zhongguo xiqu gaizao kaolun* 历练精魂: 新中国戏曲改造考论 [*Improving the Spirits: A Historical Study of Theater Reform in New China*] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2013).

recognition of the relevance and importance of ghosts to China's literary modernity, regardless of whether these literary acts of courage, to stay with the metaphor, aim at extending or further narrowing boundaries between the human and the spectral, as both positions exposed themselves to criticism.

Throughout this study, I use the somewhat misleading term “ghost fiction.” By this I do not mean texts, which were written by an author other than the one printed on the book's cover or that they are the product of automated writing. Rather, I define ghost fiction as imaginative literary works in which phantom figures not only play a central role, but also do actual *ghost work*, i.e. act as trespassers of boundaries real and metaphysical, or embody a state of exception and crisis. Taking my cue from the Greek verb *κρίνω* (“*krinó*”), which means “to distinguish,” “to differentiate,” but also “to evaluate” and “to judge,” ghosts are figures of crisis both in the sense of a sudden disruption of continuity, which may be temporal, spatial, or perceptual, but also in the sense of a challenge to what is accepted as real and true. This reading of ghosts as expressions of crisis is not only backed up by my “Benseler” Greek dictionary, but relies more importantly on two arguments, one historical, one theoretical. As we have seen, ghosts are deeply entrenched in the history of 20th century China's political ideology. This first became apparent during the early Republican period, when public intellectuals, scholars, and writers began to take an interest in ghost beliefs, ghost stories and even the Chinese character for *gui* 鬼 “ghost”, which unlike *youling* 幽灵 (“phantom” or “ghost”) is not a term significant to premodern aesthetic visions. The theoretical argument is based on Jacques Derrida's (1930-2004) concept of spectrality, which he developed most fully in his controversial study “Specters of Marx” (1993), and offers a helpful conceptual link between ghosts and critiques of modernization. Although each chapter will provide supplementary context to the texts under discussion and relies upon a variety of analytical frameworks, the development of anti-ghost rhetoric in the Republican period and Derrida's concept of spectrality are two important through-lines of this study. In the following I will first provide a

short introduction to Republican period discussions of both figurative and non-figurative ghosts with a special focus upon literary contexts. In the second part, I contextualize this project within the field of spectrality studies and previous scholarship, where I also outline the content of each chapter.

1 Getting serious about ghosts: anti-spiritualism and ghost rhetoric from 1918-1949

Within China's modernization discourse, ghosts become a heavily politicized topic. While the Chinese lexicon actually has numerous terms for ghosts, these debates focused most often upon the term *gui* 鬼 („ghost“). Why does *gui* become important? And how is *gui* employed as an aestheticopolitical term? Here, I propose some tentative answers to these questions by analyzing usages and critiques of *gui* in mainly Republican-era sources. This section aims at providing some general context for the subsequent chapters in which I investigate various usages and meanings of ghosts in literature against the backdrop of an increasingly *gui*-hostile literary environment.

Although hard-and-fast distinctions between ghost, phantom, revenant, spook, spirit, etc. would be difficult to make in any language, in modern Chinese “ghost” is conventionally translated as *gui*, while *hun* 魂, *hunpo* 魂魄 and *youling* 幽灵 refer more frequently to the immaterial soul, the spirit, or metaphorical meanings derived thereof. While the compound *guishen* 鬼神 (ghosts and gods) already suggests that even the divine *shen* are more closely associated with the ghostly than gods in the Graeco-Roman tradition, the *hulijing* 狐狸精, “were-fox”, the *yuanhun* 冤魂, “vengeful spirit”, the *jiangshi* 僵尸, “zombie” and the myriad of circumstantially determined ghosts such as the *shuigui* 水鬼, “ghosts of the drowned”, and many more all belong to the at times dangerous, at times jocular world of supernatural beings that have no single equivalent in English. Earliest usages of the character *gui* suggest that it could mean both foreign in the sense of non-Chinese as well as in the supernatural sense of not belonging to the world of the living.¹⁵ While the meaning of the

15 Mu-chou Poo, “The Concept of Ghost in Ancient Chinese Religion,” in *Religion and Chinese Society*, ed. John Lagerwey, vol. 1 (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2004), 173–91.

character is highly debated, the Chinese term *gui* has been shown to be a derivative of the verb *wei* 威, “awe inspiring”. From a literary historical perspective, the term *hun* is more important, especially in the compounds *huanhun* 还魂, “returning soul” or “revenant”, and *yuanhun* 冤魂, “vengeful spirit”.¹⁶ But because *gui* had over time acquired a number of derivative meanings, often derogatory in nature, and are also more closely associated with religious practices than other ghost figures, May Fourth secularizers singled out *gui* as their primary target of attack and not, for instance, a belief in *hun*.

A particular thorn in the eyes of the “New Youth” (*Xin Qingnian* 新青年) literati was the “Shanghai Spiritist Society” (*Shanghai lingxuehui* 上海灵学会) and their experiments with such things as spirit calligraphy (*jizi* 乩字), spirit painting (*jihui* 乩绘 or *jihua* 乩画), and spirit photography (*linghun zhaoxiang* 灵魂照相). In their attacks neither *hun* nor *youling* appear and instead *gui* take center stage. Lu Xun writes in 1918:

Nowadays, there is a whole group of people talking about ghosts [*guihua* 鬼话]. They hate science, because science teaches us reason and understanding as well as a clear thought process, which doesn't allow for any aimlessness [*guihun* 鬼混]. [...] They even go as far as to propose the death sentence for science, and yet still unexpectedly invoke the two teachings. That is why on a boxer pamphlet it is clearly stated: “Master Confucius and Celestial Master Zhang [famous Daoist hermit] are sending you their words from Shandong, spread it fast, there is no false word!” [...] In my opinion, to rescue this China, which „is about to be divided and its people extinct” the method of “Master Confucius and Celestial Master Zhang sending word from Shandong” is completely inappropriate. Only science can oppose this nonsense [*guihua* 鬼话]! Real science cannot be easily dismissed!¹⁷

16 The semantics of *gui* and *hun* are also discussed in Judith T. Zeitlin, *The Phantom Heroine: Ghosts and Gender in Seventeenth-Century Chinese Literature* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007), 4–5.

17 Lu Xun 鲁迅, “Sanshisan 三十三 [Thirty-Three],” in *Lu Xun quanji* 鲁迅全集 [*The Complete Works of Lu Xun*], 1st ed., vol. 1 (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1987), 298–302.

Also, in contrast to earlier critiques of various Chinese ghost beliefs, their anti-superstition campaign did not distinguish between the political, the social, and the cultural. Indeed, under the fiery pen of these reformers a new *gui*-ghost appeared that was not only the antithesis of the secular and the scientific, but a cultural obstacle of the Chinese people. Chen Duxiu 陈独秀 (1879-1942), for instance, noted in his critique of the “return to the application of Euro-American theories of the soul” that spiritist societies were advocating that nothing exerted such a detrimental effect on China's soul (*xin* 心) as ghost beliefs.¹⁸

Gui became a master signifier that encompassed not only all old forms of ghostly literary and non-literary discourses, but also generated a plethora of new figurative uses. The old ghosts were joined by “living ghosts” (*huogui* 活鬼) such as “foreign devils” (*yanggui* 洋鬼), “opium ghosts” (*yangui* 烟鬼), “romantic ghosts” (*fengliugui* 风流鬼, i.e. brothel clients) and most infamously the “Japanese devils” (*riben guizi* 日本鬼子). While this “living ghost” rhetoric was not new in itself, and I will return to the genre of satirical ghost novels shortly, a semantic shift in its use was taking place. For instance, in the essay, in which Hu Shi 胡适 (1891-1962) lists China's “five ghosts,” poverty, disease, ignorance, corruption and chaos, he uses *gui* synonymously with *choudi* 仇敌, “enemy”. And, defending his archival research on the Dunhuang manuscripts Hu polemically added that “the numerous carnivorous and misguiding ghosts inside this 'rotten pile of paper' are more harmful to humans than Pasteur's bacteria” and “while inserting new knowledge and new [ways of] thinking is necessary, [the task of] extinguishing ghosts (*dagui* 打鬼) is even more pressing.”¹⁹ Hu uses *gui* no longer merely to comment on public mores, but insinuates that ghosts, who symbolize China's social problems and ideological hurdles, are the greatest obstacle on China's path towards modernization.

The political stakes involved in this debate on ghosts and *gui* is further evidenced in linguistic and paleographic scholarship of the time. Zhang Taiyan 章太炎 (1868-1936) and Shen

18 Chen Duxiu, “You *gui* lun zhiyi 有鬼论质疑 [Questions and doubts concerning the existence of ghosts],” in *Shen shen gui gui*, ed. Chen Pingyuan (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1992), 1.

19 Hu Shi, “Zhengli guogu yu ‘dagui’ — Gei Hao Xu xiansheng xin,” 146.

Jianshi 沈兼士 (1887-1947) pushed in a more clearheaded fashion for a worldly interpretation of the character's semantics.²⁰ Shen especially argued that in its earliest usages *gui* was not primarily and only in very limited contexts used as ghost or spirit and should rather be read as referring more often to the worldly realms of wild animals, foreign tribes, and human feelings of fear and disgust. Whilst Shen's scholarly work can be situated within the movement for the “organization of national heritage” (*zhengli guogu* 整理国故) around Hu Shi and Gu Jiegang 顾颉刚 (1893-1980), Shen's work on the character *gui* was not directly driven by any political agenda. Yet, Shen's linguistic argumentation against a supernatural understanding of *gui* echoed a widely shared sentiment among leading intellectuals that ghost beliefs needed to be attacked on all scientific fronts.

In literary circles ghosts were a more overtly political topic. On the occasion of turning fifty Zhou Zuoren 周作人 (1885-1967) published two doggerels or “ragged poems” (*dayou shi* 打油诗), in which he mockingly depicts himself as “half Confucian, half Buddhist”, who “walks the streets all day listening and talking to ghosts and sits by the window all year round drawing snakes [i.e. writing *caoshu* 草书, i.e. cursive script]”.²¹ Zhou drew stark criticism from leftist intellectuals, not only for espousing such a world-weary view of the intellectual figure as doing nothing but “playing with collectibles” and “growing sesame,” but especially for his use of the terms “fox spirits” and “ghosts.”²² This attack is all the more remarkable considering that Zhou had been one of the leading voices of the leftist literary movement, notably calling for “human(ist) literature” or a “literature of Man” (*ren de wenxue* 人的文学) in 1918.²³ Nevertheless, reading Zhou's poem alongside his

20 Zhang Taiyan's article is from 1907, while Shen Jianshi's article was first published in Chinese in 1935, and in English in 1936. Zhang Taiyan, “Da Tie Zheng 答铁铮 [Reply to Tie Zheng],” in *Zhang Taiyan quanji* 章太炎全集 [*The Complete Works of Zhang Taiyan*], ed. Xiong Yuezhi 熊月之, vol. 4 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1982), 369–75; Shen Jianshi, “‘Gui’zi yuanshi yiyi zhi shitan [A preliminary inquiry into the archaic meanings of the character ‘gui’ 鬼’字原始意义之试探],” in *Shen Jianshi xueshu lunwen ji* 沈兼士学术论文集 [*The Collected Scholarly Works of Shen Jianshi*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), 186–202.

21 Zhang Juxiang 张菊香 and Zhang Tierong 张铁荣, eds., *Zhou Zuoren nianpu* (1885-1967) 周作人年谱 [*A Chronological Biography of Zhou Zuoren*] (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 2000), 440.

22 The repercussions Zhou had to endure after “talking ghosts” would become an important historical precedent for the *Analect* writers of the ghost story special issues I discuss in chapter two, for instance in “On Ghost Texts” (*Tan gui bian* 谈鬼编) by Xu Wugui 徐无鬼 (literally “Noghost Xu,” a not very oblique penname I could however not trace to any known author).

23 Zhou Zuoren, “Ren de wenxue 人的文学 [A Literature of Man],” in *Zhongguo xin wenxue daxi* 中国新文学大系 [*Compendium of Modern Chinese Literature*], vol. 1 (Hong Kong: Xianggang wenxue yanjiushe, 1968), 219–25.

lecture script “Spirits of the Past” (*Guoqu de youling*, 过去的幽灵) Hu Feng 胡风 (1902-1985), Zhou Zuoren's former student, mocked his teacher by rhetorically asking: “Are the ghosts that Mr. Zhou speaks of and those that he hears of, not the same ghosts he warned us about in his very own translation [of the Russian writer Vasili Eroshenko's lecture]?”²⁴

Similarly, in a short study on ghosts in Shakespeare's works, the literary critic Liang Shiqiu 梁实秋 (1903-1987) sarcastically remarks that his leftist colleagues were so fervently against ghosts that if Shakespeare were alive in China at this moment his ghosts would not be allowed on stage.²⁵ And in the editorial to the ghost story special issue (*Gui gushi zhuanhao* 鬼故事专号) of the “Analects Fortnightly” (*Lunyu banyuekan* 论语半月刊), in which Liang's article appeared, the editor Shao Xunmei disparagingly concludes that anti-superstition campaigns had dealt an almost fatal blow to ghosts in literature as well, although he was convinced that ghosts indeed should have a place in modern fiction.

Ghost criticism has to be viewed within the larger context of China's new culture movement and its intellectual-elitist enterprise of creating a modern Chinese vernacular fiction. The normative temporalities underlying the reformer's cultural-evolutionary model of civilizational development meant that “strange” and fantastical fiction had become a symptom of Chinese culture's “backwardness.” To literary reformers, ghosts were not simply a problematic subject matter, but also symbolized China's literary heritage as a whole—a sentiment that is astutely captured in Lu Xun's caricature of Chinese literature as conveying nothing but the “optimism of zombies” (*jiangshi de leguan* 僵尸的乐观).²⁶ Conventional historiography of modern Chinese literature unsurprisingly assumes a gradual triumph of the realist vernacular novel and acknowledges other genres, which in David Wang's terminology were just as vital to the “dissemination of modernity,”²⁷

24 Hu Feng, *Hu Feng zawen ji* 胡风杂文集 [*Collection of Hu Feng's Miscellaneous Writings*] (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 1987), 17–19.

25 Liang Shiqiu, “Lue tan Shashibiya zuopin li de gui 略谈莎士比亚作品里的鬼 [Some Remarks on Ghosts in Shakespeare's Works],” *Lunyu banyuekan* 论语半月刊 [*Analects Fortnightly*], 92 (1936): 950–51.

26 Lu Xun, “Xinqingnian bidu shu 新青年必读书 [Necessary Readings for the Youth],” in *Lu Xun quanji*, vol. 3 (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1987), 12.

27 David Dewei Wang, *Fin-de-Siecle Splendor: Repressed Modernities of Late Qing Fiction, 1848-1911* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 22.

if only as literary “anachronisms.” The main criticisms leftist intellectuals leveled against these “other” literatures—very broadly defined as encompassing popular fiction written in a classical style as well as “serious” modern vernacular fiction with “fantastic” narrative elements, as found in works of Shi Zhecun, Mu Shiying and Xu Xu 徐訏 (1908-1980)—were that they catered to a leisure culture providing readers with escapist fantasies deemed incompatible with their didactic project of creating a national literature.

However, *gui* could to a certain degree also be of scholarly interest. The rediscovery of the rather obscure and infamously difficult to read Qing novel “What literary reference is this?” (*He dian* 何典, Zhang Nanzhuang 张南庄, 1879) by the leftist intellectual Liu Bannong 刘半农 (1891-1934) is particularly illuminating in this respect because the novel is not only set in the ghost world, but actually uses the ghost world as a pretext for its excessive creation of neologisms with *gui* as affix.²⁸ While Liu Bannong found it necessary to censor sexually explicit expressions from the novel, he did not take issue with its ghost discourse, as Zhang's ghost parody relies chiefly on the lexical ambiguity of *gui* as both “ghost” and “nonsense.” As a signifier of irreverence towards Confucian literary practices and its scrupulous deference to canonical works (as the title puns on,) *gui* are read as part and parcel of a popular literary practice that resisted this dogmatic and calcified establishment and serve (rightly or not) as historical proof of a proto-vernacular literary tradition.²⁹

At the same time, there was renewed interest in the early Qing novel “A Tale of Ghost Beheading” (*Zhangui zhuan* 斩鬼传, 1688, Liu Zhang 刘璋),³⁰ in whose generic lineage *He dian* was placed, and the sub-genre of ghost satire more generally.³¹ A number of new imitative works

28 In fact, the novel had never been as obscure as its rescuers Liu Bannong and Lu Xun thought, because apart from the original at least four editions had already been in circulation prior to Liu's modern edition of 1926. See Roland Altenburger, “Chains of Ghost Talk: Highlighting of Language, Distancing, and Irony in *He Dian*,” *Asiatica Venetiana* 6 (February 2001): 23–46.

29 For further discussion of *Hedian* see also Wang, *Fin-de-Siecle Splendor*.

30 This novel was reprinted at least twice during the socialist period prior to the Cultural Revolution. In a brief summary accompanying the 1959 edition, the editors point out that fiction such as *Zhan gui zhuan* helps renew the contemporary reader's appreciation of the “value and beauty” (*kegui ke'ai* 可贵可爱) of the present, while they also freely acknowledge that they excised vulgar expressions: “a common problem in popular fiction of the time.” The novel has been translated into German (du Bois-Reymond 1923) and French (Danielle Éliassberg 1976).

31 David Wang describes this genre as “comic ghost fiction,” see Wang, *Fin-de-Siecle Splendor*, 205.

appeared by writers of very diverse literary and political backgrounds. Probably the most famous examples are Zhang Henshui's 张恨水 (1895-1967) “New Account of Ghost Beheading” (*Xin zhan gui zhuan* 新斩鬼传, 1926)³² and Zhang Tianyi's 张天翼 (1906-1985) “Ghostland Diary” (*Guitu riji* 鬼土日记, 1931).³³ Both novels draw on a similar logic of tragicomically invoking the underworld and its myriad supernatural figures and religious customs to create a sociopolitical satire of the present. Another modern work in the ghost satire tradition is Qian Zhongshu's 钱钟书 (1910-1998) short story collection “Human, Beast, Ghost” (*Ren, Shou, Gui*, 1946). It depicts a world, in which hell appears to have taken up permanent residency on earth and evolution has strayed off the developmental one-way street from ghost to beast to human. In “Inspiration” (*Linggan*, 灵感), for instance, the fictional characters of an overrated writer come upon his accidental suicide to “life” as haunting ghosts in the afterworld demanding justice for the writer's inability to give them a fuller and more believable life in his books.³⁴

Parallel to this line of mostly satirical *gui* allegories developed a strand of leftist ghost literature that targeted specific political enemies. Here *gui* designate both an ideogeographical distinction between civility (*hua* 华) and barbarity (*yi* 夷) and ideological difference, which also helps explain why the famous “specter” from the opening line of the “Communist Manifesto” has never been rendered as *gui* in Chinese translations.³⁵ One example is Wang Lan's 王蓝 “Tales from

32 Zhang makes explicit reference to „What literary reference is this?” in his preface.

33 “Ghostland Diary” actually combines elements of both ghost satire and (fantastical) travel literature such as *Jinghua yuan* 镜花缘 (“Flowers in the Mirror”, 1827, Li Ruzhen 李汝珍) and *Laocan youji* 老残游记 (“The Travels of Lao Can”, 1907, Liu E 刘鹗), especially in its use of the figure of the uninitiated traveler, who embodies the foil of normalcy to the foreign and exotic locale on literary exhibition (in this case a living person, temporarily transported to the world of the dead).

34 There is both a French and an English translation of Qian's short stories: *Hommes, Bêtes et Démons*, trans. Sun Chaoying (Paris: Gallimard, 1994); *Humans, Beasts, and Ghosts: Stories and Essays*, trans. Christopher G. Rea, and Dennis T. Hu, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

35 The first complete Chinese translation of the Communist Manifesto is commonly attributed to Chen Wangdao 陈望道, published in 1920, but there exist at least two earlier (partial) translations into classical Chinese by exchange students in Japan: one is the unrecovered version from 1907 by a student writing under the penname Shu Hun 蜀魂 and the other is a partial translation signed with Min Ming 民鸣 from 1908, which was published in *Tian yi bao* (天义报), the anarchistic journal of Chinese exchange students. Chen's translation was based on the Japanese rendition by Kotoku Shusui and Sakai Toshihiko of the official English translation of the “Manifesto” and uses the same characters for specter/*Gespenst* as the Japanese version, i.e. *guaiwu* 怪物, literally “strange matter”. Min Ming's translation uses the synonymous *yiwu* 异物. In Hua Gang's 华冈 translation from 1932 we still find *guaiwu*, but in Chen Fangwu 成仿吾 and Xu Bing's 徐冰 translation from 1938, which is the first Chinese translation based on the German text, *Gespenst* is suddenly rather idiosyncratically rendered as *ju ying* 巨影, “mighty shadow”. Other translations give *Gespenst* as jingling 精灵, “spirit” (Chen Shoushi 陈瘦石, 1945), *guai ying* 怪影, “strange

Ghost City” (*Guicheng Ji* 鬼城记, 1944) that captures in short vignettes the author's experiences during four years in Japanese-occupied Tianjin, bearing witness to: “the beautiful and majestic mountains and rivers turning into heaps of skeletons and lakes of blood”.³⁶ Ouyang Shan's novel “Ghost Nest” (*Guichao* 鬼巢, 1936) is an interesting hybrid in this sub-genre, because the ghosts of the title refer both to the Guomindang government and to the Communist victims of a mass assassination, who are now haunting an old theater. Although Ouyang begins his novel with the narrator insisting that he never liked “mysterious, monstrous and strange things”³⁷ the supernatural connotations of *gui* carry considerable narrative momentum, as when, for instance, the ghosts appear in the protagonist Gao Gang's 高刚 dreams.

During the Yan'an period (1935-1947) two major works focusing upon ghosts were produced. The lesser known is Ouyang Shan's novel “Uncle Gao” (Gao Ganda 高干大, 1943) which creatively adapts traditional conceptualizations of sickness as caused by ghosts for the ideology of the class enemy. I will discuss Ouyang's novel in more detail in chapter four. The most influential and today still performed work is “The White-haired Girl,” which is a collectively penned *yangge* 秧歌 dramatic performance by writers of the Yan'an “Lu Xun Academy” based on regional folk tales and mythology. The play's numerous adaptations for stage and screen reveal not only shifts in state ideology through adaptation and censorship, but also that ghost culture remained central to state-promoted narratives of revolution and class struggle.

To this day, China is the only country in the world that officially bans ghosts (and other supernatural creatures, for that matter) from films. Although there are domestic productions that have managed to bring some ghosts back to the silver screens, ghost appearances are most often

shadow” (Moscow: Foreign Language Press, 1949) and *mo ying* 魔影, “demonic shadow” (again Chen Fangwu, 1953). Today *Gespenst* is translated as *youling*, which first appeared in Bo Gu's 博古 1943 translation, and has resulted in the translation of Derrida's “Specters of Marx” as *Makesi de youling* 马克思的幽灵. A detailed Chinese translation history of the “Manifesto” and partial reprints of all version can be found in Zhang Yan 张妍, ed., *Gongchandang xuanyan: Hanyi jinian ban* 共产党宣言: 汉译纪念版 [Commemorative Edition of the Chinese Translations of “The Communist Manifesto”] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011).

36 Wang Lan, *Guicheng ji* (Chongqing: Honglan chubanshe, 1944), 63.

37 Ouyang Shan, “Guichao,” in *Ouyang Shan wenji* 欧阳山文集 [The Collected Works of Ouyang Shan], vol. 2 (Guangzhou: Huacheng, 1988), 594.

couched in narratives that offer some “rational” explanation for the supernatural events.³⁸ Or they cater to the state's global culture agenda, as in the most prominent case of the film franchise “Painted Skin” (*Huapi* 画皮, 2008, dir. Gordon Chan 陈嘉上; *Huapi 2*, 2012, dir. Wu Ershan 乌尔善). Although ghost censorship in literature has ceased almost completely,³⁹ ghosts are still a politically sensitive subject matter and continue to be appropriated and re-interpreted both in political rhetoric and in literature. For instance in the latest and heavily expanded edition of “Stories About not Being Afraid of Ghosts” from 1999 *gui* are yet again invoked to discredit enemies of “socialism with Chinese characteristics”: “As we are approaching the new millennium, those practices that the May Fourth cultural avant-gardists Lu Xun and Chen Duxiu already rebuked as “ghostly” (*guidao* 鬼道) and “demonic spirited” (*yaoqi* 妖气) such as false qigong and false science, are regaining the upper hand. Under the pretense of promoting traditional ethnic culture and health through physical exercise, [these practices] deceive the people; [...] For example 'Falun Dafa' [...],”⁴⁰ On the other hand, Yu Hua's 余华 to date harshest critique of contemporary Chinese society in “The Seventh Day” (*Di qi tian* 第七天, 2013) features an all ghost cast. Although *gui* became an increasingly coercive method of exclusion, they also developed, sometimes for that very reason, a critical potential that accounts for their ongoing salience to contemporary culture production.

2 Making the case for ghosts: putting the project in context

This project analyzes the representation of phantoms and similar figurations of spectrality in literary texts. These representations may draw on religious motifs and their history in the modern period or re-iterate classical Chinese genres of supernatural writing such as the *zhiguai*. But as Judith Zeitlin

38 A short history of ghost censorship in Chinese cinema can be found in Laikwan Pang, “The State Against Ghosts: A Genealogy of China’s Film Censorship Policy,” *Screen* 52, no. 4 (January 12, 2011): 461–76. Some examples of PRCh horror movies are discussed in Li Zeng, “Horror Returns to Chinese Cinema: An Aesthetic of Restraint and the Space of Horror,” *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media* 51 (2009): 1–12.

39 There are rumors that the online hit novel “Ghost Blows out the Candle” (*Gui chui deng* 鬼吹灯, 2006, Tianxia Bachang 天下霸唱 (pen name of Zhang Muye 张牧野)) had to be altered prior to its hard-copy publication. True or not, it is interesting that this discourse of ghost censorship continues, if only to add panache to a commercial novel.

40 Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan wenxue yanjiusuo 中国社会科学院文学研究所 [The Institute of Literature of the Chinese Academy of Sciences], ed., *Bu pa gui de gushi* 不怕鬼的故事 [Stories about Not Being Afraid of Ghosts] (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1999), 3–4.

in her study of premodern female phantoms comments, “a specter is always an image, culturally and historically constructed, and it therefore forces us to consider what it means to represent something in a given period and context.”⁴¹ Accordingly, the readings in the following chapters always proceed from the context of textual production and start out with the same three-pronged question: What kind of ghosts appear in which contexts, and how do these relate to broader literary-historical configurations of such notions as textuality, subjectivity and society? Owing to the heterogeneous nature of literary ghosts in modern China, my readings necessarily draw on different theoretical approaches. Nevertheless, what could be called the general methodology of this study is rooted in the field of “spectrality studies,” itself a somewhat elusive and heterogeneous precinct of academic inquiry,⁴² and informed, more specifically, by what Derrida calls the ghost's “paradoxical phenomenality.”

In recent years ghosts have become a ubiquitous conceptual figure in contemporary culture theory and are brought to bare on a dizzying array of topics, from the expected such as English gothic fiction to more unorthodox fields such as postcolonial citizenship.⁴³ Considering the long-standing suspicion towards and even contempt for the occult and the supernatural by scholars of the 20th century, ghosts have since the 1990s enjoyed by any standard a remarkable academic comeback. Jacques Derrida's “Specters of Marx” (1993) was, as Maria del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren in their comprehensive introduction to the field of spectrality studies rightly point out, the “main catalyst” of this comeback, as it facilitated the consideration of ghosts as suitable “for exploring and illuminating phenomena other than the putative return of the dead.”⁴⁴ Taking his cue from the archaic term *specter* used by Marx and Engels in the “Communist Manifesto,” Derrida develops his critique of the proclamation of the end of Marxism and the final triumph of the

41 Zeitlin, *The Phantom Heroine*, 10.

42 María del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren, eds., *The Spectralities Reader: Ghosts and Haunting in Contemporary Cultural Theory* (New York, London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 33.

43 Pheng Cheah, *Spectral Nationality: Passages of Freedom from Kant to Postcolonial Literatures of Liberation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

44 Blanco and Peeren, *The Spectralities Reader*, 2.

capitalist world order in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union by reconsidering ghosts and haunting as a theoretical method for exposing the illusionary “self-sufficiency” and naturalness of a hegemonic discourse (such as Francis Fukuyama's “end of history”). As he puts it very bluntly in one passage: “Hegemony still organizes the repression and thus the confirmation of a haunting. Haunting belongs to the structure of every hegemony.”⁴⁵ Although the political vectors of Derrida's work have been criticized and even ridiculed, his suggestion that we “live with” rather than exorcise ghosts offered humanities scholar and social scientists alike a welcome new vantage point to consider the ethical and political trajectories of ghosts and haunting.⁴⁶

Beyond the shock value of bringing something commonly regarded as unbecoming scholarly inquiry into the realm of high theory, Derrida actually invites us to take ghosts seriously, not because they are real as in verifiable in a natural science experiment, but because they invite us to rethink ethics from the vantage point of who or what is not fully represented, i.e. present through absence. In “Ghosts: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, History” Peter Buse and Andrew Stott explain:

Ghosts are neither dead nor alive, neither corporeal objects nor stern absences. As such, they are the stock-in-trade of the Derridean enterprise, standing in defiance of binary oppositions such as presence and absence, body and spirit, past and present, life and death. For deconstruction, these terms cannot stand in clear, independent opposition to one another, as each can be shown to possess an element or trace of the term that it is meant to oppose.⁴⁷

The specter or revenant, to use Derrida's preferred terminology, captures what he calls a “supernatural and paradoxical phenomenality;”⁴⁸ it represents a visible invisibility, a non-sensuous

45 Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, ed. Bernd Magnus and Stephen Cullenberg, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), 37.

46 A number of responses to Derrida's “Specters” by Marxist thinkers, mostly “ranging from skepticism, to ire, to outright contempt” can be found in Jacques Derrida et al., *Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium on Jacques Derrida's Spectres of Marx*, ed. Michael Sprinker (London, New York: Verso, 2008), 2.

47 Peter Buse and Andrew Stott, *Ghosts: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999), 10.

48 Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 7.

sensuous, a tangible intangible. What Paul de Man identifies as the “idea of modernity” offers a useful contextualization for understanding the ethical implications Derrida's diagnosis is aiming at here. As he describes it:

Modernity exists in the form of a desire to wipe out whatever came earlier in the hope of reaching at last a point that could be called a true present, a point of origin that marks a new departure. This combined interplay of a deliberate forgetting with an action that is also a new origin reaches the full power of the idea of modernity.⁴⁹

The paradox of this desire is, according to de Man, that the more modernity seeks to suppress and forget “anteriority,” the more threatening this past becomes. For Derrida, ghosts as paradoxical arrivants, as “ontologically ambiguous” figures,⁵⁰ reveal the exclusionary politics of this desire, to which we can either respond with ever more violent exorcisms or recognize that where haunting is inevitable it is more apposite to offer these “other arrivants” what he calls “a hospitable memory or promise.”⁵¹ The political trajectory of an ethics, which does not negate, but rather welcomes what it fears and does not understand, is helpfully, but also problematically, clarified in a passage in which Derrida draws on the image of the immigrant.

One should not rush to make of the clandestine immigrant [Derrida is speaking of Marx] an illegal alien or, what always risks coming down to the same thing, to domesticate him. To neutralize him through naturalization. To assimilate him so as to stop frightening oneself (making oneself fear) with him. He is not part of the family, but one should not send him back, once again, him too, to the border.⁵²

Although in “Specters” Derrida is chiefly concerned with the question of how a commitment to Marxism is still possible in the context of the “orgy of self-congratulations which followed the 1989

49 Paul De Man, “Literary History and Literary Modernity,” *Daedalus* 99, no. 2 (1970): 388–89.

50 Carla Jodey Castricano, *Cryptomimesis: The Gothic and Jacques Derrida's Ghost Writing* (Montreal: McGill Queens University Press, 2001), 5.

51 Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 175.

52 *Ibid.*, 174.

crumbling of the Berlin Wall,”⁵³ his reconceptualization of ghosts, which not only represent otherness and subalternity, but also challenge us to envision more inclusionary ethical perspectives, has helped “theorize a variety of social, ethical, and political questions”⁵⁴ beyond the fate of Marxist politics. As del Pilar Blanco and Peeren succinctly summarize:

These questions include, among others, the temporal and spatial sedimentation of history and tradition, and its impact on possibilities for social change; the intricacies of memory and trauma, personal and collective; the workings and effects of scientific processes, technologies, and media; and the exclusionary, effacing dimension of social norms pertaining to gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and class.⁵⁵

The idea of modernity as a “haunted” ghost-busting machinery has appealed particularly to literary scholars and anthropologists who had never fully severed all contact with supernatural matters. But while Derrida himself draws significantly on Shakespeare's “Hamlet” and “Timon of Athens,” he has actually opposed readings of the spectral as an “aesthetic.”⁵⁶ And as del Pilar Blanco and Peeren point out, there is also the risk of “overstretching”⁵⁷ ghosts as a conceptual metaphor, turning the spectral into a cliché trope, which is no longer able “to discriminate between instances and largely uninterested in historicity.”⁵⁸

But despite these conceptual pitfalls and dangers, Derrida's diagnosis of a haunting that is felt as an obligation to act nevertheless provides a compelling analytical framework for this study, because it begins at a similar juncture within the history of modern Chinese literature, when vernacular ghost fiction started to appear, which not only expresses a sentiment that something dead is living on in the present, but also that ghosts and ghost stories could or should contribute to the

53 Bernd Magnus and Stephen Cullenberg in the introduction to the English edition of *Specters of Marx*, vii.

54 Blanco and Peeren, *The Spectralities Reader*, 2.

55 Ibid.

56 Jacques Derrida, “Marx and Sons,” in *Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium on Jacques Derrida's Specters of Marx*, ed. Michael Sprinker (London, New York: Verso, 2008), 248.

57 Blanco and Peeren, *The Spectralities Reader*, 15.

58 Roger Luckhurst, “The Contemporary London Gothic and the Limits of the ‘Spectral Turn,’” *Textual Practice* 16, no. 3 (2002): 535.

configuration of China's literary modernity. On the one hand, this study first asks what kind of absence particular ghosts re-present, but then also analyzes how this particular experience or presence relates to the terms of China's modernization more broadly. For instance, in chapter three I read the representation of female phantoms in fiction by male and female Shanghai writers of the 1930s and 1940s as gendered reflections of, and on, Shanghai's commodity culture, cosmopolitanism, and the changing real and symbolic roles of women.

What do I mean by representation? As I have pointed out, two different meanings of representation in the context of ghosts need to be distinguished, only because they become frequently conflated in the literary texts I discuss. Understood as *Darstellung*, representation means rendering something visible, but as *Vertretung* it means advocating on behalf of someone or something, which can of course also be an act of rights deprivation—an important aspect of my discussion of ghostly discourses in socialist fiction in chapter four. But Derrida's discussion of spectrality complicates the notion of representation even further by highlighting the ambivalent ontology of representation, in the sense of imagination, which is in German *Vorstellung*.

Representation-as-*Vorstellung* appears in Marx' "The German Ideology" in a derogatory sense as the false consciousness of the religious imagination. The truth of religion is that it is a reflection of the history of the material world and not something "internal to consciousness."⁵⁹ As Marx sees it, "in religion people make their empirical world into an entity that is only conceived, imagined, that confronts them as something foreign." But as Derrida persuasively argues *Vorstellung* is not only "in the head", but also "outside the head."⁶⁰ This is because if "subjective representation and an abstraction" are reflections of material history, then nothing would persist, or survive as Derrida puts it, beyond its time and a totally/totalitarian, synchronized world would be possible. So not only is Marx' own argument contradictory, but Derrida uses the example of Marxism itself to point out that an idea could not have a future, if, as its critiques would have it,

59 Quoted in Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 171.

60 Ibid.

Vorstellung does not also have a life of its own. In other words, the validity and importance of ideas are not determined solely by the normative logic of historical success and failure (this also, of course, enables Derrida to remain conveniently tacit on the subject of Stalinism).

To explain why and how ideas survive, return or haunt, Derrida resorts in the next paragraph to his trademark lexical ruminations on the German sentence “es spukt” (literally “it haunts”) which elicited the criticism that Derrida's Marxist critique is “the intellectual equivalent of a vaguely leftist commitment to the underdog.”⁶¹ Indeed, it is hard to imagine Derrida speaking of “Marx's spectrology” before 1991. Nevertheless, what is compelling is his argument that ghosts represent the conceptual truth of *Vorstellung* as something neither fully subjective, i.e. inside the head, nor fully objective, i.e. materially real, because it has wider implications for the haunted constellation in the early stages of China's modernization project. While haunting may be historical, it does not follow a clear pattern of causality: haunting belongs “finally neither to us nor to it,” it is connected to specific persons, times and places, yet is not fully determined by consciousness (as in a hallucination) and matter/reality.

To understand historical relationships as a form of haunting, which defies linear temporality and blurs the boundaries of agency, is finally also particularly apposite in the context of non-Western modernization projects, as it proposes an alternative or as Derrida puts it an “out-of-joint” timeline to the common unidirectional narrative of historical development, inheritance, literary influence and so on. This does not mean that all modern Chinese fiction is haunted, but rather that at certain junctures ghosts came to represent or articulate spectral questions and concerns related to modernization in China. As Chen Jianguo notes in his discussion of post-Mao ghost fiction:

61 Terry Eagleton, “Marxism without Marxism,” in *Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium on Jacques Derrida's Specters of Marx*, ed. Michael Sprinker (London, New York: Verso, 2008), 86.

While the phantasm points to the impossibility of origin in time and space, the narrative of the ghost itself always takes place in a specific sociohistorical context, which provides a trajectory for its own diagnosis.⁶²

The main hypothesis of this study is accordingly that ghosts do not “return” to modern Chinese fiction, as David Wang has famously argued, but that they are expressions generated both by what is no longer or not yet and by what does exist in a given space at a given time. It is to this ambiguous genesis to which ghosts as re-presentations speak.

Because of the radicality, with which secular agendas were and continue to be pursued in China—particularly noticeable in the absence of a large horror film industry such as in Indonesia, Thailand, Korea and Japan, Derrida's work and spectrality studies in general have not yet been taken up to the same degree as in other Asian area studies.⁶³ Nevertheless, an increasing number of works, mostly in literary studies, have begun to investigate ghosts in modern China no longer from an exclusively ethnographic or religious studies point of view. In the following I contextualize how this project relates to previous studies and focus especially on David Wang's “The Monster That Is History,” because it is to date certainly the most influential and well-known study of ghosts in modern Chinese literature and also covers roughly the same period as the present study, although its focus lies on postmodern ghost fiction.⁶⁴ Studies relevant to discussions in subsequent chapters are introduced there.

62 Chen, *The Aesthetics of the Beyond*, 71.

63 Derrida gave a lecture series in China, in one of which he discusses the concept of spectrality: *Delida Zhongguo jiangyan lu* 德里达中国讲演录 [*Derrida's Lectures in China*], ed. Du Xiaozhen 杜小真 and Zhang Ning 张宁 (Beijing: Zhongyang bian yi chubanshe, 2003). “Specters” itself was translated into Chinese in 2008 as *Makesi de Youling: Zhaiwu Guojia, Aidao Huodong he Xin Guoji* 马克思的幽灵: 债务国家、哀悼活动和新国际, trans. He Yi 何一 (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2008).

64 Studies tangential to this project include Andrew Hock-soon Ng, *Asian Gothic: Essays on Literature, Film and Anime* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2008); Chen Xiaoming 陈晓明, *Xiandaixing de huanxiang: Dangdai lilun yu wenxue de yinbi zhuanxiang* 现代性的幻想: 当代理论与文学的隐蔽转向 [*Imagined Modernity: The Invisible Turn in Contemporary Theory and Literature*] (Fuzhou: Fujian jiaoyu chubanshe, 2008); Chia-rong Wu, *Supernatural Sinophone Taiwan and Beyond* (Amherst: Cambria Press, 2016).

In the chapter “Second haunting” Wang proposes the concept of “phantasmagoric realism” to describe the “vigorous return of ghosts to elite and popular Chinese culture in the 1980s.”⁶⁵ It focuses mainly on tracing the diverse premodern narrative materials and aesthetic resources that gave birth to contemporary writers' aesthetics of the phantasmagoric as an alternative to the “realist paradigm”.⁶⁶ This revival or in Wang's terminology “second haunting” hypothesis is favored over a reading of modern Chinese ghost fiction as imitative of Western fantastic discourses (such as Latin American magical realism),⁶⁷ which it may superficially resemble, but from which it differs, according to Wang, in aesthetic and mythological substance. This perspective enables Wang to juxtapose a vast array of temporally and geographically disparate historical and literary sources to draw out, also by way of Derrida's “Specters,” previously unrecognized connections between various Sinophone literary communities and to analyze “the changing aesthetics and politics of fantasy and realism behind such a recapitulation.”⁶⁸

Wang's is, to my knowledge, the first study tracing the fate of Chinese literary ghosts throughout the 20th century, but there are numerous ghost-focused studies on individual authors such as Shi Zhecun and Lu Xun,⁶⁹ and specific periods of modern Chinese literary history, mostly on post-Mao fiction.⁷⁰ In “The Aesthetics of the ‘Beyond’” Chen Jianguo proposes what he calls a

65 Wang, *The Monster That Is History*, 265.

66 Ibid., 266.

67 Ibid.

68 Ibid.

69 For Shi Zhecun see for instance Shih Shumei, *The Lure of the Modern: Writing Modernism in Semicolonial China, 1917-1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Zhang Hongbing, “Writing ‘the Strange’ of the Chinese Modern: Sutured Body, Naturalized Beauty, and Shi Zhecun's ‘Yaksha,’” *Journal of Modern Literature in Chinese* 5, no. 2 (January 1, 2002): 29–54. Notable studies of Lu Xun's ghostly visions include Maruo Tuneki's 丸尾常喜 “Ren” yu “Gui” de jiuge: Lu Xun xiaoshuo lunxi “人”与“鬼”的纠葛:鲁迅小说论析 [“Humans” and “ghosts” entangled: A Study of Lu Xun's Novels], trans. Qin Gong 秦弓 (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1995); Eugene Y. Wang, “Tope and Topos: The Leifeng Pagoda and the Discourse of the Demonic,” in *Writing and Materiality in China: Essays in Honor of Patrick Hanan*, ed. Judith Zeitlin and Lydia Liu (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 488–552; Wang Hui 汪晖, “Lu Xun wenzue shijie zhong de ‘gui’ yu ‘xiangxia chaoyue’ 鲁迅文学世界中的‘鬼’与‘向下超越’ [‘Ghosts’ and ‘downward Transcendence’ in Lu Xun's Literary World],” in *Paths Toward Modernity: Conference to Mark the Centenary of Jaroslav Průšek*, ed. Olga Lomová, *Studia Orientalia Pragensia XXVI* (Prag: Karolinum Press, 2008), 359–77.

70 Two studies by Xiao Xiangming 肖向明 focused on the Republican period are “Lun xin wenhua yujing xia ‘gui’ de wenzue cunzai 论新文化语境下‘鬼’的文学存在 [On Literary ‘ghosts’ in the Context of the New Culture Movement],” *Jinyang xuekan*, no. 5 (2006): 103–109, and “‘Guiyu-renjian’ de zhengzhi yuyan — Lun 20 shiji 40 niandai ‘minjian xinyang’ de wenzue xiangxiang ‘鬼域 - 人间’的政治寓言——论 20 世纪 40 年代‘民间信仰’的文学想象 [The Realms of Ghosts and Humans as Political Allegories - on the Literary Imagination Of ‘popular religiosities’ in the 1940s],” *Hainan shifan daxue xuebao (Shehui kexue bao)*, 2009, 12–17.

“logic of the phantasm,” which he defines as a literary, epistemological practice “performed by contemporary Chinese writers in efforts to think beyond the unthinkable and to present the unrepresentable.”⁷¹ Anne Wedell-Wedellsborg’s paper “Haunted Fiction: Modern Chinese Literature and the Supernatural” investigates contemporary adaptations of premodern genres, but argues along similar lines as Wang that the recapitulation of ancient ghost story writing traditions in contemporary fiction express a recognition of the fundamental strangeness and “unknowability of the modern world.”⁷²

While this study addresses the salient absence of sustained diachronic consideration of ghost narratives in modern Chinese literary history, it also expands on and complicates previous research in two important ways. Firstly, it foregrounds the heterogeneity of literary ghost representations in modern China. Because the theme of the ghost’s return is only one of many topics modern Chinese ghost fiction explores, this study does not posit, as for instance Wang and Wedell-Wedellsborg do, a spectral economy of repression and return in the history of modern Chinese ghost fiction. Ghosts appear throughout the modern period both as a rhetorical trope and as real ghosts, although non-figurative usages rarely imply an ontological claim and are rather invoked to make a philosophical or aesthetic proposition. My interest in studying these various literary representations of ghosts lies not so much in discerning subversive or repressed from dominant usages, which do in fact not always coincide with the conceptual distinction between the figurative and the non-figurative, as in analyzing how both ghosts and “ghosts” become bound up with specific entanglements of the aesthetic and the political. One of the main objectives of this study is to show that ghosts did not keep “creeping back into China,”⁷³ as Wang puts it, but rather that they never left.

71 Jianguo Chen, *The Aesthetics of the Beyond: Phantasm, Nostalgia, and the Literary Practice in Contemporary China* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2009), 67.

72 Anne Wedell-Wedellsborg, “Haunted Fiction: Modern Chinese Literature and the Supernatural,” *International Fiction Review* 32, no. 1 (January 1, 2005), accessed December 1, 2016, <http://journals.hil.unb.ca/index.php/IFR/article/view/7797/8854>.

73 Wang, *The Monster That Is History*, 265.

Secondly, this study does not read ghost fiction primarily in relation to questions of genre and literary mode, but focuses more upon the *realities* represented in historically distinct constellations of literary ghost discourses. More specifically and unlike Wang, I view the importance (or literary merit for that matter) of ghost representations not as contingent upon their repression in hegemonic realism—itself, according to Wang, exposed as deficient by the “ghostly obsessions” and “gothic imaginations” of great writers such as Lu Xun and Zhang Ailing 张爱玲 (1920-1995). For instance, Wang feels “doubly appreciative” of Xu Xu's “Ghost Love” (*Guilian* 鬼恋, 1937) as a rare example of “actual’ ghosts in mainstream realist fiction,” but then only offers the vaguest interpretation of Xu's novel as expressing a “decadent romantic desire.”⁷⁴ While I agree with Wang that repression is not only oppositional, but also generative, ghost fiction should at the same time not be reduced to a by-product of realist doctrine. Configurations of the real, to return to Peter Button, are without doubt the most predominant theme in modern Chinese aesthetic theory and literary production, but Chinese realism is not the only vantage point from which we can and should read ghost fiction. Put differently, hegemonic modes of literary representations are not the only reality ghosts as representations may question.

In the following chapters I analyze ghost fiction, which more broadly calls attention to the reality of the unreal, unrepresented, invisible, and marginal, including desires and fears, but also the “class enemy,” labor migrants and the environment. In chapter two I focus upon two ghost story special issues of the satire magazine “Analects Fortnightly” (*Lunyu banyuekan* 论语半月刊, henceforth “Analects”), with which the poet Shao Xunmei inaugurated his position as Chief Editor. By the 1930s, normative constraints on literary writings were established to the point where most writers refrained from any reference to the fantastical without carefully contextualizing non-secular narrative elements within discourses of reform and (national) pedagogy. Although as a popular satirical journal the “Analects” steered clear of overt political debates, Shao Xunmei was well aware of the criticism his ghost story project might face. However, his interests lay mainly in

⁷⁴ Ibid., 274.

bringing the excitement popular literature offered readers, and also the financial benefits to publishers such as himself, together with the critical aspects of leftist literatures. While he criticized literary realism for “talking so much about humans to the point of being boring,”⁷⁵ he also believed literature should retain a pedagogical core. Beyond Shao's editorials, the “Analects” ghost stories special issues offer interesting insight into different approaches to the spectral and reveal some of the aesthetic and political difficulties ghost fiction faced.

While chapter three remains in the Republican period, it engages with a very different set of modernist ghost narratives, which were not solicited for a specific project, but grew more organically out of Shanghai's cosmopolitan modernity and its literary culture. More specifically, it studies female phantom romance narratives and their different articulation by male and female authors. Female revenants are one of the most iconic figures in classical Chinese literature. Mainly in early *zhiguai* tales, but also in late Qing (1644-1911) *zhiguai*, female specters are often portrayed as terrifying or cosmologically unregulated other-worldly creatures, who deplete men of their *yang* energy. When at the beginning of the 20th century women's suffrage became one of the most important yardsticks of socio-cultural progress, reformers seized the opportunity to denounce this fascination with female phantoms in premodern literature as a sign of the deep-rooted misogyny pervading Chinese culture. For instance, the leftist literary critic Ma Zihua 马子华(1912-1966) confidently predicted in 1936 that with the end of woman's oppression in a coming socialist society, ghost stories would cease to exist. Ironically, however, it was in the fiction of Ma's contemporaries that female phantom narratives rose to prominence—not only in the writings of experimental modernists, but also in female-authored popular fiction of the 1940s.

Chapter three is divided into two sections. In the first I analyze ghost novels and novellas by Zhang Kebiao, Shi Zhecun, Ye Lingfeng, and Xu Xu. In the second I look at imaginative fiction by the female authors Shi Jimei and Tang Xuehua 汤雪花 (1915-1992), who in the mid-1940s took

75 Shao Xunmei, ed., “Gui gushi zhuanhao,” *Lunyu banyuekan* [Analects Bimonthly] 91(1936): 940.

Shanghai's literary scene by storm, but have since 1949 drifted into almost complete obscurity. By focusing upon how gender inflected diverging arrogations of female phantom narratives, I argue that female phantom narratives by male authors reveal a fetishistic negotiation with Shanghai's urban modernity and its semi-colonial situation. Proceeding to novel's by Shi and Tang, I argue that their narratives of murderous and menacing phantom women seek to restore agency to so-called backward feminine practices such as female suicide and haunting. Furthermore, I suggest that these ghost narratives relate to Shi and Tang's experience as female popular fiction writers in the 1940s, whose writings symbolized on the one hand Shanghai's cosmopolitan maturity, while on the other hand they were often regarded as thematically unsophisticated and stylistically derivative.

Chapter four explores the role of premodern ghost beliefs and literary practices in socialist fiction. Although ghosts are in Yan'an and Maoist fiction of the so-called "seventeen-year period" (1949-1966) overall only a very marginal literary subject matter, the ideology of what Haiyan Lee has termed Maoist "class racism"⁷⁶ was in large part shaped against the allegorical horizon of China's ancient ghost culture, with the result that ghost fiction retained a certain ideological relevance. Foregrounding the politics of textuality,⁷⁷ my analysis will focus upon the effects of this conjunction of class racism and premodern ghost culture on the representation of the Maoist language community. Bringing together Roman Jakobson's research on metaphor and metonymy with Rey Chow's analysis of languaging and racialization in "Not Like A Native Speaker" (2014), I first analyze Ouyang Shan's Yan'an period novel "Uncle Gao," which narrates the transition of a rural community from a feudal to a socialist economy. What makes Ouyang's novel so interesting is the fact that the path to collectivization is engendered by the conflict between modern medical practices and rural shaman culture. As I will attempt to show, this medical discourse sets the path for the novel's political treatment of ghost culture, which is at the core of its vision of socialist nation building. I then turn to the Maoist ghost story collection "Stories About Not Being Afraid of

⁷⁶ Lee, *The Stranger and the Chinese Moral Imagination*, 236.

⁷⁷ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 166.

Ghosts.” Analyzing He Qifang's 何其芳 (1912-1977) introduction and the organization of the collection itself, I argue that “Stories” is modeled upon the premodern elite literati practice of self-fashioning through the collecting of strange tales. What I seek to demonstrate is that in both cases the ghostly subject matter provides the model for its own critique.

The second part of chapter four examines divergent literacies of “humans” and “ghosts” in literary texts: What is the relationship of the “ghost” to language and the expression of the self? First I discuss two 1960s short stories by Zhou Libo, which take inspiration from classical ghost stories, but express less a concern for secular reform and center rather on the topic of the spoken and written word in conjunction with revolutionary subjectivity. I then read Zong Pu's 宗璞 (1928-) short novel “Who am I?” (*Wo shi shei ? 我是谁?* , 1979), which recasts the prosecution of intellectuals by Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution as an aphasic disturbance and linguistic breakdown. Overall, this chapter attempts to differentiate and analyze the various ways ghosts are put into “speech” and the symbolic work of the human-ghost opposition in Maoist literary discourse.

Turning to the post-Mao period (1976-), chapter five discusses Jia Pingwa's novel “White/Night” (*Baiye 白夜*, 1995) and Yu Hua's “The Seventh Day” (*Di qi tian 第七天*, 2013), which both construct a ghostly perspective to critically engage with China's ongoing and vast social transformation. Both novels share a similar post-secular perspective as they blur the distinction between the religious and the secular, the private and the public, the irrational and the rational by weaving the ancient Mulian mystery play in Jia's and Christian cosmogony in Yu's case into the representation of the (after-)life in China today. Their novels thus echo the cultural functions of anomaly account compilations in premodern times, which have served since their emergence during the Six Dynasties (220-589) period to construct “alternative cosmologies,” reflect a “crisis of the Confucian order,” and thematize a “intellectually and emotionally challenging world.”⁷⁸

78 Sing-Chen Lydia Chiang, *Collecting The Self: Body And Identity In Strange Tale Collections Of Late Imperial China* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 245–46.

Furthermore, I argue that the post-secular perspective of these novels is most developed not in their incorporation of religious elements into the urban experience, but in their exploration of how this hybrid space fosters various new networks and exchanges with the inhuman, which not only includes ghosts, but also animals and the environment. Older models of cosmography not only play a thematic role, but also provide aesthetic models for dynamically engaging with the complexities and contradictions of China's transformation in the post-Mao period such as labor migration and the environmental crisis. Exploring spiritual possibilities glossed neither in religious nor in non-religious terms, both novels highlight the continued relevance of *not being afraid of ghosts* to China's literary modernity.

Overall, each chapter presents a case study of literary ghost representations at various points in the history of modern Chinese literature. This study thus contributes to the ongoing reconceptualization of this history not only by foregrounding a non-human centered perspective, but also by placing a large number of lesser to unknown literary texts and debates at the center of its discussion.⁷⁹ What emerges is not a story of the tenacity of tradition, but rather multiple aborted and resurrected storylines of fragile bonds, ambiguous yearnings, ideological divisions, and tenuous experimentation. Indeed, if we wished to discern some overarching logic to the Chinese ghost story from its earliest appearance in Six Dynasties anomaly account compilations to the present then perhaps that in times of political fragility, cultural crisis and social anxiety, it has always lent itself to reinvention.

⁷⁹ Emphasis on “what was marginalized in the May Fourth movement” has been a particularly salient feature of this effort to rethink Chinese literary modernity, see Zhang Longxi, “Literary Modernity in Perspective,” in *A Companion to Modern Chinese Literature*, ed. Zhang Yingjin (London: John Wiley & Sons, 2015), 50.

Chapter 2:

Ghost talk in 1936: “Living ghosts” and “real ghosts” in Republican-era literary discourse and the two *Analects Fortnightly* ghost story special issues

1 Entertaining ghosts

In one of his early poems, Shao Xunmei described Shanghai as a city of topsy-turvy realities, where the fantastic can become truth and the genuine may just as easily serve as a disguise for the false. The poem “Spirit of Shanghai” (*Shanghai de youling* 上海的幽靈) ends with an ecstatic appeal to the reader: “Come! This place is your grave!”⁸⁰ While the invitation to die in Shanghai gives expression to the city’s cosmopolitan appeal, it simultaneously conjures up an image of Shanghai as the site of a joyous burial ritual. Here, the grave does not mark the end of life, but rather the dawning of a new age, in which experience is no longer shaped by nature and the cycles of life:

Here there is no need to be afraid of rainy and cloudy days,

No need to be afraid of autumn and winter's death, nor of spring's vigor:

how could summer's fire compare to the heat of passionate lips!⁸¹

The natural cycle of seasonal change dissolves in a romantic encounter between the “unclimbable celestial buildings up there, street cars, electric cables and race horse stables down below”.⁸² While the poem’s tone and imagery presents a rather conventional picture of Shanghai as the epicenter of the modern, the image of the gravesite which closes the poem exerts a gravitational pull on the libido-charged cityscape in the preceding lines, and redirects the readers’ attention towards the urban underground lurking beneath the electrified image of the modern. Shao Xunmei’s subscription to the tradition of decadence, which typically abounds in images of death and decay attuned him to the “dark forces,” which rise from the subterranean realm of the city and its past and linger between

80 Shao Xunmei, *Hua yiban de zui'e* 花一般的罪恶 [*Flower-like Evil*] (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1992), 48.

81 *Ibid.*, 47.

82 *Ibid.*

the lines as a threat to his jubilant expression of the modern city's liberation of desire.⁸³ Much later, he would revisit the relationship between the modern and its dark other, not from the “top,” but from the vantage point of the haunting subterranean itself, and not in the medium of poetry, but as editor of the popular humor magazine “Analects.”

In 1936, eighteen years after Zhou Zuoren's famous call for a “human(ist) literature,” Shao brought a group of writers and cartoonists together in an a double special issue of the “Analects” to reflect on its possible antinomy: ghost stories (*gui gushi* 鬼故事). As Shao understood them, ghosts as a subject matter, stood in opposition to “human(ist) literature,” which he criticized for focusing on humans “to the point of being boring”.⁸⁴ In particular, he viewed ghost stories as a literary form particularly suited to conveying “emotions” (*qinggan* 情感), whereas the new novel (*xin xiaoshuo* 新小说), as he had already pointed out in another context, remained limited by its own “rationality” (*lizhi* 理智).⁸⁵ Instead of invoking the better-known Western genre of the gothic or the Chinese literary conventions of the “anomaly account” (*zhiguai* 志怪) and the “marvel tale”(*chuanqi* 传奇), Shao proposed to adapt an English “literature of nonsense” for a new Chinese “literature of the absurd” (*huangmiu de wenxue* 荒谬的文学) or of “reckless talking” (*xiasan huasi* 瞎三话四). Central to his argument is the idea that ghosts not only make good stories, but that they *are* stories for the two main reasons that they embody or gesture towards some form of injustice and/or express an uncanny experience—as such, they are the ideal vehicle for reimagining the new novel, which Shao found lagging behind popular fiction (*tongsu wenxue* 通俗文学) in terms of narrative interest.

83 For a discussion of Shao's decadent aesthetics and his public persona see Jonathan Hutt, “Monstre Sacré: The Decadent World of Sinmay Zau,” *China Heritage Quarterly*, accessed December 10, 2016, http://www.chinaheritagequarterly.org/features.php?issue=022&searchterm=022_monstre.inc, and Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China, 1930-1945* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), chapter 7.

84 Shao Xunmei, *Ziyou tan* 自由谭 [*Candid Talk*] (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 2012), 9.

85 Shao Xunmei, “Xiaoshuo yu gushi 小说与故事 [The novel and the story],” in *Ershi shiji xiaoshuo lilun ziliao* 二十世纪中国小说理论资料 [*Materials on 20th century Chinese fiction theory*], ed. Chen Pingyuan et al., vol. 3 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1997), 105. For a critical discussion of the *xiaoshuo* and *gushi* debate of the 1930s see Hui Jiang, “From Lu Xun to Zhao Shuli. The Politics of Recognition in Chinese Literary Modernity: A Genealogy of Storytelling” (New York University, 2008).

As a writer, editor and tabloid star, Shao had always embraced scandal and non-conformity. At the same time, he and many of the contributors were also highly aware of the difficult literary territory, mapped out in the introduction, that they were venturing into. While this awareness arguably stifled literary creativity, the special issues offer a fascinating insight into a highly self-reflexive literary ghost debate unique in modern Chinese literary history. My analysis will focus mainly on two questions: What strategies did modern artists adopt when writing/visualizing ghosts? And in which contexts does the spectral accrue distinct significance, or not, as the case may be? Starting with an analysis of Yu Dafu's 郁达夫 (1896-1945) call for papers and a *manhua* by Chen Haoxiong 陈浩雄, I will first contextualize some of the anxieties about ghosts as a subject matter within a discourse of national and cultural development and the political crisis on the eve of the Sino-Japanese war (1937-1945). Thereafter I retrace Shao's arguments in his two editorials, where he sought to persuade his (modernist) colleagues to nevertheless engage with ghosts. Short readings of four ghost stories will be the focus in the second part. Ultimately, I argue that debates on ghosts and ghost fiction cannot be understood simply as a symptom of colonial struggle with a national past, from which a not yet fully modernized nation had to vindicate itself from. Rather they offered writers important avenues through which to articulate contestation and difference within a heavily politicized discourse of cultural production. Although Shao's literary project would shortly after be muted by the outbreak of war, the two special issues on ghost stories give vivid testimony to how ghosts, far from being figures of the past, were set squarely in late 1930s debates on China's modernization and often manifested themselves most visibly within discourses of crises.

2 Living with ghosts

When at the request of Shao Xunmei, Yu Dafu posted a call for papers for a special issue of the “Analects” on ghost stories in 1936, it came as no surprise that the majority of contributors expressed a great deal of anxiety about the subject matter or even simply dismissed it as an idle pastime, especially in face of the looming military confrontation with Japan. In contrast to the

hesitation many writers admitted that they felt surrounding the subject of ghosts, the overwhelming response to the ghost story announcement allowed Shao to publish two consecutive special issues instead of the usual one. In the editorial of the following issue Shao states that they had received enough contributions to fill at least twenty more issues and that they might easily have turned the “Analects” into a “ghost magazine.”⁸⁶ Still, many of the contributors begin their essays and stories by justifying their “ghost talk” (*guihua* 鬼话) as an intellectual strategy for circumventing censorship and expressing grievance about the state of the world. The two *loci classici* referred to are Su Dongpo's 苏东坡 (1037-1101) conversations with friends on ghosts after his banishment, and Pu Songling's 蒲松龄 (1640-1715) frustration about a failed career in officialdom, which led him to create his famous *zhiguai* collection *Liaozhai zhiyi* (“Liaozhai's Records of the Strange” 聊斋志异).

Yu Dafu also refers to these two historical anecdotes and states explicitly that for once the debates will not focus on the existence of ghosts, but rather on the ghostly and the underworld as powerful literary devices relating to an immediate social and political reality. Through satirical hyperbole he demonstrates this approach by drawing a picture of the current world as populated by ghosts, goblins and demons: “Even after Ibsen's death, ‘Ghosts’⁸⁷ are still rummaging Europe and while Zhong Kui is not fulfilling his duty, do-no-goods are wreaking havoc in China.”⁸⁸ More specifically, he addresses the colonial context of China's tumultuous political scene through a sarcastic remark on the Republican government's “Order to promote friendly relationships with foreign countries” (*Dunmubang jiaoling* 敦睦邦交令), which had forced China to welcome “green-eyed and red-haired demons”⁸⁹ from all over the world. Yu reminds potential contributors that to

86 Shao Xunmei, *Ziyou tan*, 21. This interest seems to have been so great that in the following issue Shao printed a request that contributors no longer submit any ghost articles. While there is no explicit explanation given, the ghost stories special issues certainly reflected poorly on Shao as a person. In the editorial of the following issue Shao addresses the criticism that he only conceived of the ghost stories special issues to “forget some sorrow,” *Ibid.*, 23.

87 The reference is to Ibsen's play “Ghosts,” which was also in China widely received. The play's title in Norwegian is “Gengangere” (Revenants, 1881).

88 Yu Dafu, “Gui gushi zhuanhao qishi 鬼故事传号征文启事 [Call for Submissions: Ghost Story Special Issue],” in *Yu Dafu quanji* 郁达夫全集 [*Complete Works of Yu Dafu*], vol. 11 (Hangzhou: Zhejiang Daxue, 2007), 238.

89 *Ibid.*

draw on Chinese as well as Western ghost imagery in order to discuss and critique current events is not only a tried and tested rhetorical strategy for expressing one's thoughts and feelings about the world, but that it is especially appropriate for such troubled times, in which the imminent Second Sino-Japanese War further fueled an already fervent debate on “National Salvation”: “Although metaphysical talk and saving the nation may seem completely unrelated, to stand up and cry out loud is also a sign of a man's [willingness] to take revenge.”⁹⁰ It is through the transposition of human affairs onto the brutal (Chinese) ghost world that the “true nature” of reality is revealed. Yu's ghosts function (with the exception of Ibsen's “Ghosts”) as metaphors for the untimely, unruly and intrusive. In line with Hu Shi's rhetorical battle cry to “beat the ghosts,”⁹¹ the act of “recognizing” what “they” are therefore already entails the appropriately enlightened response of taking pedagogical, legal and political measures to expel such ghosts forever.

In one of the *manhua* 漫画 (“cartoon”) printed in the second special issue, the artist Chen Haoxiong 陳浩雄 offers a visual translation of Yu's approach: in “An X-ray view behind the scene” (*X-guang zhi muhou* X光之幕后, illustration 1), a skeleton hand pulls back the curtain blocking our view of a contemporary China populated by ghosts and demons at war. Just like the penetrative gaze of the X-ray, ghosts function here as a visual rhetoric for exposing a sinister and corrupt reality. While the ghosts are intended to heighten the sense of brutality and chaos of the reader's view of the civil war in China, the reader is through the spatial configuration of the *manhua* as a window or a Western theater space also at a safe distance from the scene. Furthermore, the image's claim to representational truth is grounded neither in traditional religious iconography nor the historical semiotics of the ghost story, instead, the modern X-ray technology laying bare Chinese reality is given interpretative authority.⁹² In a similarly figurative manner, the term “living ghost”

90 Ibid.

91 Hu Shi, “Zhengli guogu yu ‘dagui’ — Gei Hao Xu xiansheng xin.”

92 Technological metaphors more generally suggest an epistemological shift in popular understanding of the immaterial world. Wang Xia'an 王霞庵 in his essay “On Ghosts” (*Lun gui* 论鬼) states, for instance, that “the soul is to humans, what steam is to the train.” See *Lunyu banyuekan*, 91: 893. The table of contents of the “Analects” ghost story special issues are given in Appendix 2.

(*huogui* 活鬼) is frequently employed in satire relating to decadent or morally dubious urban citizens or foreign intruders. Xu Xu's 徐訏 "Ghost play" (*Guixi* 鬼戲) is just one of many texts where ghosts are only slightly veiled stand-in figures for the Japanese military forces. Likewise, Chinese ghostlore is often translated into a glossary of negative real-world phenomena. The visual representations of ghosts in particular draw upon this logic, turning Wuchang into an opium addict, female ghosts into courtesans, prostitutes or high-heel wearing women, and *jiangshi* ("zombies" 殭屍) into military generals.⁹³

Such rational explanations are also offered for ghost tales themselves and often an underlying psychological or social problem is discerned. While the explanations vary, from Shi Zhecun's insistence that all ghost stories are satirical in nature to Cao Juren's 曹聚仁 (1900-1972) critique of ghost writers who cloak their inability to imagine a just government in fantasies of a cruel ghost world, these theories about ghost fiction assume that the presence of ghosts in literature cannot be taken at face value and needs to be historicized.⁹⁴ The Leftist literary critic Ma Zihua in "Ghosts and Women" (*Gui yu nüxing* 鬼與女性) formulates this developmentalist critique most clearly when he states that after the complete abolishment of the feudal system, the future (socialist) society would no longer have any ghost stories to tell.⁹⁵ I will return to Ma's essay in the following chapter.

2.1 Phantom relations

For some authors, however, this historical narrative spanned merely back into their own childhood. Here, a more sympathetic tone pervades. A good example of this is Xu Qinwen's 许钦文 (1987-1984) account in "The Beautiful Ghost of the Female Hanged" (*Meili de diaosiqi* 美丽的吊死鬼) in which he voices his fear of the ghost of women who died during child labor, because in their quest for a substitute soul they posed a direct threat to his mother. While the lore of the "mother

93 See Illustrations 2 and 3.

94 Shi Zhecun, "Ghost Talk 鬼话[Guihua]," *Lunyu banyuekan*, 91 (1936): 870; Cao Juren, "A Target on Ghosts 鬼的箭垛 [Gui de jianduo]," *Ibid.*: 873.

95 Ma Zihua, "Gui Yu Nüxing 鬼与女性 [Ghosts and Women]," *Lunyu banyuekan*, 92 (1936): 955–59.

snatching ghost” (*shemu gui* 舍母鬼) is inextricably tied up with his affective attachment to his mother, within the chronology of the biographical narrative such memories can only be retold in the vocabulary of loss and amnesia, not only of an affective dimension of knowledge and a sense of wonder (this is especially pronounced in Lin Geng's 林庚 “About Ghosts” *Shuo gui* 说鬼), but also of one's personal history, which seems suddenly tied to another time. For instance, Guo Moruo 郭沫若 (1892-1978) writes in his autobiography (referenced by Shao but not included in the two special issues) about the clash between his father's ghost stories and his later education in science and Western medicine. To dismiss his father's stories as psychological hallucinations was for the young Guo a traumatic experience, since he was not only losing his father as an authority figure but also disavowing a crucial and beloved part of his childhood:

Father had told me this himself and not just once. This was something the childhood mind could not wrap its head around. Not only did ghosts exist, but there was also a world of the dead! [...] Did such things really exist? And yet again, father had himself heard these [ghosts], he had himself seen them. He had told us himself about them.⁹⁶

These childhood realms of ghostlore, because they are so personal, are deeply fraught with ambivalent sentiments about ghosts as symbols of a shared history, of literary and cultural heritage and affectionate communal bonds, but also of the impact of colonial culture on (China's) “coming-of-age.” For instance, the role of Western education is highlighted in Ling Si's 灵丝 “The Different Types of Ghosts” *Gui zhi zhongzhong* 鬼之种种. Ghost tales give expression to these feelings of alienation (from one's own culture and family) as well as dislocation (from the rural), which might be viewed as “a constitutive aspect of our experience of the modern.”⁹⁷ Certainly, Xu and Guo's biographical narratives of becoming modern mirror China's national coming of age within the temporal framework of a global and homogenous time, which allows for a narrativization of ghosts

96 Guo Moruo 郭沫若, “Wo de tongnian 我的童年 [My Childhood],” in *Guo Moruo quanji: wenxue bian* 郭沫若全集: 文学篇 [*The Collected Works of Guo Moruo: Literature Volume*] Vol. 11, (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1992), 28-29

97 Jo Collins and John Jervis, *Uncanny Modernity: Cultural Theories, Modern Anxieties* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 2.

as something exclusively from a mythical, remote and irrational (childhood) past. At the same time however, the spectral also attunes them to the permeability of different times (past, present and future), places (rural and urban) and cultures (East and West). “Ghost related things” could give narrative form to these haunting memories, when everything else had vanished or, as Xu writes, been forgotten.⁹⁸ Nevertheless, the biographical format of these ghost memories speaks to Xu and Guo's reluctance to allow ghosts into the “adult” world of the modern. For Shao, however, relatability was a crucial argument in favor of the ghost story. Advocates of *tongsu wenxue* frequently argued against the privileging of Western literary models by May Fourth intellectuals on the basis that literature, in order to remain relevant, had to be accessible to a wider public. Although elitist in its assumptions about popular “taste”, Shao too would take up this line of argumentation: “[...] most of us Chinese grew up listening to ghost stories, which makes it quite impossible for them to sound as foreign and strange as some of the names of the new idols.”⁹⁹ Why not write ghost stories then?

3 Theorizing ghosts

After long travel and studies abroad, the twenty-one year old Shao Xunmei made his literary debut in 1927 with a poetry collection entitled “Paradise and May” (*Tiantang yu wuyue* 天堂与五月), which soon took literary circles by storm. While his scandalously decadent poetry was critically acclaimed, his continued fame, rightfully or not, was owing not so much to his own literary output—aside from poetry, he wrote a few short novellas—but was dependent, rather, on his (purposefully cultivated) notoriety as dandy and bonvivant. Yet, Shao was not only the subject of a number of tabloid sensations and scandals—most notably his love affair with American journalist Emily Hahn (1905-1997). It was probably in his work as essayist, editor and translator that Shao excelled most, though without much financial gain. Nevertheless, Shao's star faded quickly during his lifetime.

Jonathan Hutt argues that one of the most important factors contributing to Shao's unfavourable

⁹⁸ Xu Qinwen, *Lunyu banyuekan*, 92 (1936): 963.

⁹⁹ Shao Xunmei, *Ziyou tan*, 10.

legacy relates to the fact that his “singular blend of the traditional and the modern, the foreign and the Chinese, the insular and the cosmopolitan”¹⁰⁰ is difficult to classify within a rigidly binary Leftist or modernist framework. Another reason for his rapid decline from fame was owing to the fact that Shao's tastes were too Western and his lifestyle too reminiscent of the belle-epoque of Shanghai, making him unsuited to the rigid ideological climate that by the 1940s slowly pervaded the cultural scene. Subsequently, after 1949 Shao began to see his publishing empire and family inheritance crumble. Shunned by the literary establishment and in abject poverty, Shao died in 1968 in the garage of one of his former Shanghai estates.

Despite Shao being one of the founding members of the “Analects,” and his editorship lasting from 1936 until 1949,¹⁰¹ the most prominent name attached to the “Analects” today is Lin Yutang 林语堂 (1895-1976), who spearheaded the European-style “humor” avant-garde in the 1930s.¹⁰² Transliterated by Lin into *youmo* 幽默 (in distinction to the Chinese concept of *huaji* 滑稽 (“satire”, “farce”), humor was intended to provide those writers weary of the increasing political instrumentalization of art with an alternative tool for “social critique.”¹⁰³

The ghost story issues marked Shao's inauguration as Chief Editor and the special issues under Shao set his brand of “Analects” off most clearly from Lin Yutang's. While the few special issues edited by Lin had very concrete themes such as “Chinese humor,” “Western humor,” or “modern education,” Shao chose much more broadly suggestive topics such as “family,” “light,” “addiction,” and “escape”—the last special issue to be published on the eve of the Republican army's flight to Taiwan. While Shao continued to emphasize the importance of *youmo* as a concept

100 Hutt, “Monstre Sacré: The Decadent World of Sinmay Zau.”

101 Shao Xunmei's editorship had a rather long interruption from 1937 to 1946 when during the war against Japan publication was halted and was done partially in collaboration with the journalist and teacher Lin Dazu 林达祖. For a detailed history of the “Analects”, see Li Yingzi 李英姿, *Chuantong Yu Xiandai de Bianzou: “Lunyu” banyuekan ji qi yanzhong de minguo 传统与现代的变奏:《论语》半月刊及其眼中的民国 [Variations on Tradition and Modernity: The “Analects” Bimonthly Journal and the Republican Era]* (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 2012).

102 For a short history of the 1930s “humor phenomenon” see Diran John Sohigian, “Contagion of Laughter: The Rise of the Humor Phenomenon in Shanghai in the 1930s,” *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 15, no. 1 (2007): 137–63.

103 Qian Suoqiao, “Discovering Humour in Modern China: The Launching of the Analects Fortnightly Journal and the ‘Year of Humour’ (1933),” in *Humour in Chinese Life and Letters: Classical and Traditional Approaches*, ed. Jessica Milner Davis and Jocelyn Chey (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2011), 218.

for the “Analects,” humor was, and not only in the ghost story issues, increasingly supplanted by his interest in providing writers with a forum for literary creativity, which, as it turned out, was not always successful. In the editorial for the “family” issue he expresses his despair that a word with so many suggestive connotations had “in nine out of ten articles” been turned into a lament on the dreariness of family life.¹⁰⁴ From an impressive list of contributors, including Zhou Zuoren, Lao She 老舍 (1899-1966), Xu Xu, Shi Zhecun, Xu Qinwen, Cao Juren, Feng Zikai 豐子愷 (1898-1975), Liang Shiqiu, and many others, we can gather a sense of Shao's intention to make his first issue of the “Analects” a literary event.¹⁰⁵ Unusual, it seems, was also the fact that nobody had received any remuneration and Shao proudly writes that this time everybody had written “exactly what they wanted.”¹⁰⁶

3.1 Shao's new ghost story: dead upon delivery?

Both of Shao's editorials discuss more than just the ghostly subject matter at hand. They contain introductions to writers, comments on editorial decisions--such as returning to the use of *fantizi* (long-characters)--and advertisements for content in the following issues. For the most part, however, both texts deal with the subject matter of the two special issues. My reading in this section of the discussion will focus in some detail on Shao's argumentation across both editorials elucidating some of the more subtle implications Shao draws out with regard to the relevance of ghost stories.

In the first editorial, which was, according to Shao, partially the reprint of an earlier article he had written on ghost stories, he begins his discussion on ghosts by addressing the secular critique of “superstition” (*mixin* 迷信). Shao was certainly not unsympathetic towards spiritist experiments. In subtle mockery of the paradox that some of the “scientifically most developed countries” were probing into the existence of ghosts, while “the governments of civilized societies [read: China]

104 Shao Xunmei, *Ziyou tan*, 54.

105 The ghost stories special issues became the historical precedent for attacks on Shao that he favored well-known writers over “new talents” and he later confessed that a close deadline had left him with no other option than to include mainly articles he had personally requested in advance, *Ibid.*, 42.

106 *Ibid.*, 5.

forbid the practice of superstition,” Shao concluded that this was indeed “strange.”¹⁰⁷ However, as Yu Dafu before him, Shao did not want to engage with the debates on the scientific viability of ghosts and explicitly states that they had received not a single article by “ghost scientists,” who he mockingly speculates were too busy with the afterlife to tend to worldly affairs:

Could it be that those ghost scientists are battling day and night against those nations of specters and are no longer able to communicate with the human world?¹⁰⁸

In a more serious tone, Shao displaces the current controversy surrounding ghosts into a more generalized discourse of the “mysterious” (*shenmi* 神秘):

Everybody has his own family's ghost stories and no matter how much will power one has, there will always be situations, where one is overcome by goose-bump inducing thoughts.¹⁰⁹

The most important testimony of the ghost story's “eternal” relevance, however, is its expression of structures of injustice, certainly not exclusive to China: “Every human can become a ghost: For people in despair, this is a solution; for people living in comfort, this is frightening.”¹¹⁰ What could be read as a functionalist approach to religious beliefs serves Shao in fact as an argument for grounding ghost literature within the shared, human experiences of injustice, fear and redemption. Fully aware of the potential for controversy that a special issue on ghost stories carried, Shao preemptively counters criticism by claiming that all literature is in this sense ghost literature:

To say that they [ghosts] are the driving force behind the creation of all art could not be called an exaggerated proposition.¹¹¹

By contextualizing ghosts within universal notions of injustice, fear and mystery he was making sure that he would not be accused of “advocating superstition.”¹¹² And yet the question of why there were no longer any ghost stories being written remains. Recalling the excitement of when he first

107 Ibid., 7.

108 Ibid., 6.

109 Ibid., 7.

110 Ibid., 7.

111 Ibid.

112 Ibid., 8.

heard of Ba Jin's 巴金 (1904-2005) novel "Spirit, Ghost, Human" (*Shen, Gui, Ren* 神鬼人, 1934-1935), Shao expresses his surprise and disappointment that the novel had nothing to do with actual ghosts at all.¹¹³ Equally, he was dissatisfied with Guo Moruo's post hoc rationalization of his childhood ghost memories. Shao surmised that while the government campaigns against superstition were likely to blame for the literary elite refraining from writing ghost stories, the "dark and secretive shadows" could not have evaded the "common people's" eyes.¹¹⁴

This gap between an elitist concept of modern literature and popular experience of the modern is crucial to Shao's argumentation and he too recounts his childhood memories of listening to his uncle's ghost stories to make a case for a more intuitive than rational approach to fiction. However, aside from fleetingly remarking on the current "ghostly direction"¹¹⁵ in world literature and film, it was most importantly his interest in the concept of *tongsu wenxue* and the fiction of the "Saturday school" that actually inspired Shao to rethink the concept of ghost stories. Clearly Shao was not interested in the actual popular fiction written at his time, where ghosts were a common staple. By this he implicitly reinforces the critique of this style of "low" fiction as not aesthetically elevated enough to be taken seriously. Instead he focuses on his fellow "serious writers" and tries humorously to persuade them with the "five advantages" (*wu yi* 五易) that ghost stories have over human stories: They are "easy to write," "easy to understand," "easily incite compassion," "easily succeed," and are "easy to remember."¹¹⁶ However, Shao does not offer a clear definition of what a ghost story actually is. Interestingly, he does not count Chinese *zhiguai* and *chuanqi* featuring ghosts as real ghost fiction, but calls them myth/fairy tale (*shenhua* 神話) and satire (*fengci* 諷刺) since unlike Western ghost fiction, they rarely induce feelings of "horror" or "dread" (*kongbu* 恐怖).

Shao therefore takes greater inspiration from Western fiction than from the Chinese tradition,

113 Ibid., 9. Ba Jin's "Gods, Ghosts and Men" is a collection of three stories, which reflect the author's personal experiences during his stay in Japan in 1934 and focus thematically on religious beliefs as a retreat from social life and political engagement.

114 Ibid., 8.

115 Ibid.

116 Ibid., 10–11. This is also a playful spin on the historical proverb from the *Han Feizi* 汉非子 that "to paint ghosts and demons is easy" (*hua gui zui yi* 画鬼最易) while visible creatures such as dogs and horses are the most difficult to capture.

although ultimately he does not argue for a sinicized version of the gothic tale, but focuses on ghost stories as a subject matter, rather than narrative mode, particularly suited to China's current situation:

The success of a literary work relies heavily on timing and opportunity. Mao Dun became famous, because he wrote 'Eclipse' [*Shi 蚀*, 1930] when nobody else was writing long novels [*changpian xiaoshuo* 长篇小说]. The sales of the *Analects Fortnightly* were high because, at the time, people wanted to speak out, but that was inopportune, so for a while the attitude of putting on a laughing face and crying on the inside flourished. Pearl S. Buck's success was due to the fact that she was writing novels on Chinese topics when the whole world was looking towards China. Rarely the man makes the times, while the times often make the man. This is why ghost stories would easily meet with success.¹¹⁷

While Shao largely keeps within the very general framework that I have outlined and concludes his enumeration of the “advantages” by reiterating that “for humankind ghost stories will always hold a special position,”¹¹⁸ his arguments are most intriguing where he tries to connect the universal features of ghost stories to current cultural and political crises. Again, the city of Shanghai serves Shao as a model for the uncanny when he writes that today ghost stories would not fail to draw an audience, because “no matter where or when, there is always an eerie atmosphere (*gui kongqi* 鬼空气) permeating, be this at the noisy opera houses or in the crowded dance halls, you will always be able to hear chilly howls of ghosts (*gui jiao* 鬼叫).”¹¹⁹

Here Shao certainly plays with the wide semantic range of the character *gui*, which does not only mean “ghostly” but also “non-sensical” (as in *guihua* “non-sense talk”), “fiend” (as in *jiugui* 酒鬼 “alcoholic”) or “foreign” (as in *yanggui* 洋鬼 “foreigner”, but most often given as “foreign devil”). In keeping with the comical light-heartedness of the “*Analects*,” Shao constantly changes between the two ghost modes that he himself differentiates clearly. There are the “real ghosts” of

117 Ibid., 11.

118 Ibid.

119 Ibid.

Chinese and Western ghostlore and there are the “living ghosts” invoked by Yu Dafu (the opium addicts, the colonialists, etc.). We should be careful not to misunderstand Shao here though. By “realness” Shao does not mean practiced ghost beliefs, from which he carefully distanced himself, but the emotions and experiences that ghost stories are capable of conveying. Referencing Zhou Zuoren's essay “Fear Heaven Pity Man” (*Wei tian min ren* 畏天憫人¹²⁰), Shao argues that China has a unique tradition of conceptualizing ghosts within a framework of retribution, which holds that ghostly *yin*-forces can intervene in the *yang*-world of the living at moments of chaos, corruption and injustice and, equally, the afterworld will bring punishment to those who did not answer for their wrong-doings during their lifetime. Even without the cosmological order sustaining these narratives, the ghost story's ability to raise awareness of inequality and abuse is in Shao's view particularly suited to a time in which “injustices in the world are all too numerous.”¹²¹ The new literature May Fourth intellectuals tasked with relating such “injustices” to its readership lacks the imagination Shao views as key to a successful piece of fiction. “Real ghosts” offer writers the opportunity to throw off the shackles of verisimilitude and plunge into the world of free imagination: “To write about real ghosts is easy precisely because they can be freely imagined, even when one takes those living ghosts as reference: [writers] could never lack materials and [their] stories would never be bland.”¹²² Summing up his first editorial he writes:

I have often said that the first requirement of the novel should be a story, because what everyone after finishing a book remembers forever is the story. [...] Most of the new novels are meaningless essays [*sanwen* 散文]. I don't understand why one would insist on calling them “novels.” If you talk about ghosts you automatically have a “story.”¹²³

Shao's insistence on the concept of *gushi*, with the ghost story being its most paradigmatic manifestation, was part of a larger discourse on the relationship between *gushi* and *xiaoshuo*. Shi

120 The title given by Shao renders *Shuo wei tian min ren* 说畏天憫人 “On Fear Heaven Pity Man”.

121 Shao Xunmei, *Ziyou tan*, 10.

122 Ibid.

123 Shao Xunmei, *Ziyou tan*, 11.

Zhecun and Shen Congwen 沈從文 (1902-1988) were among the notable writers weighing in on this debate, foregrounding *gushi* as not only prerequisite for a readership, but also as an indigenous “Eastern” literary tradition unlike the “Western” novel.¹²⁴ For Shao the distinction seems to have lain on the one hand in the “transmitability” of a story as well as in its ability to provoke an emotional response from its reader. In the second editorial he states:

From the perspective of a pure literature and art, the popular novel obviously is not desirable, but from the twin perspectives of writers and publishers, the popular novel has its reasons for existing. [...] Certainly, the popular novels' most important task is to 'excite' [*ciji* 刺激] and to 'intoxicate' [*mazui* 麻醉]. But I think that no matter how lofty and grand one's ideas are, one cannot go wrong if one starts with what is simple. Only with a readership can a text become effective.¹²⁵

While he reinforces again that he was not interested in a “new popular fiction,” he proposes to utilize ghosts as one of its “crown jewels,” precisely to give new literature those affective capabilities its advocates regard as popular fiction's most deplorable feature. Broadening his perspective once more, Shao goes on to compare Western and Chinese ghost narratives and concludes that within the Chinese tradition ghost stories are “intoxicating,” while the ghosts in the Western popular novel simply provoke “excitement.” As a synthesis of these two types of popular ghost fiction Shao proposes the term *huangmiu*, which he derives from the English literary concept of nonsense:

Literature of Nonsense (sic) can be translated as 'absurd literature' [*huangmiu*]. To make sense out of the non-sensical. This is why worldwide non-sensical things and people receive

124 For instance Shi Zhecun, “Xiaoshuo zhong de duihua 小说中的对话 [Dialog in novels],” in *Ershi shiji xiaoshuo lilun ziliao*, ed. Chen Pingyuan et al., vol. 3 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1997), 466–71. See also footnote 82.

125 Shao Xunmei, *Ziyou tan*, 15. Conventionally *mazui* means “numb” or “anaesthetized”. In the context of popular fiction, Leftists used *mazui* in the derogatory Marxian sense of “opium for the people”. But not only did Shao as a “humorist” oppose such a limited view of popular culture, as he states here quite clearly, but his usage of the term is also often more figurative in the sense of “distracting” or simply “entertaining”. By translating *mazui* as “intoxicating” I have tried to honor the semantic range Shao's use of the term suggests.

the utmost attention and highest admiration. Absurd is colloquially referred to as 'literature of reckless talk' [*xiasan huasi*].¹²⁶

The list of works he counts as “absurd literature,” though amongst them “Gulliver's Travels” (1726) by Jonathan Swift, “The Pickwick Papers” (1836-37) by Charles Dickens and the Ming dynasty novel “Journey to the West” (*Xi you ji* 西游记, 16th century) seem quite unrelated to the ghost fiction Shao outlines, and he afterwards immediately goes on to question the usefulness of importing generic labels from the West. This leads into a discussion of the ways that writers are remembered in China. Quoting at length from an obituary on Maxim Gorky (1868-1936), Shao concludes, quite polemically, that his “affiliation” to a literary school, i.e. socialist realism, caused Chinese critics to shed many tears over his death, while the passing away of the “unaffiliated” Gilbert K. Chesterton (1874-1936) was largely ignored in China.

What follows is Shao's obituary to Chesterton, where he acknowledges the influence Chesterton's writings had on the “Analects.” This leads Shao to another dead author, the German cultural historian Oswald Spengler (1880-1936). He quotes Will Durant (1885-1981) on Spengler's central thesis regarding the “weakening of the blood” in conjunction with the decline of the arts and draws a parallel to China, which is still “waiting for Napoleon to appear.”¹²⁷

What do we make of these writings on the dead? At the beginning of the second editorial Shao had discussed yet another strategy for remembering, i.e. a literary prize he and some of his friends wanted to inaugurate in honor of the poet Xu Zhimo 徐志摩 (1896-1931), which for reasons that are described as “circumstantial” failed to become a reality.¹²⁸ Intentional or not, the thematic connection between the ghost stories, the literary prize and the obituaries is hard to ignore. While it would be difficult to find common ground among these four authors and thinkers—and Shao also does not imply this—all three genres or commemorative practices share certain generic affinities since they arose (or, as in the case of Shao's ghost story, would arise) within the context of

126 Ibid., 16.

127 Ibid., 19.

128 Ibid., 13.

Shanghai's literary and print culture and its new forms of media circulation and readership. Shao himself explicitly points out that the obituary or memorial article (*aiqi* 哀启) was a “new format.”¹²⁹ In light of Shao's ideas on the new ghost story the thematic connection is, however, even more apparent. The obituary and Shao's ghost story in particular have, the potential to mediate between memories of the past and their (re-)contextualizations in the present and their reconfiguration of these constellations, in turn, can take on important social and political functions. For Shao this meant that the newspaper obituary (as well as the literary prize) should not be made subservient to the political agendas of the present (as Leftists in his view were prone to do), but rather that the present should honor and pay its debts to a past it may no longer recognize as its own; likewise, the ghost story needed to be similarly conceptualized with such a political and moral dimension in mind. Shao follows here, to a certain degree, Leftist didacticism when he goes on to state that the ghost story should be as “exciting” as the popular novel, but “not absurd to the point of making sick.”¹³⁰ But if the obituary and the literary prize can be read as the ghost story's sibling genres, then to write ghost stories was for Shao not merely a way of capitalizing on the seemingly ubiquitous sentiments of anxiety, disorientation and fear, but a possible mode of responsibly engaging with the more ambivalent experiences of modernization.

The fact that Shao seems to offer himself up for the role of China's literary Napoleon, turning the tide on a new literature that has lost its course, testifies not only to Shao's rather pretentious ambition as the editor of “*Analects*,” but also to his sincere belief in the importance of his ghost story experiment to the future of modern Chinese literature. This is not to suggest that Shao was a poststructuralist *avant la lettre*. He did not believe the text to have any immediate claim to social realities. Rather, texts could only have an impact if they responded to lived experience, had a clearly discernible narrative and, most importantly, engaged their readers not in an idealist and abstract manner, but by appealing also to their sensual and emotional faculties. In this sense then,

129 Ibid., 17.

130 Ibid., 16.

for Shao, letting ghosts return to fiction would ensure that the abstract “human(ist)” literature he loathed would turn into the more humane art of storytelling.

4 Writing ghosts

To Shao's surprise, the majority of contributions were essays on ghost beliefs and ghost fiction rather than actual ghost stories: “This is for any editor a rare occasion.”¹³¹ If we accept his speculation that this had to do with everybody writing “what they really wanted to talk about”¹³² then it follows that most contributors did not want to write ghost stories in Shao's sense, and this included some of the most well-known and prolific writers such as Shi Zhecun and Lao She. Of roughly fifty texts that were included in both issues, only fifteen fall under the category of the ghost story proper, leaving aside Xu Xu's “Ghost Play.” Apart from the texts on childhood ghostlore I discussed briefly above, I also exclude in the following discussion those pieces with a more ethnographic approach in writing for instance about “types of ghosts.” In doing so I follow Shao's distinction of literary and non-literary texts, although it could certainly be argued that, at least in the Chinese case, ghost tales never adhered to any strict boundaries between the fictional and the non-fictional. However, there is a strong difference in the intention of texts that seek to creatively engage with ghosts and those that seek to explain ghost beliefs, customs, etc. or write *about* ghosts, which makes this distinction both methodologically useful and theoretically productive.

The first observation one can make when reading the “Analects” ghost stories is how remarkably they differ, not only in terms of subject matter, but also in their composition and style which ranges from modernist experimental fiction to retellings and revisions of classical *zhiguai* tales. Again, one recurring topic is the looming military confrontation with Japan as in Lin Nai's 林乃 “Personal account of ghost-watching in the North” (*Beiguo guan gui ji* 北国观鬼记), Zhang Kebiao's 章克标 (1900-2007) “Ghost Neighbor” (*Linjia de gui* 邻家的鬼) and Qu Jinfeng's 区劲锋

131 Ibid., 5.

132 Ibid.

“Ghost Soldier” (*Guibing* 鬼兵), which already point to the proliferation of the term *guizi* 鬼子 as hateful epithet for the Japanese imperial forces during the “War of Resistance.”¹³³

Furthermore, two stories are translations. These are Paul Morand's (1888-1976) “Mr. Yu” (*Yu xiansheng* 余先生, translated by Ye Fengling 叶凤灵, probably a misspelling of Ye Lingfeng 叶灵凤 (1905-1975)) and Guy de Maupassant's (1850-1893) “The Conservatory” (*Yanghua de nuanfang* 养花的暖房, translated by Qing Ya 青崖). While Morand's story is about a ghost from the Tang dynasty (618-907) seeking to recover his tomb treasures that have become the property of a present-day New York merchant, Maupassant's text recounts how a dull marriage is sexually reinvigorated by the revelation that the at first eery and frightening sounds coming from the conservatory outside their house are in fact the screams of their maid engaging in a nocturnal relationship. While all of the fifteen stories certainly warrant a detailed analysis, I will focus on four texts that best exemplify the diversity of writings on “real ghosts.” These are the two urban stories, “Hearing Ghosts” (*Wen gui* 闻鬼) by Shao Xunmei and “The Disappearing Hand” (*Shou de xiaoshi* 手的消失) by Lin Weiyin 林微音 (1899-1982) as well as “Mountain Retreat” (*Shanju* 山居) by Lu Jun 陆骏 and “Thus Have I Heard” (*Ru shi wo wen* 如是我闻) by Bi Shutang 毕树棠 (1900-1983), set outside of the city and at China's borders, respectively.

4.1 Shao Xunmei: Listening to transgression

For Shao, the haunted house occupied a central role in the symbolic expression of urban experience. While in the poem I quoted earlier these darker realms are alluded to only in the image of the grave site, in “Hearing Ghosts” Shao focuses on the actual haunted nature of city life, and more specifically the houses he had lived in. Technically, Shao's “story” is an account of three instances of “hearing” ghosts, one from his childhood and two more recent. These accounts are framed as personal experiences, but also draw on classical ghost story tropes such as a candle's flame turning green in the presence of a ghost. Given its imitative style of gothic haunted house narratives ,

¹³³ For a detailed discussion of the term *guizi* and Anti-Japanism see Leo Ching, “Japanese Devils,” *Cultural Studies* 26, no. 5 (2012): 710–22.

Shao's story could be analyzed from a psychoanalytic perspective. Such a reading might take the first ghostly encounter from Shao's childhood as a projection of his family's fears over their crumbling fortunes onto an obtrusive spectral presence. Equally, the second and third haunting of the ghost of the Scottish proprietor's dead son-in-law, who disturbs Shao's nighttime work, could initially be read as a manifestation of the menacing encroachment of foreigners on the city and its inhabitants—a reading that could even be supported by the biography Shao's daughter wrote in which she recounts how the bustling life of the Shao family, with their frequent visitors and dinner parties at the Julu residence, met the disdain of their foreign landlords.¹³⁴ But instead of exploring these themes, ghosts end up being little more than a vehicle to highlight the author's extravagant self-image by delving into something as forbidden and out-of-fashion as ghosts. This is particularly clear when Shao goes so far as to advertise his own essay collection, “A One-man Conversation” (*Yi ge ren de tanhua* 一个人的谈话), by highlighting its origins in an eerie encounter with the supernatural. Indeed he ends with the confident remarks:

People have said that these [sounds] were echoes, others insisted that they were 'imagined', but I, who have personally experienced these situations, can say straightforward and honestly: 'That was a ghost!'¹³⁵

Shao arguably falls short of his own demand of offering his readers a good story, because he does not delve into a fuller exploration of these hauntings. Instead, questions of plausibility are foregrounded and he emphasizes how those writing about and painting ghosts, but who have never personally encountered any spectral appearances, in fact give strong testimony to those believing in the “No-Ghost-Theory.”¹³⁶ Too concerned with the image of the ghost-writer Shao himself truncates the narrative possibilities of ghosts he had so highly praised and reduces them to a chiffre of the marginalized avant-garde intellectual. While it seems apparent that he tried to wrest ghosts from the

134 Shao Xiaohong 邵绉红, *Wo de baba Shao Xunmei* 我的爸爸邵洵美 [*My father Shao Xunmei*] (Shanghai: Shanghai Shudian chubanshe, 2005).

135 Shao Xunmei, *Lunyu banyuekan*, 91 (1936): 923.

136 *Ibid.*, 921.

narrow discursive confines of the no-ghost-theorists and their rational explanation of ghosts as “echoes” or figures of “imagination,” he remains unconvincing precisely because he frames his narratives still within this discourse of (dis-)belief. Within such a (mock-)scientific discourse of ghosts, and its ocular-centric epistemology, Shao has to resort to aural experiences of the uncanny.

The title of Shao's story makes suggestive use of the character *wen*, which refers to the perceptual faculties of smelling, hearing (of), but also means to (intuitively) know something—a pun Shao plays on when the house servants gossip and newspaper reports become the primary source of information on the ghost and the history of Shao's residence. The generative place of these non-visual hauntings are two luxurious estates, which Shao, to considerable ironic effect, describes in the most objective and quantifiable terms:

[...] six or seven years ago there was an old Western style mansion on Jing'an Si Lu, that occupied more than seven Mu [600 m²] of land, with a big field of grass in front of the entrance. The mansion inside had four main rooms and two entrance halls. My bedroom was above the entrance hall to the West and had a balcony five chi [30 cm, sic] wide, in front of which there was a big Magnolia tree. Looking through the leaves of the Magnolia tree, one could see a seventeen or eighteen chi long dusty alley, overgrown on both sides by shrubs of holly. At the end of this alley was the main gate, which led to the street. Across from the street was the house of the Yuan family.¹³⁷

Overall, such meticulous descriptions, which read as a mocking imitation of the evidential writings obsessed with proving the legitimacy of their claims, give us an image of the city as a measurable space with clearly defined compartments assigned to people and their activities. Only in the darkness of the night, and with few or no people around, can the phantom's sounds travel through these spaces. Here, the pleasure with which Shao seems to self-consciously affirm his ghostly encounters bears much in common with his editorials, and his insistence on textual exploration and transgression, not only in the sense of questioning those neatly segregated spatial configurations

¹³⁷ Ibid.

between rich and poor, foreign and Chinese,¹³⁸ but most importantly bursting open those narrowly confined “intellectual spaces” allotted to the modern writer. Viewed in this light, “Hearing ghosts” is very much in line with Shao’s early poetry in that both can be read as an expression of his wish to pursue the new, the uncharted and the unexpected. If the static and measurable urban space represented the affectlessness and alienation of “human writing,” Shao’s itinerant ghost sounds, which penetrate these “solid” structures, allegorize the modern as a force liberational in its atomizing thrust. Herein, Shao’s ghosts are akin to Walter Benjamin’s figure of the flâneur, who feels at home in such an ever-changing world and whose aimless drifting seems always to gravitate towards those uncanny elements of the city, where feelings of shock, horror and dread intermingle seamlessly with fascination and pleasure.

4.2 Lu Jun: Old stories, new ghosts

“Mountain Retreat,”¹³⁹ by the unknown author Lu Jun,¹⁴⁰ is a very different story, in which we find a move away from the city and into a more rural setting. In a well known trope from Shi Zhecun’s “Yaksha” (*Yecha* 夜叉, 1933) the protagonist is sent upon doctor’s orders to the countryside to rest from an unspecified illness. The story abounds with allusions to classical *zhiguai* and gothic tropes: spider webs, a run-down mansion, a mass grave, a female specter and the accompanying story of cruelty and injustice as well as white smoke and a *jiangshi* 僵尸 zombie. In the end the spooky apparition that the protagonist witnesses with the sister of a friend, turns out to be a prank played by one of his fellow patients who dressed up in white.

Up until this point, however, the reader well-versed in the semiotics of the classical ghost story would have assumed the young woman, named Jing Fei 静裴, to be the dangerous phantom.

138 Shao and Yu Dafu seemed to have commissioned “Shanghai Ghost Talk – The ghost king comes from Shanghai” by Xu Weinan 徐蔚南 in fear of not receiving enough “Shanghai ghost stories,” *Ibid.*, 899.

139 The title may also be a reference to Qu Yuan’s 屈原 poem “Mountain Ghost” (*Shangui* 山鬼). Shen Congwen wrote an eponymous story on a madman’s life as a mountain recluse: “Mountain Ghost” (1927). This genealogy of spectral women and men living as mountain recluses, often shunned by society, carried well beyond the 1930s, as evidenced by the Yan’an academy’s *Yangge* opera “The White-haired Girl.”

140 Lu Jun only published this one story in the “Analects” and was most likely an amateur writer without personal ties to the literary establishment or Shao himself as Shao only refers to him as “Mister Lu Jun” in the editorial. The (pen) name does also not appear in any reference book.

In fact, the staging of the story as an encounter between the ghostly female beauty and the patient/literati heightens the reader's expectation of romantic events to follow. Most peculiarly, however, no such affairs are ever implied. The abandonment of such classical ghost narrative tropes immediately after their introduction is one of the defining characteristics of the story. Indeed, the mountain sanatorium, built in the shape of a classical Chinese garden, "all uneven and crooked,"¹⁴¹ is said to have been erected on the grounds of a mass grave, though, once again, no further historical or otherwise pertinent information is given. These elements in the narrative function to set the "spooky" scene, for the reader and the characters of the story alike, but in the end are found to be empty signifiers. The only instance of haunting even vaguely explored is a hillside where Jing Fei and the narrator one night assume a ghost on their toes. Jing Fei relates the story of a local girl, who after being impregnated out of wedlock was buried there alive by her father. But again, the narrator does not go on to question Jing Fei about the girl's fate, considering such information irrelevant to their experience of being haunted.

This story is most distinctive from the other "Analects" ghost stories in its strong emphasis on nature as an inhospitable force, saturated with tropes of spectrality that represent the narrator's projection of his fears and anxieties. This is particularly apparent in the characterization of Jing Fei. Aside from her eerie morning strolls in the cold, the old estate that she and her sick mother reside in is overgrown with moss, shady and cold, and her only real pleasure seems to be listening to birdsong in the morning. By contrast, our sickly protagonist, who should have moved into Jing Fei's house but decided that it was too run-down for his liking, oversleeps regularly in the morning and due to his sensitivity to the summer's heat stays in bed dozing well into the afternoon. While the uncanny elements of the narrative are very literally encoded into the landscape, the clinic or sanatorium built in the shape of a Chinese garden only imitates nature. Such a place is only able to produce, it seems, pseudo-hauntings such as dressing-up in white and sneaking up on your friends.

By contrast, the urban protagonist early on experiences his new mountainous habitat as "weighing

¹⁴¹ Lu Jun, *Lunyu banyuekan*, 92 (1936): 989.

down his heart.”¹⁴² If being in nature is the cure to his sickness, then this is a cure that draws on the psycho-mechanics of shock-therapy.

At the same time, the ghost story itself serves merely as pastime. Arguably the most important episode in the narrative, which leads to the story's haunting climax, is when a group of the protagonist's fellow patients and Jing Fei sit together one evening to talk about ghost stories. Instead of being frightened, though, the ghost story leaves everybody underwhelmed: “[...], then he started to tell a story that seemed like something from a book like *Records on Rainy Nights and under the Autumn Lamp* [*Yeyu qiudeng lu* 夜雨秋灯录 by Xuan Ding 宣鼎 (1832-1880)]. After very briefly summarizing the story he was already finished and I listened without the least bit of interest”.¹⁴³

Unfortunately, Lu Jun did not explore the conflict between a pathologized landscape and the evacuation of the ghost story's cultural functions, both religious and “literary,”¹⁴⁴ any further. However, what Lu's short story does demonstrate is the difficulty of translating Shao's concept into modern fiction, because the story does not end in the protagonist's return to “health” and real injustices, such as that of the girl buried alive, fail to find meaningful representation. Suspended between the “non-sense” of ghost impersonation and an unintelligible, spectralized and gendered nature, “Mountain Retreat” suggests the modern ghost story to be as necessary as it is difficult to write.

4.3 Lin Weiyin: Losing sight of human(ity)

Set once again in an urban landscape is “The Disappearing Hand” by Lin Weiyin, a lesser known writer associated with the *haipai* 海派 brand of Shanghai modernism. While Shao, as connoisseur of all things fashionably urban, takes pleasure in the uncanny sensations and mysterious encounters that the ghost's sonoric transgression enables, Lin's short piece of experimental fiction narrates how

142 Ibid., 990.

143 Ibid., 991.

144 I am thinking here specifically of the changing contexts and meanings of literary representations of female ghosts that Judith T. Zeitling analyzes in her seminal study, *The Phantom Heroine: Ghosts and Gender in Seventeenth-Century Chinese Literature* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007).

flânerie leads to claustrophobia and terror. Opening with a stereotypical setting for a tale of urban horror, the first-person narrator recounts his trip to an unspecified city, where he suddenly finds himself with free time on his hands and decides to “take a stroll through unknown streets.”¹⁴⁵ In characteristically modernist fashion, every observation is cast with self-doubt, leaving the narrator “I” wondering, for instance, if it “was the beginning or the middle of autumn.”¹⁴⁶ His interest is suddenly aroused by an unusually narrow alley, which he observes for a while from the outside before he decides to enter. Fascinated by the encroaching walls of this “one-man alley” (*danren long* 单人弄), he speculates on what might happen if someone were to walk towards him from the other side. His hopes to see “how they would mutually hold their breath and how they would shift their bodies”¹⁴⁷ soon comes true, although in a different way than he had imagined. The person suddenly moving towards him—“could I really call this a person?”¹⁴⁸—is perceived as an indistinguishable black mass, from which only the three white dots of the face and two hands, forming an “equilateral triangle,” stand out.¹⁴⁹ This presence moves at a steady pace and in unaltered frontal position past the narrator, who remains throughout the story mysteriously invisible to the presence’s eyes, which “did not see anything or maybe did not look at anything.”¹⁵⁰ The increasingly panic-stricken narrator squeezes himself to the side and dares not move until the apparition is well behind him. At this moment his interest in the mysterious being piques again and he looks back only to see the two hands slowly vanishing. Even after returning to the entry point of the alley he is unable to catch another glimpse of the pair of hands and concludes that “up until today [he] does not know if they followed the face or got lost somewhere in the immense black space.”¹⁵¹

145 Lin Weiyin, *Lunyu banyuekan*, 92 (1936): 986.

146 Ibid.

147 Ibid.

148 Ibid.

149 I have been made aware that this, interestingly, correlates with neuroscientific findings on the predominance of the face and the hands in cortical representations of sensitive body areas. This has been famously visually translated into the figure of a “homunculus” inside our brain, whose hands and head are excessively enlarged in relation to the rest of the body.

150 Shao Xunmei, *Lunyu banyuekan*, 92 (1936): 986.

151 Ibid., 987.

Hands are the part of the body most frequently used for human interaction and are thus symbolic of human sociality and affective bonds. They also recall more specifically the X-rayed hand in Chen Haoxiong's *manhua*. As a metonymy for (manual) labor, the hands pulling back the curtain symbolize agency and resolve. If Chen's stripped-down bare bone hands, however, encode a resolute belief in the ability to overcome China's crisis through the powers of a technologically mediated epistemology of visuality and Enlightenment empiricism, then Lin's disappearing hands question the evidentiality of the visual. Can one ever trust what one sees to be true? Could those mysterious eyes without eyebrows even see? From the onset the protagonist has, very literally, a troubled vision: "But after entering, I saw that it was not as dark inside as it had looked from the outside."¹⁵² In his famous analysis of E.T.A. Hoffmann's tale "The Sand-Man" in "The Uncanny" (1919), Freud analyzed the theme of the eyes and especially losing one's eyesight as indicative of the child's castration anxiety.¹⁵³ I don't think it is necessary to read castration here in such literal biological terms.¹⁵⁴ Instead, loss of sight and distrust in visual perception point, similarly to the ghost sounds in Shao's text, to the fragmentizing, but for Lin also the de-humanizing experience of the modern urban space, where one no longer experiences the self as cohesive and autonomous.

An interesting intertext to this is another small *manhua* (Illustration 4), in which the "eyeless ghost" (*wuyan gui* 無眼鬼) keeps the streets free from "wronged characters" in a critique of media censorship's mutilating results, on both the textual and corporeal level. If the X-Ray technology in Chen's *manhua* bespeaks a rational and purposive epistemology of the visual, then the different (in-)visibilities in Lin's text point to the dissolution of certainties and the loss of agency. Interestingly, the narrator uses Chinese operatic imagery to characterize such inhuman and uncanny artificiality when he states "... and above the upper lip, where one can grow a beard, it had two pitch black vertical lines, even blacker than the rest of its body, a brow triangle, just like the eyebrows

152 Ibid., 986.

153 Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny* (Penguin Books Limited, 2003).

154 I eschew here the whole interpretative dimension between the "narrow alley" and the vagina, which Freud viewed as the ultimate "unheimlich" object, once "home" to us all, but now rendered frightening as exemplified in popular folklore such as the Medusa's head, *vagina dentata*.

female opera actresses wear on stage.”¹⁵⁵ Although the narrative “I,” who refuses to give the reader a single piece of personal information, strives to understand and decode the uncanny appearance, and the references to geometry and Chinese opera certainly point to his desire for a semiotic system capable of rendering his experience intelligible, Lin does not grant him, or the reader for that matter, any facile conclusion as to what has actually happened. If the disembodied and then vanishing hands are read as an allegory of the modern (capitalist) urban space, then neither new science nor tradition, as possible alternative value-systems, can counteract its dehumanizing (or even mutilating) thrust. On the other hand, Lin's story demonstrates how Shao's ideas on the new ghost story were taken up by writers in order to explore the spectral as a critical counter-discourse to the “human.” As I will discuss below, the spectral in Bi's story is taken a step further than by Shao and Lin through the critical application of insights from the subterranean/inhuman perspective to nationalist narratives of the “people.”

4.4 Bi Shutang: Learning from “real ghosts”

Set in the remains of what was, during the Ming dynasty, once an important maritime defense fort on the Eastern corner of the Shandong province, Bi's “Thus Have I Heard” tells the story of a low-level government official who loses his job after defending a local street peddler selling peanuts in front of a brutal police officer.¹⁵⁶ Unable to further support his family, he eventually poisons himself, along with his wife and children, who then return as vengeful spirits to haunt the police chief and the brutal officer by shocking them with their terrifying appearance and screaming: “You are done!”¹⁵⁷ The story ends with the police chief resigning his post and the officer punished to live as a blind beggar.

155 Shao Xunmei, *Lunyu banyuekan*, 92 (1936): 987.

156 Most likely this novel is reprinted with the title “Mister Cheng” (*Cheng xiansheng* 成先生) in “A Collection of Daydreams” (*Zhou meng ji* 晝夢集, 1940), which I was, however, not able to verify. The original title *Ru shi wo wen* is also a reference to Ji Yun's eponymous *biji* collection from 1791. The author Bi Shutang is today best known for his work as translator of English literature such as Mark Twain's “Life on the Mississippi” (*Mishishibi he shang* 密士失必河上, 1955)

157 Bi Shutang, *Lunyu banyuekan*, 92 (1936): 980.

Bi is the most straight-forward and unapologetic of all “ghost writers.” There are the “Dragon King,” who incarnates into three government inspectors in order to lure the police chief into the family’s haunted house, scary ghosts with long white tongues protruding from their mouths and, most importantly, a functioning cosmological order, which restores justice to those wronged. Furthermore, the local residents have an intuitive knowledge of the universe’s moral order, when they at the end of the story recognize that the crippled beggar is someone they should ignore, which is unusual within the religious context of Buddhism. Whereas the title of the story is traditionally a very common introductory phrase in Buddhist sutras (collections of didactic aphorisms relating the teachings of Gautama Buddha), such learning is in Bi’s text modernized to address issues of rural poverty as well as government neglect and abuse. If it weren’t for the appearance of the vengeful spirits of the Wang family, the text could very well qualify, in terms of its style and subject matter, as a social realist novel. The reference to the unfolding events as if they were taking place “now” in a novel dated precisely to July 1936, enhances the strong political overtones, even though political institutions are still referred to by their imperial names, as for instance *yamen* 衙门 for “government office”.

The coastal province of Shandong was at the beginning of the 20th century a politically highly instable region at the mercy of warlords and colonial powers. The police in the narrative are symbolic of these hegemonic forces that impose their regulatory regime onto the local peasant community “too poor [even] to produce idlers out of their midst”.¹⁵⁸ Not only are the peasants obliged to observe the rules (for instance a prohibition on gambling), the police forces are not recognized as belonging to this place, with the notable exception of the tragic hero Wang Cheng, “who although he belonged to the *yamen* had become a model member of the community and all the people in the fort respectfully called him Mister Cheng.”¹⁵⁹ His protest against the beating of the peanut seller is, then, not simply viewed as an overstepping of his competences, but as an actual

158 Ibid., 979.

159 Ibid., 975.

threat to this outside order, when he is accused of “taking over the town.”¹⁶⁰ In contrast to this oppressive regime, which views the poor peasant as a type of “deviant” at the margins of society in need of regulation and reform, the peasants themselves appear in the most idealized terms as a community with strong values, fostering compassion and generosity.

If we read the fort community in “Thus Have I Heard” as a heterotopia in the Foucaultian sense, as a place of difference and alterity, then this place performs two seemingly contradictory functions. On the one hand, it reveals the governmental practices of normalizing peasants into citizens of a nation, by subjecting the local to the national. On the other hand, it simultaneously also symbolizes the modern nation's cultural essence through idealized notions of frugality, community and cosmological order. Homi Bhabha calls this the “double time” in nationalist narratives.¹⁶¹ The dystopian elements give way to the utopian when in the end justice is restored and life goes on as before. In fact, the police chief himself recognizes that the community will never be able to become fully regulated. After a first spooky encounter with the Wang family ghosts he plays the episode down in front of a group of frightened government officials (who turn out to be incarnations of the dragon king helping the Wang family): “Although this fort is small, it is quite old and because there are rarely soldiers stationed here, it is only normal for ghosts to go about their evil business. Nothing strange about that.”¹⁶²

On account of the well-known reference to Buddhist sutras in the title the reader expects to be given a didactic tale or a moral lesson. Certainly, the immediately apparent teaching appears to be that the cycles of cosmic retribution serve those leading a pious life. On the other hand, the story's realism in depicting the bleak and poverty-stricken lives of the fort community would render such an interpretation only plausible if we read “Thus Have I Heard” as a satire of traditional morality. But this, in turn, would again be at odds with Bi's direct and sincere prose. In fact, “Thus

160 Ibid., 976.

161 Homi Bhabha, “DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation,” in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi Bhabha (London, New York: Routledge, 1990), 291–322.

162 Bi Shutang, *Lunyu banyuekan*, 92 (1936): 980.

Have I Heard” distances itself clearly from pedagogical ghost discourses of both religious and secular persuasion not only through its narrative style and social-realist concern but most importantly by eschewing any moral commentary on or rational explanation for the ghost's appearances.¹⁶³ As such, Bi's novel succeeds as the most convincing translation of Shao's notion of “real ghosts” into a successful piece of fiction. Just like the children in Bi Shutang's story, who remain mute during their lifetime, find themselves suddenly, as ghosts, able to stake their claim to the care and recognition that they had been denied, so too does the modern ghost story gain as “realist” novel its most pronounced contours.

5 In the company of ghosts

Published on the eve of the Second Sino-Japanese war, when even the renowned writer of gothic inspired fiction Shi Zhecun wrote that “the age of realism” (*xianshi zhuyi de shidai* 现实主义的时代)¹⁶⁴ had come, the ghost stories special issues of the “Analects” offer revealing insight into some of the ambiguities and difficulties Chinese writers encountered in “becoming modern” as well as in “writing the modern.” Contributors of these two issues draw on a wide range of spectral figures, from “traditional” religious ghosts to “modern” hallucinatory ghosts, to problematize these narrations of the self and the nation in the interstices of a heavily normativized discourse of the modern and the more mundane realms of family life, tabloid press, urbanization, migration, etc.

Save for ghosts actually taking to the *planquette* boards, writers had to find ways of voicing in the “name of ghosts” the dark, forbidden and marginalized topics that ghosts as unruly figures could embody. Unsurprisingly, the fate of the ghost writers themselves is one of the most prominent topics, which often precluded deeper investigations into ghost stories themselves.

163 Contempt for (religious) didacticism seems to have been common among “Analects” writers. Zeng Die, for instance, disdainfully notes that most ghost stories were crafted to “exhort people to pursue the moral good” (*Lunyu banyuekan*, 91 (1936): 881). And Wang Xiaoshan 王小山 speaks of ghosts in “The Mentality of Ghost Fright” (*Pagui xinli* 怕鬼心裡) as “religious propaganda” (Ibid., 905), although recent scholarship has also shown that ghost tales should not be reduced to their religious and didactic functions, see: Sing-Chen Lydia Chiang, *Collecting The Self: Body And Identity In Strange Tale Collections Of Late Imperial China* (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

164 Shi Zhecun, *Lunyu banyuekan*, 91 (1936): 870.

Furthermore, Shao's concept of a new Chinese ghost story, with a cultural-political function somewhere between public obituary and lighthearted “non-sense,” proved difficult to grasp. While the traditional ghost story had been discredited as in Lu Jun's story, where it was presented as a boring and unimaginative pastime, the new ghost story envisioned by Shao was equally difficult to conceptualize and translate into successful fiction.

The fears, anxieties and injustices Shao believed the new ghost story capable of addressing were grounded in a secular and rational present that antagonized ghosts as anachronistic, superstitious and irrational. This tension is palpable in nearly all the texts. Yet two very distinct approaches can be discerned that correspond with Shao's theorization of “living ghosts” and “real ghosts.” The majority of texts approach ghosts with a claim to representational authority, which metaphorizes and/or historicizes ghosts, often straddling a thin line between political commentary and social satire. In contrast, texts seeking to follow Shao's proposition to write “real ghosts” try to imagine (con-)figurations of hauntings, which grant ghosts not only the ability to “intoxicate” readers, but also to pursue their own, perhaps terrifying modes of self-empowerment, as Bi Shutang's story demonstrates.

While a radical secularist such as Ma Zihua read Chinese ghostlore as vivid testimony to China's misogynist culture, he believed himself capable of putting these voices to rest, mimicking the paternalistic reflex directed towards the childhood self, as it is expressed in the biographical essays., to speak *for* the ghost, but not to actually “listen to” (Shao) or, as Derrida has famously put it, to learn from the ghost.¹⁶⁵

This is nowhere more visible than in the treatment of the most iconic of literary revenants, the female ghost. Not that the “Analects” issues did not apart from Ma Zihua's essay, include a wide range of texts on female hauntings as embodiments of gendered injustices or sexually charged phantasies of transgression, but moral pedagogy often foreclosed any consideration of the claims female modes of haunting could make and how these in turn could contribute to a new literary

¹⁶⁵ Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 221.

politics of *gushi*. Even when writing about the terrifying beauty of the ghost of the hanged woman, Xu Qinwen could not fail to express his “pity” for the women, who were being driven to suicide by their cruel families.¹⁶⁶ Zhang Leping's *manhua* (illustration 5), which appeared right before Xu's essay, goes even further by satirizing a male passer-by who calls the police on a shadow of what he presumes to be a woman trying to hang herself. However, the last panel reveals that what he saw was in fact a child playing with a doll. The figure of the child and the lamp represent the new age, in which female suicides only appear as false shadows.¹⁶⁷ However, the culturally overdetermined female phantom was perhaps also most unsuitable for Shao's ghost story project, which focused upon the new literary perspectives that ghosts were starting to reveal precisely at the moment of being discarded from “human” history.

Still, Shao's endeavor to (re-)invent modern Chinese fiction through ghosts was, with respect to its capability for literary innovation, too ambitious a task as it found its final limit in the horizon of the radical alterity of female haunting. It is therefore certainly a noteworthy coincidence that Lu Xun that same year published his famous essay, “The Female Hanged” (*Nüdiao* 女吊, translated by Gladys Yang and Yang Xianyi as “The Hanging Woman”) on his vision of a gendered and spectralized ideology of revenge. Written only weeks before his death, Lu Xun, just like Xu, draws on the operatic figure of the ghost of the female hanged from his hometown Shaoxing's version of the Mulian dramatic cycle, in order to criticize the “bad habit” of Chinese ghosts to find substitutes, because only when they have lured another soul into suicide can they move on to a more peaceful afterlife: “If not for this, we could mix with them quite at our ease.”¹⁶⁸ In recognizing Chinese intellectuals' reluctance to engage with ghosts, Lu Xun was certainly right. But those who did get “mixed up” with ghosts, as he himself did, indeed also showed that to write as a “substitute”

166 Xu Qinwen, *Lunyu banyuekan*, 92 (1936): 964.

167 The reality of female suicides at the time speaks a very different story, see Bryna Goodman, “The New Woman Commits Suicide: The Press, Cultural Memory, and the New Republic,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 64, 1 (February 2005): 67–101.

168 Lu Xun, “The Hanging Woman,” in *Selected Works of Lu Xun*, trans. Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang, 3rd ed. (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2003), 440.

was an important avenue for self-expression and cultural critique. And while the “Analects” ghost stories failed to make a profound mark on the course of Chinese literary history—as is evidenced by the virtual anonymity of most writers discussed, Lu Xun's spirited plea for the female specter's revenge appears today only as the prelude to the complicated and contradictory career of ghosts in 20th century Chinese literature and politics. It is in this sense, then, that Shao also underestimated the power of the ghosts he had conjured, because both “living ghosts” and “real ghosts” would gain central importance to narratives of China's modernization.

Chapter 3:

Ghost Trouble: Female ghosts, fetishism and spectral subjectivity in Shanghai fiction from the Republican period

[...] the fact that ghosts [gui] are predominantly female is nothing extraordinary and has reasons that can be studied. [...] 'ghosts' are mostly female, this is the crystallization of a very ancient mentality, the product of a feudal system.¹⁶⁹

1 Keeping dreams of phantom love alive

Female ghosts mean double trouble. As ghosts, they question the self-sufficiency of the temporal and spatial structures we live in. As supernatural and strange women, they challenge the boundaries of our social institutions and cultural norms. Ma Zihua's essay „Ghosts and Women” contains this double threat by reading female phantoms as the symbolic embodiment of cruelty towards women, superstitious beliefs and a misogynist Confucian culture apparatus. This allows him to correlate female ghosts with China's degree of modernization and he concludes his essay, as I already discussed in the preceding chapter, with the confident prediction that in the future socialist society ghost stories will cease to exist completely.

Ma's politically fueled diatribe has no interest in engaging with the complex history of Chinese gender relations and much less even with the artistically elaborate representations of female phantoms in both premodern and modern fiction and stage drama, even though the two examples he uses are “twenty-five year old”¹⁷⁰ ghost stories. His conclusions are accordingly by no means original. What is most problematic about Ma's account is not so much his admittedly narrow focus on female phantoms as figurations of male anxiety and desire, but the fact that he denies the

¹⁶⁹ Ma Zihua, “Gui yu nüxing,” *Lunyu banyuekan*, 92 (1936): 957.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 955.

feminine and the spectral any form of historical agency and textual authority. Those still mired in a feudal and patriarchal cultural imaginary are now assigned the same inferior social position previously occupied by the female phantom: “Although today's 'ghosts' may no longer be frightening, there are still plenty of 'ghost-making' 'ghosts' out there.”¹⁷¹ Still very much indebted to premodern medical conceptions of ghosts as demonic vectors threatening the healthy (male) body, the female specter symbolizes today no longer the weakness of women, but the political humiliation and social danger of outmoded, sentimental, silly, superstitious and irrational ideas and practices to Ma's vision of modern China. While the masculine also changes meaning from feudal misogyny to enlightenment rationality, it retains a position of power and authority.

Other, less politically oriented writers, were, to refer again to my subversive appropriation of Maoist phraesology in the title of this study, not as afraid of female ghosts as Ma. Indeed discourses of female spectrality appear prominently in the modernist and popular fiction of Ma's contemporaries. Taking the form of the femme fatale, beautiful corpse, tragic revenant and suicidal bride, gendered figures of death and repetition are well-known from the works of neo-sensationist writers, but also appear in 1940s women's popular fiction. While reform discourse assimilated female haunting into the sequential time of modernization by turning the female phantom into an emblem of “the nearly ten thousand years of injustice and hardship that women have endured,”¹⁷² the ghost fiction studied in this chapter insists not only on the relevance of haunting to social life, but also mobilizes supernatural, archaic and unruly forms of femininity to articulate the experience of Shanghai modernity. In these texts female ghosts are troubling not in the sense of a problem or a disease, but in the sense of a provocation and opportunity to experiment with and transgress norms, values, identities. As Judith Butler points out in the preface to *Gender Trouble*, from where I borrow the term, trouble does not only designate an indisposition or some flaw to overcome, but also in a

171 Ibid., 958.

172 Zhou Zuoren, “Jiuxi yinxiang (er) 旧戏印象 (二) [Old Opera Impressions (Two)],” in *Zhou Zuoren sanwen* 周作人散文 [Collected Essays of Zhou Zuoren], vol. 4 (Beijing: Zhongguo guangbo dianshi chubanshe, 1992), 469–70.

more positive sense “an unanticipated agency.”¹⁷³ Reading female phantoms requires us therefore not only to pay attention to the ways modern thought limits, misconstrues and negates gendered haunting, but also to recognize the transgressive and even empowering trajectories they create.

This chapter is divided into two sections. In the first I analyze ghost novels and novellas by Zhang Kebiao, Shi Zhecun, Ye Lingfeng, and Xu Xu. In the second I look at imaginative fiction by the female authors Shi Jimei and Tang Xuehua, who in the mid-1940s took Shanghai's literary scene by storm, but have since 1949 drifted into nearly complete obscurity. At the historical moment, when China was taking the “magical leap”¹⁷⁴ into modern time, these writers creatively reinvented the centuries-old figure of the female phantom to address broadly three topics, which were most visible and acutely felt in the cultural milieu of Shanghai: sexual difference, commodity culture, and colonialism. Collectively, these ghost novels challenge progressive time's move towards a “more just social order”¹⁷⁵ through a “literature of man” (*ren de wenxue*) and thereby also reject the simple dichotomies of old and new, foreign and national, urban and rural. Although Chinese and Western ghost discourses play an important role in the texts I discuss, I am not so much concerned with the reception or adaptation of specific genres nor with a more general assessment of (in-)fidelity to specific forms of (literary) thought as with how and to what end female spectralities and spectral femininities are creatively appropriated and reworked. In short, what kind of trouble do female ghosts make? Moreover, reading female authored ghost fiction from the 1940s in conjunction with the phantom discourse in male modernism from the 1930s enables us not only to perceive 1940s female fiction in a more complex light, it relativizes also the exceptionalist view of Chinese modernism from the 1930s as the apex of literary creativity in the Republican period.

173 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Tenth Anniversary Edition* (New York: Routledge, 2002), xxvii.

174 Shi, *The Lure of the Modern*, 49.

175 Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 18.

My discussion of male-authored texts will focus upon the relationship between female spectrality and another topic, with which it frequently appears in tandem: fetishism. This double line of inquiry has two main reasons: First, the fetishization of (not only spectral) women is an extraordinarily prominent theme in *haipai* fiction from the 1920s and 1930s.¹⁷⁶ Female figures are not simply beautiful women, but in the words of the narrator in Mu Shiyong's "Black Peony" (Hei Mudan 黑牡丹, 1933) "half animal, half object [*jingwu* 静物]"¹⁷⁷—*jing*, "still" or "lifeless", being the operative term. My second reasoning for this tandem approach is the fact that, from an analytical point of view, fetishism too can be viewed as a fantastical narrative, as it involves the attribution of human properties to objects and qualities of lifeless matter to humans, which neither possess "naturally."

I will focus specifically upon psychoanalytic theories of the fetish, because sexual difference plays an important role in these novels. Freud's 1927 essay on fetishism is my point of departure, but my reading follows E. L. McCallum's feminist revision of Freud's theory in "Object Lessons: How to Do Things With Fetishism" (1998), in which she interprets the fetish not so much as the symbol of a lack or deficiency, but rather as a tool for negotiating loss and change, which is targeted not only at sexual, but also at cultural difference.

Aside from Freud and McCallum, I also draw on the works of Gilles Deleuze and the French-Hungarian psychoanalysts Maria Torok and Nicolas Abraham, which bring the cultural significance of fetishism into clearer focus. As I will try to show, female phantoms are not simply symptoms of a male subject in crisis. Just as these writers found in the female phantom a literary analogy to the fetishism arising in the colonial context of Shanghai modernity, so does the centuries-old revenant offer insight into a new historical situation.

176 I use the term *haipai* very loosely as a term for authors, who worked primarily within the Shanghai publishing world. It serves me therefore as a common denominator between modernists such as Mu Shiyong, neo-romanticists such as Xu Xu and female popular fiction writers such as Shi Jimei and Tang Xuehua.

177 Mu Shiyong 穆时英, "Hei Mudan 黑牡丹 [Black Peony]," in *Zhongguo xinganjuepai shengshou: Mu Shiyong xiaoshuo quanji* 中国新感觉派圣手: 穆时英小说全集 [*The Champion of Chinese Neo-Sensationalism: The Collected Novels of Mu Shiyong*] (Beijing: Zhongguo wenlian, 1996), 261.

While issues such as consumerism and cultural hybridity also play a role in female-authored ghost fiction, they are subordinate to the exploration of the vexed relationship between spectrality and female subjectivity. In distinction to male authors, both Shi and Tang's writings focus strongly on topics such as suicide, prolonged sickness, and both physical and emotional entrapment. Are female ghosts simply figures of despair and culturally conservative notions of femininity or does female haunting also carry empowering trajectories? In what ways do their phantom figures differ from the various male arrogations of female spectrality, ranging from Lu Xun's imaginary flirts with centuries-old figures of enchantment and seduction, notably in his writings on the Leifeng pagoda and the essay "The Female Hanged,"¹⁷⁸ to Mu Shiying's necrophilic meditations on urban experience in works such as "Black Peony" or "A Platinum Statue of the Female Body" (*Baijin de nūti suxiang* 白金的女体塑像, 1933)? What do the tropes and aesthetic techniques they employ reveal about their own views on writing? And what is the relationship between their literary articulations of female subjectivity and their public self in 1940s Shanghai? As I will try to show, both Shi and Tang reveal in their fictional writings not only an acute sensibility for the ways supernatural, archaic and unruly forms of femininity inform modern women's experiences, but also for how these discourses shape their (poetic) voice as female writers of popular fiction.

2 In love with ghosts: the phantom romance plot in 1930s Shanghai fiction

For Freud the fetish is a substitute for the "quite special"¹⁷⁹ penis of the mother. When the young boy first perceives of his mother's "lack" he immediately denies it and proceeds to symbolically substitute the mother's (lacking) penis with another object, which is frequently something in close spatial, temporal or logical proximity to the locus of the once imagined and now missing female penis, such as a foot, fur, etc. If this object is eroticized by the grown-up male it has become a

178 Wang, "Tope and Topos."

179 Sigmund Freud, "Fetishism," in *Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey and Alix Strachey, vol. 11 (London: Hogarth and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 2001), 152.

fetish.¹⁸⁰ What sets this entire symbolic operation into motion is the threat of castration, which the mother's lack of a penis suggests to the young boy. Fetishism is thus the simultaneous imagination of a threat of castration, its disavowal and the mastery of this anxiety-ridden fantasy through the self-reaffirming manipulation of an object. Through fetishism man regains control over the world.

Freud's theory of fetishism is certainly problematic on many accounts,¹⁸¹ but it is nevertheless a useful starting point for understanding the fetish of the ghostly women in Shanghai fiction, because it foregrounds the “divided attitude”¹⁸² of the fetishist, who can accommodate both the “attitude which fitted in with the wish and the attitude which fitted in with reality.”¹⁸³ The fetishist simultaneously recognizes and disavows reality.

In Mu Shiyong's “Black Peony” (*Hei Mudan* 黑牡丹) this division is dramatized by a split of the fetishist into two separate characters: The narrator first meets the title heroine at a dance hall and later again, by chance, at the country house of his friend Shengwu. As he slowly gathers, his friend had given Black Peony shelter after escaping from a violent customer. But instead of disclosing what really happened to her, she has made her savior believe that she is a supernatural flower spirit. Intoxicated by her beauty and wantonly ignorant of her wounds he quickly “renounces all scientific knowledge”¹⁸⁴ and decides to marry her. The narrator knows Black Peony's true identity, but plays along with her charade, because his friend would in all likelihood leave her, if he were to be confronted with the fact that she is a prostitute (although it seems that they all know that he knows). Before he returns to the city she offers him a similar deal: “Come back here every

180 Leo Lee seems to implicitly follow Freud's logic when he argues that the fetishization of hostesses and dance-hall girls could be explained by the high degree of visibility these women had in the public sphere. Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China, 1930-1945* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 27.

181 An in-depth analysis of Freud's problematic conceptualization of gender in relation to fetishism can be found in Ellen Lee McCallum, *Object Lessons: How to Do Things with Fetishism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999). For a discussion of Freud's remarks on the Chinese practice of foot-binding in “Fetishism” (1927) see: Dorothy Ko, *Cinderella's Sisters: A Revisionist History of Footbinding* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); and Jack Spector, “Freud's ‘fetishism’ and the Footbinding of Chinese Women,” in *The Reception and Rendition of Freud in China: China's Freudian Slip*, ed. Tao Jiang and Philip J. Ivanhoe (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 86–102.

182 Freud, “Fetishism,” 157.

183 *Ibid.*, 156.

184 Mu Shiyong, “Hei Mudan,” 264.

weekend and hang out with us. I will always prepare a comfortable bed for you, a sumptuous breakfast, a patio with conversation and laughter, and a welcome heart.”¹⁸⁵ Although the narrator falls just slightly short of being a true Freudian fetishist, because his fetishism is partially outsourced and he returns to his busy life, which might one day make him “collapse in the middle of the road,”¹⁸⁶ his nervous shuttling between the city and the recluse's home nevertheless captures the mental mechanism of fetishism, because he neither flees reality nor destroys the illusion.

The imaginative centrality of “modern girls” (*modeng nūlang* 摩登女郎) is one of the hallmarks of Shanghai fiction from the Republican period.¹⁸⁷ Male writers used these publicly highly visible women to paint a portrait of Shanghai as an alluring and exhilarating metropolis and of themselves as masters of this dangerous and exotic terrain. Shengwu, the narrator's friend in “Black Peony” as well as many of Mu's other male protagonists such as Doctor Xie in “Platinum Statue of a Female Body” fall in love with women, who for their intent and purposes are functionally dead. The following is Shengwu's description of his first encounter with Black Peony:

A woman with clothing torn in pieces, in the dark, like a marble statue, with eyes closed, shadows of her long lashes covering the lower portion of her eyes, hair spread out on the ground, a white carnation still at her temple, on the white skin of her face and body was flowing blood, one hand holding her breast, blood flowing out from beneath her hand – a very lovely girl!¹⁸⁸

Such necrophilic desires frequently appear in 1930s modernist novels. This Freudian interplay between Eros and Thanatos is also very pronounced in the works of Shi Zhecun and was one of the main reasons Leftist critics charged modernist writers for being overly hedonistic and lacking

185 Ibid., 269; Andrew David Field, trans., “Black Peony,” in *Mu Shiyong: China's Lost Modernist* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2014), 132.

186 Mu Shiyong, “Hei Mudan,” 269; Field, “Black Peony,” 132.

187 Sarah E. Stevens, “Figuring Modernity: The New Woman and the Modern Girl in Republican China,” *NWSA Journal* 15, no. 3 (2003): 82–103.

188 Mu Shiyong, “Hei Mudan,” 266; Field, “Black Peony,” 128–29.

political consciousness.¹⁸⁹ Maoist literary history equally regarded *haipai* fiction in general as irrelevant to or obstructive of social development. Although recent scholarship in the last few decades has made enormous strides in recuperating these “lost” voices,¹⁹⁰ the May Fourth normative view on fantasy as a (hedonistic) escape from reality, truth and politics still lingers in the critical vocabulary of contemporary analysis, when for instance Mu's aesthetic is read as a strategy “to displace naked confrontation with the reality of semi-colonialism and imperialism, and to avoid questions of politics and nationalism,” at least before he became a Japanese collaborator,¹⁹¹ or Shi's pre-war fiction is characterized as showing “little interest in larger social realities.”¹⁹²

My argument in this chapter does not so much refute this scholarship as propose a shift in how we read fetishism. Instead of looking at how fetishism avoids or covers up an uncomfortable, “naked” reality, I will focus on texts, in which fetishism offers itself as an alternative interpretative strategy for engaging with the world. The two main benefits of this shift are, firstly, that it brings the social dimension of fetishism and its various functions in modernist fiction from the 1930s into clearer focus, and secondly, that it enables us to understand how the spectrality embodied by the female phantom works similarly as an aesthetic and epistemological concept between desire and knowledge, fantasy and reality. The fetish object is in some way always mysterious and even magical—hence the derogatory reference to fetishism as the opposite of knowledge in Enlightenment thought.¹⁹³ But if we agree with the claim Shao Xunmei and many others made that literary realism cannot take into account the complexity and contradictoriness of actual life, then fetishism too can be understood as an alternative model for knowing the world.

189 A summary of some of the criticism leveled against Mu can be found in Shi, *The Lure of the Modern*, 306.

190 For instance, Andrew Field subtitles his translation of Mu Shiyong's works with “China's lost modernist.”

191 Shi, *The Lure of the Modern*, 332–33.

192 Carolyn FitzGerald, *Fragmenting Modernisms: Chinese Wartime Literature, Art, and Film, 1937–49* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 24.

193 McCallum, *Object Lessons*, 164.

McCallum's argument hinges on this point. Fetishism provides a more “pragmatic epistemological paradigm,”¹⁹⁴ because the fetishist “creatively and passionately negotiates between belief and knowledge.”¹⁹⁵

We get nowhere by cataloging the objects taken on as fetishes, except to further pathologize fetishism as improper knowledge or desire. [...] We do not need to become fetishists, merely to accept the double vision, the ambivalent interpretation that fetishism promotes as an *instrumental reading strategy*. Through its particularity, a fetish provides an anchor against relativism, while at the same times its meaning does not require mediation through some transcendent Truth or in reference to some absolute standard.¹⁹⁶ (my emphasis)

The fetishist can indulge in cosmopolitan lifestyles and at the same time struggle to make rent, he can acknowledge secular time and be happily married to a peony spirit, he can follow “foreign idols” while at the same time champion nativist ideals.¹⁹⁷ Therefore, rather than critique this fetishized (*lianwupi* 恋物癖) discourse of the metropolis as a both morally and politically improper desire, I want to focus on how fetishism works as a strategy, which moves between these territories of desire and knowledge. Because female revenant narratives equally conjoin the twin themes of eroticism and death, they offer a particularly illuminating vantage point for the study of this controversial modernist theme.

Another point concerns the simple fact that the “objects” studied here are not actual fetish objects (and their masters), but literary texts. The literary text inevitably adds a social dimension to its fetish discourse, because it is reproduced, read, discussed and thus part of social life.

Nevertheless, it could still be argued that these texts only speak of the (misogynist) fantasies of their

194 Ibid., 166.

195 Ibid., 167.

196 Ibid., 162.

197 As long-standing convention would have it, fetishists are almost universally male. But not only is this misconception easily refuted by abundant evidence to the contrary (and I will discuss female negotiations of fetishism adjacent practices in the second part of this chapter), but Freud too “dignified” women with the diagnosis of suffering from “clothes fetishism.” See: Ibid., chapter 2. Nevertheless, since I am discussing in this part of the chapter only male fetishism, I use of the male pronoun.

creators. Yet, if we accept McCallum's view on fetishism as a practice which not simply substitutes a lack, but can also be a negotiation of loss and change, then broader cultural and social perspectives on fetishism come into view. A lack is individual, while loss is an experience that is more recognizable and hence also elicits greater interest and compassion, even if it is not shared. McCallum explains the problem with the conception of fetishism as based on a lack as follows:

[...] objects are manipulable by subjects because they lack their own volition; "primitive" people are inferior to "civilized" because they lack reason; women are the weaker sex because they lack a penis. The lack paradigm encodes domination into the subject-object relation, because the only objects it can attend to are debased ones [...] ¹⁹⁸

The loss paradigm not only has the benefit of providing some form of common ground or point of mutual interest in fetishism, but also that literature can play an important role in this fetish negotiation of loss: "Unlike lack, which may provoke strategies of compensation or concealment, loss needs to be acknowledged, even, on occasion, narrated; it remains unbearable unless it is recognized."¹⁹⁹ The main focus in this part of the chapter will be on analyzing the different ways female phantom narratives relate to and complicate this fetish negotiation of loss.

The four ghost stories and novellas analyzed in the following were written by authors, who published also in "Analects" and are associated with *haipai* 海派 modernism, although they are often placed into different corners within this broad field. My choice of texts, however, is not only based on the social networks these writers shared, but also, more importantly, on the range of literary approaches to fetish ghost narratives they reveal. Furthermore, the basic plot structure of all novels actually follows very closely a stereotypical romantic ghost encounter, as it is commonly found in classical *chuanqi* and *zhiguai* literature, which further facilitates comparative analysis. This plot can be summarized as follows: a young, male protagonist meets a supernatural women,

198 Ibid., 157.

199 Ibid., 156.

with whom he usually exchanges poetic views and enjoys a brief sexual adventure. He only realizes that he made love to a ghost or fox spirit the following day, when he wakes up at a ruin or graveyard. While all four novels follow to some extent this basic plot, narrative setting and time are decidedly early 20th century Shanghai.

I begin with readings of two short novels by Ye Lingfeng and Zhang Kebiao to deepen our understanding of how Freud's theory of the sexual fetish, but also Marxist theories of the commodity fetish relate to ghost fiction from 1930's Shanghai. These novels reveal both the importance of (fetish) objects to the perception of urban reality, but also how the foreign is woven into object-ive reality itself. In my discussion of the ghost novels by Shi Zhecun and Xu Xu I therefore zero in on the question how this fetish discourse negotiates Shanghai's semi-colonial situation. I accrue particular relevance to Xu's novel "Ghost Love," because it can be read as a literary historical hinge between the male dominated literary scene of the 1930s and the rise of female authors in the 1940s. While each of the four novels and short stories play out distinct fetishistic scenarios of phantom romance, it is possible to discern in broad strokes a development of the ghost romance plot from a literary game, not unlike the poetic banter between the naïve scholar and his phantom lover in classical ghost romance narratives, to a more substantial negotiation of the relationship between a changing reality and its aesthetic reflection.

2.1 Ye Lingfeng's "Luoyan"

Ye Lingfeng was a prolific writer of erotic and sensationalist urban tales and Leo Ou-fan Lee discusses his works alongside Shi Zhecun and Mu Shiyong's, although he does find Ye technically "limited" in comparison.²⁰⁰ While Ye promoted new literary styles and had one of the largest foreign-language book collections at the time, his writings are a peculiar and at times perhaps dissonant combination of his aesthetic ideals and his need to please the broader reading public, who

200 Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 1999, 261.

according to Ye craved nothing more than “erotic stimulation or extremely melancholy romances.”²⁰¹

“Luoyan” 落雁 (1929), part of the supernatural story collection “Dreams of a Virgin” (*Chunü de meng* 处女的梦), is a very fitting example of Ye's style. The story goes as follows: the young poet Feng Ruowei 冯弱苇 encounters the enchantingly beautiful title heroine, while waiting for the ticket booth at the cinema to open. Her arrival is announced by the appearance of miscellaneous paraphernalia and strange apparitions, which to the protagonist encapsulate the aura of a bygone age; the cinema transforming into a temple, a horse carriage, a white handkerchief, which recalls the ghost veil (*hunpa* 魂帕) in traditional Chinese stage drama, Alexandre Dumas fils novel “La Dame aux Camélias” (1848), *Chahuanü* 茶花女 in Chinese, and classical Chinese poetry, which are contrasted with Shanghai “under siege by material culture.”²⁰²

This chance encounter leads them to watch the movie based on Dumas fils novel in each other's company.²⁰³ Still following very closely the ghost romance plot, Feng afterwards accompanies Luoyan back to her home. But here events take a dramatic turn, as Luoyan does not bring him to her “father” as she had promised, but to an evil demon, who has spell-bound the phantom girl to his services to lure young men to his home. In the end, she helps the narrator escape and gives him some money for cab fare, which, in the short story's final twist, turns out to be ghost money:

I took the note out of my pocket and handed it to him without even looking at it. Shortly after he came back out and shouted: Mister Feng, you must be kidding to play a joke like

201 qtd. in Jianmei Liu, *Revolution plus Love: Literary History, Women's Bodies, and Thematic Repetition in Twentieth-Century Chinese Fiction* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003), 157.

202 Ye Lingfeng, “Luoyan 落雁 [Luoyan],” in *Aiqing liaozhai: Renguilian de gushi* 爱情聊斋: 人鬼恋的故事 [*The Liaozhai of Love: Love Stories between Humans and Ghosts*], ed. Wang Aisong 王爱松 and Shao Wenshi 邵文实 (Kunlun: Kunlun chubanshe, 1999), 2.

203 The most ecstatically received cinematic adaptation of “La Dame aux Camélias” in the 1930s was the Hollywood version with Greta Garbo and Robert Taylor from 1936. However, as Ye's story was written in 1929 this movie could not yet have served as inspiration. Probably Ye is referring here to the silent movie with Sarah Bernhardt in the lead role from 1911.

this on me in the middle of the night? What are you up to with this money? What am I supposed to do with this paper ghost money?” And with that he handed the note back to me. Facing the light inside his shop, I thought about everything that had just happened. Suddenly it hit me like cold water and my entire body began to shiver.²⁰⁴

Although the sudden transformations of beautiful houses into graveyards is a frequent motif in ghost stories, it is here important that the realization hinges on money and comes at the moment he is about to re-enter neon-lit urban reality.

Marx's theory of commodity fetishism differs significantly from Freud's, because it understands the fetish not as the product of disavowal, but as a veil of history and labor. Money is the most paradigmatic commodity fetish of all, because it most convincingly veils social relations. But there are also commonalities. Both models take as their point of departure the Enlightenment critique of fetishism as false knowledge or religious belief. And both acknowledge that material objects and thereby also object-ive reality have at the very least a bearing on subjectivity.²⁰⁵

It is this “subject-constructing power of objects”²⁰⁶ that enables Slavoy Žižek to put a psychoanalytic spin on Marx' theory of the commodity fetish. Taking a view on ideology as a strategy for avoiding “some traumatic, real kernel,”²⁰⁷ in which we can recognize Freud's castration fear theory, he argues that the logic of the fetish has invaded our reality to the point that we can no longer think of the object as ideological veil of history and labor. Rather, commodities function as social reality itself and hence fulfill not only our sexual desires, but take on also emotional and spiritual roles. Žižek calls this structure of an objectified reality a “fetishistic inversion,” which feels and believes in our place.

204 Ye Lingfeng, “Luoyan,” 12–13.

205 For a very incisive, narratological comparison of these two fetish theories see Mieke Bal, “Telling Objects: A Narrative Perspective on Collecting,” in *Cultures of Collecting*, ed. John Elsner and Roger Cardinal (London: Reaktion Books, 1994), 97–115.

206 Ibid., 108.

207 Slavoy Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (New York: Verso, 1989), 45.

The point of Marx's analysis, however, is that the things (commodities) themselves believe in their place, instead of the subjects; it is as if all their beliefs, superstitions and metaphysical mystifications, supposedly surmounted by the rational, utilitarian personality, are embodied in the 'social relations between things'. They no longer believe, but the things themselves believe for them.²⁰⁸

If we apply this insight to Ye's novel, the ghost money reveals to the narrator, to put it in Žižek's phrasing, that he can no longer believe in things to do the believing for him, but that he is also himself responsible for putting his life (and his masculinity) at danger in the first place, because his nocturnal adventure is in the end the result of his own contradictory desires and fears.

A comparison between the two literary works referenced in the novel makes this point clearer. Preceding their viewing of the movie "Camille," Feng and Luoyan discuss the original novel:

"Did you read the novel 'Camille'?" I asked her.

"I have read Leng Hongsheng's [pen name of Lin Shu] translation, which I got from my father's library."

"I heard that Leng Hongsheng was in mourning while translating 'Camille', which is why his rendition is so unusual and tragically romantic (shuaiyan 衰艳). A pity it is so abbreviated. Dumas fils' original is much better."²⁰⁹

Reading and talking about books plays an important role in most of the ghost novels studied in this chapter. I will return to this topic in my analysis of Shi Zhecun's novel "Witchcraft" and then also consider the same phenomenon from a feminine perspective in my reading of Tang Xuehua's "Enigma" (*Mi 谜*, 1945). The foreign book was for Shanghai writers arguably the most fetishized

208 Ibid., 34.

209 Ye Lingfeng, "Luoyan," 4.

commodity of all and it is therefore important to look not only at what is said about, but also at what is done with books.

In this case, “La Dame aux Camélias” is not only topic of conversation, but also reenacted, when Luoyan and the narrator spontaneously decide to watch the movie together. The cinema is the 20th century version of the opera house, which is an important backdrop for the romance between the lovers of the original novel, Marguerite Gaultier and Armand Duval. Although the narrator establishes a very clear hierarchy between the original and the Chinese translation of the book, he is not capable of perceiving how his desire to reenact this classic French romance stems from his disavowal of his own fear that his “new literature” (*xin wenxue* 新文学), with which Luoyan expresses familiarity, cannot measure up to Western literature on the one hand and classical Chinese poetry on the other. Although Dumas fils' novel and classical Chinese poetry reveal the territory of aesthetic choices, from which Feng appears to take poetic inspiration, his own poetry is never recited and does not appear to offer any (aesthetic) solutions.

Feng's reverence for Western literary and sentimental culture is juxtaposed to a strong sense of melancholia for China's loss of full territorial sovereignty, which also gives rise to his cultural nostalgia. This is revealed in an exchange of favorite verses by the Song-dynasty poet Lu You (1125-1210) between Feng, Luoyan and her father/master. After Luoyan's father quotes from Lu's “Running into Light Rain on the Road to Sword Gate Pass” (*Jianmen dao zhong yu weiyu* 剑门道中遇微雨,) Feng exclaims:

“Haha, you clearly enjoy refined verses. I myself am more the type for: On the day the king's armies march north to take the heart-land, at the family sacrifice don't forget to let your father know.”

Suddenly the room turned silent. I too had memories of the imperial clan and knew the lingering pains of a vanquished nation. For them these two lines brought up personal memories.²¹⁰

At the start of their conversation the narrator notices Luoyan's father's perfect Northern Chinese accent, which establishes that he and Luoyan came to Shanghai from the politically unstable North, likely Shandong, because in another short story of the collection there is explicit reference to the Jinan incident from 1928, when Japanese forces brutally defeated the Kuomintang's army. But Feng also draws a parallel between their experience of war and turmoil and his own situation in Shanghai. The verses quoted by Feng are from Lu You's most famous poem "To Show To My Sons" (*Shi er* 示儿), in which the author expresses his dying wish that his sons may not fail to inform him in the afterworld of China's future reunification. Lu You was a poet from the Southern Song (1127-1280), which was founded after the invasion and subsequent occupation of the North by the Jurchen. He was throughout his lifetime an ardent supporter of military action against the North and is in Chinese cultural history remembered for his unwavering patriotism, above all in *Shi er*.

Ultimately, the narrator is a modern poet who both longs for and rejects the foreign just as much as he harbors an equally ambivalent set of feelings towards Chinese culture. However, Ye does not explore the contradictory emotional landscape of Shanghai's 1920s literary scene further and instead turns Feng's struggle with his semi-colonial cultural environment into a confrontation between heteronormative virility and predatory homosexuality. In doing so, the novel's ending reveals a problematic normative dynamic inherent to the sexual economy of the fetishist's disavowal of socio-cultural difference—a point, to which I will return in my concluding remarks on this part. But although the female phantom functions in "Luoyan" finally only as a savior of the narrator's heterosexuality, Ye's novel nevertheless reveals how the ghost romance plot arose out of and

210 Ibid., 9. The translated quote is from Burton Watson, *The Old Man Who Does as He Pleases: Selections from the Poetry and Prose of Lu Yu* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 68.

reflected the contradictory desires and fears of the new generation of writers working in 1920s and 1930s Shanghai.

2.2 Zhang Kebiao's "Mirage"

Zhang Kebiao's novel "Mirage" (*Shenlou* 蜃楼, 1930)²¹¹ starts out very similar to Ye's with a young man encountering a mysterious, supernatural beauty, but ends on a much more reassuring note. Zhang worked in close collaboration with the poet and publisher Shao Xunmei and is like Shao associated with the "Analects" group of writers.

"Mirage" is the title story of Zhang's eponymous short story collection. The novel is narrated from the perspective of a young male tourist, who is together with a friend in Shanghai for a weekend of urban entertainment. At the beginning, the city impresses on them a sense of danger and death. They feel like two "rotten planks of wood floating on water",²¹² who fear of ending up as "floaters in the Huangpu River,"²¹³ dragged by what Zhang Yingjin has aptly described as the city's "rapid flow of temporality that carries them towards an uncertain and unpredictable future."²¹⁴ And when the narrator is mysteriously driven off in a limousine, ghastly images flash before his eyes of „corpses stacked liked fruits and vegetables at the market."²¹⁵ This gloomy imagery changes immediately once he enters the gothic mansion, to which he is abducted. A doppelgänger of his late girlfriend greets him and convinces him that this „mirage" exists solely for his pleasure:

This is the palace of pleasure. This is happiness heaven. Here, there are no fixed names, you can call yourself whatever you want. There is no master here, those who come here are the masters.

Here, now is forever. Nobody is expecting any payment. This is the paradise before Jesus Christ

descended into the world. This place is a branch of the garden Eden itself. Here all your sorrows

211 My translation of *shenlou* as "Mirage" (in the sense of *fata morgana*) should not be confused with Ye Lingfeng's magazine "Huanzhao," which Leo Ou-fan Lee equally translates as "Mirage".

212 Zhang Kebiao, "Shenlou 蜃楼 [Mirage]," in *Aiqing liaozhai: Renguilian de gushi*, ed. Wang Aisong and Shao Wenshi (Kunlun: Kunlun chubanshe, 1999), 14.

213 Ibid., 15.

214 Yingjin Zhang, *The City in Modern Chinese Literature & Film: Configurations of Space, Time, and Gender* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 179.

215 Zhang Kebiao, "Shenlou," 20.

will disappear. Here there are no class differences. Everybody is an esteemed customer. This is the land of Pure Bliss.²¹⁶

This magical mansion of aesthetic and carnal pleasures is decked out with an eclectic array of objects, among which we find for instance Arnold Böcklin's painting "Die Meeresstille" and also a painting of his late girlfriend. However, we are not lead into a consideration of the boundaries of illusion and reality, nor do we learn anything about the narrator's deceased girlfriend. This story is not about a dead women, who has returned to life, but about male anxieties displaced onto an eclectic assemblage of objects, that have been wrenched out of their historical and biographical contexts and can therefore act as mirrors to the self. Because the supernatural woman is outside of reality and beyond history, she also does not need to be saved.

When the narrator wakes up the next morning, safely tucked into the sheets of his hotel bed, he has returned to real time and he immediately checks his watch to reassure himself of his safe return to reality. After explaining himself to his friend, they make a futile attempt to return to the mysterious mansion. Nevertheless, factual corroboration is not of great importance to the narrator, who will "forever believe in her existence, even if I never find her again."²¹⁷ Shanghai has changed from a mutilated corpse into a docile and submissive woman, which now engenders an experience of urban reality, in which the narrator can pursue his occidentalist fantasy that objects such as a European master painting serve at his pleasure.

At first sight, Zhang's novel appears to lack any communal vision. Zhang himself, however, envisioned his mirage aesthetic to be a more inclusive mode of writing than "revolutionary literature." In a letter to Shao Xunmei, published in "Golden Chamber," Zhang explains the meaning of "mirage" literature:

216 Ibid., 26.

217 Ibid., 33.

[...] art has nothing to do with the clash or unification of interests or class differences. In this matter I really don't understand the theory of those people who advocate for a class art (*jieji yishu*), revolutionary literature (*geming wenxue*) etc., but I do not want to offend those honest and good fellows here.[...]

Certainly, everybody is unhappy about something in their real life. That is why some do revolution and scream revolution; others might not scream and shout, but there are other ways of protesting. Dreaming is one of them. [...] Dreams are like a mirage. Literature and arts are frequently also just like a mirage [...] transcending worldly interests.²¹⁸

Zhang is here not offering an elaborate aesthetic program, and in fact, his mirage aesthetic is a rather cliché liberal fantasy of artistic creation, as he regards society and history as irrelevant to literary production. Furthermore, it echoes late Ming and Qing literary scholarship on the affinities between the fictional and the oneiric, which May Fourth iconoclasts vehemently disputed. Because the doppelgänger/phantom encountered by the narrator cannot be placed in a specific historical or cultural context, she is a suitable icon of Zhang's mirage aesthetic.

Nevertheless, while the ghost may only point towards male anxieties regarding sexual difference, the ghost story itself moves us away from an interpretation of Zhang's novel as merely a solipsistic dream. Rather, it translates an impossible fantasy of reversed colonialism into a literary form, which employs phantom romance to bridge the boundaries of difference between the Chinese experience of cosmopolitan life as a threat to the self, the privileged Western cultural experience, symbolized by the Gothic mansion and its exotic art collection, and the loss of local cultural heritage, allegorically embodied by the narrator's deceased girlfriend. Fantasy functions here therefore not as a mirage, a false reality, as the title would have it, nor is it criticized as a potentially emasculating flight from reality as in "Luoyan." Rather, it functions as a literary lens through which reality becomes not only more familiar, but also more comforting.

218 Zhang Kebiao, "Lun Shenlou 论蜃楼 [On Mirages]," *Golden Chamber Monthly* 1, no. 9–10 (1930): 332–33.

2.3 Shi Zhecun's "Witchcraft"

Just as the fetish represents the overcoming of castration anxiety or, in McCallum's wider-angled rereading, a strategy for coping with loss, it stands by that very fact also for the very thing one fears of losing itself. The terror at the heart of the fetish object is the central theme of Shi Zhecun's well-known novel "Witchcraft" (*Modao* 魔道, 1933).

Shi Zhecun is conventionally placed within a group of writers referred to as neo-sensationists or neo-perceptionists (*xin ganjue pai* 新感觉派), alongside Mu Shiying, Liu Na'ou 刘呐鸥 (1905-1940), and others. Inspired by Japanese neo-perceptionism of the 1920s, the neo-sensationists creatively engineered their own brand of modernism, which also incorporated aspects of, for instance, German expressionism, Buddhism, and Jazz music. Freud's psychology of the unconscious was an important resource for neo-sensationist writers, because it underscored the validity of their subjective and associative approach to writing, often employing stream-of-consciousness techniques and interior monologues. This is especially evident in Shi's case, because he took a particular interest in Western psycho-sexual theories of the mind.

One of Shi's most well-known Freudian tales is "Witchcraft," which is again narrated from the perspective of a young, male intellectual.²¹⁹ Taking us this time in the opposite direction as the tourist in Zhang's "Mirage," the novella opens with a train trip to the countryside, where the unnamed narrator is planning on spending a tranquil weekend visiting friends. On the train he meets a strange old woman, who frightens him the moment he first sees her. Her appearance triggers a hallucinatory episode, in which the protagonist fantasizes about both terrifying and beautiful women, who he believes to be manifestations of the strange old woman on the train. Although it becomes quite clear after his arrival at his friends Mr. and Mrs. Chen's house that he is merely

219 "Witchcraft" is part of Shi's short story collection "A Rainy Evening in Spring" (*Meiyu zhi xi* 梅雨之夕, 1933), which includes a large number of ghost stories. A similar conjunction of a trip to the countryside and deadly desire as in *Modao* appears both in "Yaksha" (*Yecha* 夜叉) and "The Inn" (*Lüshe* 旅舍). The short story "A Walk at Night" (*Xiaoxing* 宵行) also takes inspiration from the classical phantom romance, while "The Haunted Mansion" (*Xiongzhai* 凶宅) appears to take inspiration from English gothic fiction.

hallucinating, because they cannot see the apparitions and think their friend has gone mad, he continues to be haunted by the witch—and believes that she has taken over the body of Mrs. Chen to confuse him into believing that she is a mere figment of his imagination.

His male host is never questioned, which further reinforces the novel's main focus on the conjunction of death and femininity as symbolic of the twin Freudian themes of sexual desire and male castration anxiety. For instance, during the train ride the hilly landscape evokes contradictory images of tombs (symbolically associated to wombs) and its female occupants: “Nobody could not love her [the mummy of Wang Fei] much more passionately than a living modern woman. And how about kissing those exquisitely cold lips, exuding the smell of musk?”²²⁰ Moments later he chastises and ridicules himself for his “silly thoughts” (*wangxiang* 妄想), only to immediately come up with a new version of the tomb story, in which this time the terrifying witch exits the tomb. But then he exclaims again: “Non-sense! Non-sense! Complete and utter non-sense!”²²¹ Towards his hostess he harbors equally contradictory feelings. Burning with the desire to kiss Mrs. Chen one evening, he suspects her the following day to be “possessed by the old demon just like in the novels, where demons and fox spirits disguise themselves with the help of Daji's²²² bodily shell.”²²³

But because the narrator at this point still has lingering doubts about his own mental state and attributes his “condition” to the countryside, he decides to cut his vacation short and return to the city. But upon his return to Shanghai, where he hopes to finally enjoy himself to “make up for the losses of the last two days,”²²⁴ things take a turn for the worse. Everything colored black like the witch or white like the mummy now arouses his suspicion, for instance dark German beer, black velvet and a cocktail waitress wearing a white dress.²²⁵ Overwhelmed by his fantasies, he finally

220 Shi Zhecun, “Modao 魔道 [Witchcraft],” in *Shinian chuanguoji* 十年创作集 [A Collection of Ten Years of Creative Works] (Shanghai: Huadong shifan daxue, 1996), 274.

221 Ibid., 275.

222 Daji 妲己 was a concubine at the Zhou court during the Shang dynasty. Later legendary accounts portray her as an evil fox spirit, who precipitated the downfall of the Shang dynasty.

223 Shi Zhecun, “Modao,” 284.

224 Ibid., 285.

225 Ibid., 286–87.

retreats to his apartment. Shi hammers in the final Freudian nail, when the narrator receives a telegram, informing him that his daughter has passed away. Immediately following this dramatic turn of events, the narrator spots the old woman outside his house.

I sat on the fauteuil, holding my head for I don't know how long, when my servant stepped in with a telegram.

My three-year old daughter had died.

I dropped the telegram on the floor, and stepped out onto the balcony. It was midnight and the streets were empty. All I could hear was the sound of footsteps slowly moving along. I leaned over the railing and immediately chills went up my spine. Underneath the green light of the gas lamp across the street I saw a black-dressed old woman quickly slipping back into a small alley.²²⁶

The prominence of Freudian themes in Shi's experimental fiction from the 1920s and 1930s is well-known. Lydia He Liu discusses the relationship between Freudianism and Shi's fiction in *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity--China, 1900-1937* (1995). Her analysis also focuses on the novella *Modao* and concludes with the observation that Freudianism enabled Shi to reintroduce scientifically delegitimized fantastical literary discourses to modern Chinese literature by exposing the “allegorical affinities between traditional fantastic literature and psychoanalytical discourse.”²²⁷ I agree with Liu on this point and would indeed add that this kind of creatively engineered serendipity between the foreign and the local, older aesthetics and new knowledge is important to the configuration of *haipai* aesthetics more broadly. However, my own reading will focus more narrowly on the (psycho-)mechanics of the fantastic in Shi's novel. As I will try to show, the male protagonist in “Witchcraft” fails to fetishize the spectral woman, which I read, in a second step, as Shi's inability to overcome the aesthetic and epistemological

²²⁶ Ibid., 288.

²²⁷ Lydia He Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity--China, 1900-1937* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 142.

differences between the older literary format of the *zhiguai* and psychological knowledge of Freudianism, despite their “allegorical affinities.” Ultimately, I read “Witchcraft” as an example of a failed attempt to recuperate the classical Chinese ghost romance tale as a dynamic literary resource.

I base my analysis on the French-Hungarian psychoanalysts Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok's study of fetishism, because their primary interest in fetishism appears in their work on different types of mourning. More explicitly, they distinguish in the working-through of loss and change introjection from incorporation—terms they borrowed from their Hungarian colleague Sándor Ferenczi to set their theory apart from Freud's distinction between mourning and melancholia. While incorporation results from a failure to mourn and a refusal to acknowledge change, introjection is, in Abraham and Torok's view, the normal path through which trauma and grief are processed. The distinction between these two forms of mourning hinges crucially on the intra-psychic role of fantasy, which Torok and Abraham define as follows:

Granting our metapsychological definition of “reality” as everything, whether exogenous or endogenous, that affects the psyche by inflicting a topographical shift on it, “fantasy” can be defined as all those representations, beliefs, or bodily states that gravitate toward the opposite effect, that is, the preservation of the status quo. This definition does not address the contents or the formal characteristics of fantasy, only its function, a preventive and conservative function despite the highly innovative genius of fantasy, its vast field of action, and even despite its definite complacency with respect to desire.²²⁸

228 Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis* (Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 125. This short quote, I think, reveals very poignantly why their influence in literary studies has been very limited.

Applying this functionalist definition of fantasy to mourning, they continue by asserting that incorporation is the fantasy of “introducing all or part of a love object or a thing into one's own body.”²²⁹

If accepted and worked through, the loss would require major readjustment. But the fantasy of incorporation merely simulates profound transformation through magic; it does so by implementing literally something that has only figurative meaning.²³⁰

Introjection, on the other hand, is not a fantasy, but a metaphoric process, which fills an (oral) void in the same way as language replaces “soon after birth” the empty mouth.²³¹ While introjection allows the I to be transformed by the loss and acknowledges that the part of me invested in the loved object is gone, incorporation creates a fantasy of stagnation.

For Abraham and Torok, incorporation results not simply from a difficulty to mourn, but from losses so traumatic that they cannot be acknowledged at all and hence cannot be “given a language.”²³² Incorporation does not allow figurative necrophagia, i.e. the processing of loss through speech and food, to take place, and instead entombs the lost object inside the self. The ghost of this tomb or “crypt,” as Abraham and Torok call it, may haunt its host and give him “strange and incomprehensible signals,”²³³ but at the same time also sustains the fantasy that nothing has changed.

Incorporation can be distinguished from repression by the fact that it is the lost object, which is the “genuine subject” of the living person's actions. They later on developed this idea further into a theory of “transgenerational phantoms,” which represent shameful family secrets that are subconsciously inherited. But the important point for the present discussion is the link between fantasy, fetishism, and the negotiation of loss. While introjection is the cognizant transformation of

229 Ibid., 126.

230 Ibid., 126.

231 Ibid., 127.

232 Ibid., 130.

233 Ibid.

“food into language,” by, for instance, eating (at a wake), incorporation is anti-metaphoric in the sense that it “[annulls] figurative language”²³⁴ and preserves loss in a psychic “crypt.” In other words, incorporation transforms the figurative and symbolic into the explicit and literal.

The concept of incorporation is not applicable to every ghost story, but appears suitable for *Modao* for two main reasons. Firstly, there is a tragic family death at the end of the novel, which in hindsight may have been the reason for the protagonist's trip to the countryside in the first place in an act of what Abraham and Torok call “mourning in anticipation.”²³⁵ In fact, one of the first associations that come to the narrator's mind after first encountering the old woman on the train are witches in Europe, who fly on brooms and steal other people's children.²³⁶ Both Freud and Abraham/Torok stress the role of the father in fetishistic disavowal and incorporation, and the theme of castration certainly seems to play a role in the novella as the narrator does not lose just any relative, but his own child. Freud too speaks of the dangers of fetishism, because it may provoke a reenactment of the castration the father had presumably performed on the mother. But as much as a sexual economy seems to mask a crisis of the subject, this crisis itself appears more strongly influenced by cultural factors. I read the death of the daughter therefore more as a meta-fictional signpost of Shi's Freudian interests and less as the actual reason for the narrator's hallucinations. While there is no information given on the narrator's personal life and family situation, the reader learns about his reading list, his eating habits and his intellectual interests. It is thus not sexual, but rather cultural “castration” (in ambivalent conjunction with his illicit desire to (sexually) pursue what he cannot have), which Shi's narrator is incapable of successfully mourning by choosing incorporation over fetishization. Although there is no indication that he is in any way

234 Ibid., 132.

235 Ibid., 138.

236 Shi Zhecun, “Modao,” 272.

responsible for his daughter's death, he nevertheless suffers from an undetermined sense of guilt: "I am the only one here being punished."²³⁷

Secondly, incorporation also accurately explains why the narrator constantly confuses and conflates the symbolic and the literal. It is, for instance, unclear whether the narrator actually kissed Mrs. Chen or simply fantasized the kiss, because he is increasingly incapable of distinguishing between a tomato *symbolizing* Mrs. Chen's lips and her actual lips, gradually dissolving the boundaries separating his imagination and reality.

The red tomato in my mouth felt like Mrs Chen's red lips. As I was chewing I tasted the bitterness of secret love. I closed my eyes half shut. With the half open part I watched Mrs. Chen's smiles and her movements, all the while enjoying the company of an illusory Mrs. Chen with the other closed part of my eyes. [...] It felt like she was caressing my forehead—actually, in reality she was massaging her own forehead. I put down knife and fork to discretely get a handkerchief out of my pockets to clean my mouth. Suddenly I saw Mrs. Chen's face coming closer. How white it was! I had never seen anything like it! Not even Japanese women have corpse white faces like hers. And her smile, how seductive! What? Are we already kissing? Did I commit a sin?²³⁸

In fact, food in general is a reoccurring topic throughout "Witchcraft." Right at the beginning of the novel, the narrator is confused and upset by the strange woman's refusal to drink the tee served on the train and obsesses over her peculiar method of drinking water from a cup, which he believes might be her method of casting a spell on him.²³⁹ When he is later on thinking about food and his knowledge of the poet Lord Byron's eating habits (all he knows about the poet as he jokes), he furthermore reveals that one of the reasons he came to the countryside was to enjoy the local delicacy of broad beans.

237 Ibid., 288.

238 Ibid., 282–83.

239 Ibid., 275.

For foreign food Shanghai is the best place, but for Chinese food the countryside is far better. In Shanghai Chinese food is just greasy, greasy, greasy! The spaghetti and cheese [English in the original] at the Italian restaurants, on the other hand, is obviously extraordinary. I shall have some tomorrow.²⁴⁰

His obsession with food is carried out primarily by talking about food and not by actually ingesting anything, which can be read as an indicator of his refusal to process the loss he has yet to learn he suffered. His inability to mourn manifests itself back in Shanghai even more obvious in his clock, which stands still, and his newspaper, which has gone missing.

But while these signs frame incorporation mainly on the level of individual and social experience, there is also a very pronounced literary dimension to the narrator's aborted journey. Not only are the narrator's culinary tastes, in gastronomical parlance, "international," his reading list, too, is culturally diverse. He brought five books and one magazine with him on his trip: The Romance of Sorcery, an unnamed "strange novel" by Sheridan Le Fanu, "Persian Religious Poetry," "Cases of Sex Crime," and "Treasures of English Poetry" and an issue of "Journal of Psychology." As Lydia Liu points out, this list signals "the presence of figural reading in the text,"²⁴¹ which is particularly evident in the narrator's reading of the old woman as either an "old witch" from the West or a "yellow-faced old woman from *Liaozhai's Records of the Strange* who spews water from her mouth sitting by a latticed window under the moonlight."²⁴² But despite bringing all these reading materials with him, he has little interest in actually opening any of them:

But it appears that I have no interest in reading these books. Let's see what other books I brought with me? Nothing. Only those five books. And one issue of "Journal of Psychology," which is also boring.²⁴³

240 Ibid., 281.

241 Liu, *Revolution plus Love*, 138.

242 Shi Zhecun, "Modao," 272.

243 Ibid., 273.

These books indicate the heterogeneous source materials, out of which his hallucinations are fabricated. As such they also reveal the *literariness* of the narrator's experience. What is particularly interesting in this respect is his unwillingness to actually read anything and to rather carry his books around with him and then put them back on their shelf as soon as he is back in Shanghai. In effect, these books thus act as an extension of the metropolis, which the narrator cannot rid himself of, even though his trip to the countryside and his desire to eat local food can be read as an attempt to escape Shanghai's hybridized cultural modernity. But the books would probably not manifest themselves as threatening hallucinations, if he were to understand them not as the literal threat of castration, but rather as objects metaphorically representing this threat. In this sense, then, the narrator is actually a failed fetishist, because he cannot enjoy his books, but rather draws a direct connection between being haunted and his reading materials: "Is it because I have been reading books about magic these two last days that I am now seeing things?"²⁴⁴ The books control him and not the other way around.

In Chinese literary history, the act of reading emerges during the late Ming period as an important trope for philosophical consideration of the relationship between emotion, morality and worldly attachment and is the subject matter of the *Liaozhai* story "The Bookworm" (*Shu chi* 书痴), which may have also served Shi as inspiration, as he does not only mention Pu Songling's collection, but both stories are also thematically very similar. In Pu's satire of rote, Confucian learning and cultish reverence of ancient classics, a struggling academic's desire to meet one of the ancient beauties of his textbooks is strong enough to bring one such character actually to life. Yet, his bibliophile attachments turn out to be the impediment to his career as an official, because only after his library is burned and his fatal attachment to textuality severed does he successfully pass the imperial exams.²⁴⁵

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Discussing Pu's novel within the context of the late Ming cult of feeling (*qing* 情), Judith Zeitlin argues that "The Bookworm" ambivalently juxtaposes admiration for the protagonist's sentimental and child-like behavior, viewed as

The literalization of something, which conventionally only has figural meaning, is one important narrative strategy in *zhiguai*. Shi uses this literary device in “Witchcraft” to bring the narrator's book collection, which is symbolically also echoed in his culinary habits, to life. If we understand this process with the concept of incorporation as the “morbid denial of the reality of death”²⁴⁶ in mind, the protagonist's ambivalent obsession for foreign and classical literatures of the fantastic and exotic can be understood as an act of *de facto* self-castration. In the end, therefore, the logic of the *zhiguai* fails the protagonist, because neither are the books destroyed nor is (cognitive) order restored: the old witch continues to haunt and the books remain safely in the narrator's possession. Despite Freudianism and fantastical literature working in tandem throughout Shi's novella, the ending reveals their ultimate incompatibility: If the books had been destroyed and the witch disappeared, the logic of the *zhiguai* would leave the narrator cured. However, the logic of psychotherapy is exactly inverse; only once the psychic cause of the hallucinations is addressed, in this case a loss, would the haunting symptoms disappear.

As in Ye and Zhang's novels, the classical ghost story appears also in Shi's novel as an apposite framework for capturing the psychological and aesthetic difficulties writers faced in 1930s Shanghai. However, Shi's more complex negotiation of the relationship between the fantastic, haunting and colonial, urban modernity ultimately fails to fetishistically accommodate through sexual desire the aesthetic of the fantastic with modern subjectivity. Similar to Abraham and Torok's definition of the fantastic as an ultimately narcissistic discourse, the ghost story acts as an impediment to the narrator's ability to grieve, both his personal loss as well as his cultural roots. Viewed in this light, the narrator's aborted trip to the countryside can be read as an allegory for the

admirable expressions of *qing*, to his naiveté and clumsiness in matters of politics and the bedroom, where his worldly shortcomings are exposed in a particularly blatant fashion. Judith T. Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange: Pu Songling and the Chinese Classical Tale* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 95–97.

246 Christine Berthin, *Gothic Hauntings: Melancholy Crypts and Textual Ghosts* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 7.

difficulty of retrieving Chinese aesthetics of the supernatural as a dynamic, rather than static local resource.

2.4 Xu Xu's "Ghost Love"

In June 1937 the Second Sino-Japanese war broke out and after the battle of Shanghai Japanese forces occupied all Chinese territories. However, the international settlements remained until the Pacific war (1941) under colonial rule. In the political and intellectual safe haven of these "solitary islands" (*gudao* 孤島) Shanghai's culture industry recovered remarkably quick. But because many renowned literary figures had fled to nationalist or Communist controlled areas inland, a new generation of writers took their place. Especially women writers gained visibility in Shanghai's wartime literary scene, most notably Zhang Ailing, who rose to superstardom in the 1940s.

Conventionally, prewar and wartime fiction is treated separately, chiefly because the war years brought about "an increasing disintegration of the borders between high and low culture in Shanghai."²⁴⁷ In Chinese literary historiographies, Xu Xu is commonly classified as a "neo-romanticist" and not as a modernist, because his literary career only gained traction after the outbreak of war, when he returned to Shanghai from Paris, and his most famous works are far less aggressively experimental than for instance neo-sensationist fiction from the 1930s.²⁴⁸ This has led to an unjust treatment of Xu Xu's fiction from the 1940s in general and his novels "Ghost Love" and "Rustling Wind" (*Feng xiaoxiao* 风萧萧, 1944) in particular as the literary product of Shanghai's wartime sentimental culture, illicit cosmopolitan desires and political passivity. Yet, not only was "Ghost Love" in all likelihood still written before war's outbreak, its obvious thematic similarities and generic affinities to the previously discussed works reveal that we should at the very

247 Shi, *The Lure of the Modern*, 380.

248 Xu Xu is less known than the previously discussed authors, but interest in his works appears to be growing. Two notable studies are Chen Xuanbo 陈旋波, *Shi yu guang: 20 Shiji Zhongguo wenxueshi geju zhong de xu xu* 时与光: 20 世纪中国文学史格局中的徐訏 [*Time and light: Xu Xu's place in twentieth-century Chinese literary history*] (Nanchang: Baihuazhou wenyi chubanshe, 2004); Frederik Hermann Green, "A Chinese Romantic's Journey Through Time and Space: Cosmopolitanism, Nationalism and Nostalgia in the Work of Xu Xu (1908--1980)" (Yale University, 2009).

least question the presumed gulf between Shanghai modernism in the 1930s and “solitary island” popular literature from the 1940s.

An overnight success, “Ghost Love” is one of Xu's most well-known works and representative of his literary writings in the 1940s, which oftentimes revolve around adventurous and forbidden romances and are peppered with exotic and supernatural details. The novel appeared first serialized in the January and February issues of “Cosmic Wind” (*Yuzhoufeng* 宇宙风) in 1937, but Xu Xu revised and substantially expanded “Ghost Love” for the first book publication in 1939, which saw no less than eighteen reprints in seven years.²⁴⁹ My analysis will work primarily with the extended edition, but also take the differences between the shorter *Cosmic Wind* and the final version into account.²⁵⁰ Thematically, “Ghost Love” is a rather idiosyncratic take on the generic literary formula of “revolution plus love” (*geming jia lian'ai* 革命加恋爱), which was also playfully adapted by other Shanghai writers of the period and not an exclusively leftist domain.²⁵¹ But “Ghost Love” inverts this popular theme by suspending the romantic utopianism of the genre in a poetic world of fragile stasis, in which love remains unfulfilled and revolutionary dreams unrealized.

“Ghost Love” opens with a nighttime scene at a tobacco store, where the story's male protagonist, surnamed Xu like the author, encounters Ghost for the first time. Xu is immediately

249 Isabelle Rabut and Angel Pino, trans., *Le Fox-Trot de Shanghai : Et Autres Nouvelles Chinoises, Les Grandes Traductions* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1996), 308. Included in this anthology is also a short biography of Xu and a translation of the serialized version of *Guilian*. For a contextualization of his wartime writings more generally within the philosophical horizon of (Western) romanticism see Green, “A Chinese Romantic’s Journey Through Time and Space.” “Ghost Love” was also turned into a movie. For a discussion of the novel's various cinematic adaptations see Chen Qin, “Allegories and Appropriations of the ‘Ghost’: A Study of Xu Xu’s Ghost Love and Its Three Film Adaptations” (The Ohio State University, 2010).

250 All translations are my own and reference the 1946 edition reprinted in Xu Xu 徐訏, “Guilian 鬼恋 [Ghost Love, Reprint of 1946 Shanghai Xifeng Shuwu Edition],” in *Zhongguo xiandai ge liupai xiaoshuo xuan* 中国现代各流派小说选 [Selected Works from All Modern Chinese Literary Movements], ed. Yan Jiayan 严家炎, vol. 4 (Beijing: Beijing daxue, 1986), 314–64. The first version is reprinted in *Haipai xiaoshuo jingpin* 海派小说精品 [Selected Stories of the Shanghai School], ed. Wu Huanzhang 吴欢章 (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 1996). I also consulted the original *Cosmic Wind* as well as a 1943 edition: Xu Xu, “Guilian,” *Yuzhou feng*, no. 1–2 (1937): 444–448–493; and *Guilian*, 2nd ed. (Chengdu: Dongfang shushe, 1943).

251 Liu Jianmei, “Shanghai Variations on ‘Revolution Plus Love,’” *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 14, no. 1 (April 1, 2002): 51–92.

smitten by her unusual beauty and “snowlike, anemic complexion,”²⁵² which gives him a sense of déjà-vu. To the narrator, Ghost is the spitting image of a shop window doll from Avenue Joffre, which echoes the necrophilic desires expressed in Mu Shiyong's ghost story. However, this first impression has led both the narrator and the reader down the wrong path, because it is now the spectral woman, who takes on an active role by asking Xu for directions to Xietu 斜土 road.

“Human, please tell me how to get to Xietu Road.”

I was completely startled. A sharp glance landed on my face, waiting for me to respond. But I was unable to say anything and needed to first get a better look at her. That is when I realized that it was the woman from the store, who had just tried to buy Era [cigarettes].

I wanted to ask how she could suddenly be in front of me, but then I answered the question myself. Either I was lost in my thoughts and not paying attention or she picked up her pace on purpose to surpass me undetected.

“Xietu Road, I'm asking you about Xietu Road.”²⁵³

Ghost is not a lifeless mannequin, but assumes from the start the active and dominant role. While Xu is intimidated by her fashionable appearance (black dress, silk stockings, high-heels, and white gloves) and her “piercing gaze,”²⁵⁴ Xu's first response is to reprimand her for her unusual form of address:

“I think it is very unusual for someone asking directions not to call the other person 'mister' [xiansheng] or 'older person' [*zhangzhe* 长者], but simply 'human,' that is, of course, unless you are a deity or God!” That word “deity” [shen 神] slipped out of my mouth, because I kept thinking to myself that her beauty was nothing short of divine. I gave her a casual smile to soften my reprimanding tone.

252 Xu Xu, “Guilian,” 315.

253 Ibid.

254 Ibid.

“I am not a deity, but rather a ghost.”²⁵⁵

Xu immediately asserts incredulity, but in his thoughts he seems to subconsciously confirm her metaphysical state, because he repeatedly refers to her pale complexion, the fact that she is not wearing a warm coat despite the cold temperatures, and that she is wandering the streets alone at night. In the extended version, Xu tells Ghost a ghost story about a man who fearlessly spends a night with a female phantom to provide evidence of his intrepidity in ghostly matters, but his ghost story convinces neither Ghost nor himself. Clumsily Xu then attempts to hide his fear of Ghost by engaging her in an argument on the aesthetics of humans and ghosts. Xu makes the case that he has a sound aesthetic reason to disbelieve her: Ghost is simply too beautiful to be a ghost, who should look like decayed corpses.

“To end as an ugly corpse is the fate of every beautiful human. That is why in the human world there is no beauty and nothing can be called beautiful. Because no matter how beautiful something is, it is in the end always ugly.”

“But ghosts then could be at best like humans and not more beautiful.”

“You are not a ghost, how could you know?”

“And you are not human!”

“But I used to be a human, an extremely lively human.”

“I think you still are.”

She looked up to the sky: “Nature is truly beautiful.”

“The night is especially beautiful.”

“Let me ask you this: do you think the night is more beautiful than the day?”

“I do.”

“And the night belongs to ghosts.”²⁵⁶

255 Ibid., 315–16.

256 Ibid., 319–20.

Valuing beauty over truth, Xu has in fact initially little interest in proving Ghost wrong, but lets himself gladly be persuaded by Ghost's magnetic beauty that her spectral world holds greater erotic and poetic promise than human reality: "When I am with you, I want to be a ghost."²⁵⁷

Throughout the course of the next year, they continue to meet for nighttime strolls and Xu becomes increasingly infatuated by Ghost's erudition and cosmopolitanism, which is in the original version further underscored by her half Jewish, half overseas Chinese descent.²⁵⁸ But Ghost adamantly refuses to let Xu accompany her all the way to her home, her "ghost territory" (*guiyu* 鬼域).

"I will not let you bring me home." She stopped walking.

"You go, where you are going and I go, where I am going."

"No, you must leave now." She gave me such a sharp stare that I could no longer look at her and lowered my head.

"You must go back. Listen to me now, go back!"

That was an order and I felt truly a little intimidated. Her tone was firm and sincere, full of conviction and devotion as if she were commanding a million soldiers. I thought to myself that Napoleon must have spoken like this, when he ordered his soldiers to die on the battlefield.²⁵⁹

One day, a sudden downpour of rain makes Ghost change her mind and they go to her apartment for a fresh change of clothes. Her apartment is the mirror image of her persona: "The apartment was furnished very strange. All the furniture was red lacquered and there was a big bed with a black canopy over it, something I had never before seen anybody use."²⁶⁰ Xu also takes mental note of the fact that Ghost's windows are covered by three layers of curtains, going from white to green to

257 Ibid., 327.

258 Xu Xu, "Guilian," 1996, 389.

259 Xu Xu, "Guilian [Reprint of the 1946 Shanghai Xifeng Shuwu Edition]," 327.

260 Ibid., 330.

black: “Could I really have entered a grave?”²⁶¹ Most disturbing to Xu, however, is the fact that Ghost has men's clothes at her home, which she lends him, while his are drying. Ghost coquettishly teases him by making him believe that she has a husband. However, when he demands to see this “husband” and Ghost agrees to bring him out, it is she herself, who comes out dressed in a men's suit, proudly proclaiming: “I am my own husband.” Overcome with joy, Xu immediately falls to his knees in front of her and begs Ghost to take him as her husband. However, Ghost remains firm in her cold detachment from the human world and insists that love “is just some naïve and silly thing humans do.”²⁶²

This scene is of course not only sentimental, but also highly satirical, because in Xu's late 1930s Shanghai even the female phantoms have adapted to the modern age and no longer rely on male *yang* energy for subsistence like their premodern literary predecessors. But this humor is lost on Xu, who is deeply hurt by Ghost's rejection and decides to retaliate the humiliation by exposing Ghost as human. Xu hopes that his degradation of Ghost would reverse the power hierarchy between the two and make her no longer immune to his sexual advances. At this point, the ghost romance story turns into a detective novel, in which Xu tries to come to a satisfactory answer about Ghost's identity by returning to her house the next day to see if it has transformed into a grave and leaving his Omega watch at her apartment as a pretext to visit Ghost during the day—again reversing the classical ghost story theme, in which an object is taken from the ghost world as proof. But not only does his plan repeatedly fail to provide any evidence that would prove her wrong, on the contrary, his and Ghost's nighttime meetings start to take a toll on his physical health. Although Xu still refuses to believe that what is happening to him is like “one of those Liaozhai stories, in which men fall for ghosts,”²⁶³ there is as yet no indication that Ghost is not supernatural.

261 Ibid., 331.

262 Ibid., 333.

263 Ibid., 345.

By chance Xu eventually uncovers Ghost's secret during a visit to Shanghai's Longhua temple, where he sees Ghost dressed as a nun. Overcome with rage and anger he follows her home, where he assaults her with his discovery. For a moment Ghost is slightly rattled, but quickly regains composure and calmly changes back into Ghost dress: "Human, have a cigarette and calm down. Don't be so fragile!"²⁶⁴ Ghost then explains to Xu that she used to work as an agent for an underground resistance group, but has resigned from this murderous trade after losing her lover and being betrayed by her former companions. Ghost herself explains her choice to live in disguise as a fatigued and disillusioned retreat from life, but also explains that "life in prison, sitting in the damp darkness, meditating with my eyes closed, day after day, month after month, can you believe me? That is what gave me my Buddha nature."²⁶⁵ Evidently, Ghost does not simply play a nun, but also claims to have reached spiritual enlightenment.

In the end, the revelation does not reverse the hierarchy between Xu and Ghost. On the contrary, Ghost appears to Xu now even more frightening than before:

"Even if I am human, you better believe me that I could become a ghost at any moment, even a ghost as you imagine them to be." I saw her flipping a small and glistening knife in her hands. I had seen her take this knife out many times. I had always thought it was some sort of cosmetic item, but now I realized that it is actually a weapon.²⁶⁶

Moreover, Xu's health continues to decline and he eventually requires hospitalization. During his recovery he receives fresh flowers every day from a mysterious gentlemen, who turns out to be none other than Ghost. Now no longer playing the alluring seductress or terrifying assassin, Ghost takes on a caring and maternal role by giving him money to cover his hospital bills and urging him in her final letter to "only leave the hospital once the doctor allows it."²⁶⁷

264 Ibid., 349.

265 Ibid., 351.

266 Ibid., 350.

267 Ibid., 357.

At the hospital, Xu also makes the acquaintance of a young nurse, with whom he will soon share the same doomed desire for Ghost. Both will never see Ghost again, who explains to Xu in a letter that she has left the city. After his recovery, Xu nevertheless decides to move into Ghost's former apartment in the vain hope that she might return some day. His nurse makes a second appearance towards the end of the novel at Ghost's former apartment in the hope of meeting the mysterious man, who brought Xu flowers at the hospital. Xu jealously reveals to her that the handsome man she wants to meet is in fact a woman, but she has already been fully enveloped by Ghost's charm and proclaims that her love transcends gender. The novel ends without any resolution, as Xu's desire for Ghost remains unchanged: "I am always thinking about her, never ceasing to be concerned for her. My God, where on this boundless earth will I see her again?"²⁶⁸

Xu's love for Ghost drives him to the point of mental and physical exhaustion, while Ghost refuses to be redomesticated by him as a living woman. As I have argued elsewhere, Xu Xu's novel should be read within the context of anti-colonialism on the eve of the Second Sino-Japanese war and the increasing indistinctness of literature and political propaganda, which was particularly evident in the use of the politically highly charged character *gui*. There I compare the novel and an earlier, very short play of Xu's, "Ghost Play" (Guixi, 1936), which was published in the 1936 *Analects ghost story special issue* and in which a character named "Ghost" and a character named "Human" allegorically play out foreign colonial aggression against China. A comparison of the play and the novel shows that the same abstractly named character duo reflects in "Ghost Love" Xu Xu's insistence on maintaining the distinction between *gui* as political enemy and *gui* as a literary aesthetic, between politics and art.²⁶⁹

However, the relationship between these two meanings of *gui* can be further untangled. While "Ghost Love" begins remarkably similar to Ye and Zhang's ghost stories, and even the

268 Ibid., 364.

269 Jessica Imbach, "Variations on Gui and the Trouble with Ghosts in Modern Chinese Fiction," *Asiatische Studien*, 70:3 (2016).

character of Ghost is just as exotic and cosmopolitan as earlier phantom figures, “Ghost Love” sets itself clearly apart by the very fact that its gender hierarchy is reversed. Ghost is entirely in control of the relationship to Xu. She decides, when they meet, when they part, where they go and what they talk about. She creates the rhythm and progress of the narrative. But Xu's depiction of a strong female character reverses not only the hierarchy between the masculine and the feminine, but also between the human and the spectral, reality and fiction. For instance, while in both Zhang Kebiao's “Mirage” and Shi Zhecun's “Witchcraft” watches still carry meaning either by telling the time, which is reassuring, or by standing still, which is worrying, Xu's Omega wrist-watch fails to provide him with any signal or clue. In effect, Ghost's fantasy world holds greater authority than reality measured by clocks and watches. Moreover, Ghost refuses to conform to the phantom strategies of classical ghost narratives, because she returns neither to her natural underworld habitat, which would in Ghost's case mean a return to human life, nor does she get married. This leaves not only Ghost's dominance over Xu intact, but also ensures that the values of femininity and fictionality remain (aesthetically and morally) superior to masculinity and reality. Although Xu by chance uncovers Ghost's “lie,” this does not change their relationship and in fact only exacerbates her cruelty towards Xu and his complete surrender to an impossible love.

Another important difference between “Ghost Love” and the previous texts is the fact that the climactic revelation, which appear most frequently at the ending of Chinese phantom romance stories, comes mid-way through the novel and changes nothing in the relationship between Xu and Ghost. Just as the suspense over Ghost's true nature and identity is the main focus in the first half of the novel, which is also the first half of the installment of the original version, this suspense transforms into equally ambiguous forms of suspension after the truth about Ghost comes to light. Xu's exposure of Ghost as human is followed by one instance of physical suspension (recovering at the hospital) and psychic suspension, when he moves into Ghost's apartment, because he can not let

go of her. The second half of the novel thus transforms suspense into unfulfilled desire, and the intellectual thrill of solving Ghost's mystery into the emotionally exalting, but futile pursuit of Ghost's love. By introducing the character of the nurse and her homoerotic desire for Ghost, the extended version further underscores the theme of unreciprocated love and desire, while at the same time also broadening the parameters of the desiring subject. In the following, I argue that the various elements of Ghost's disguise, the endless deferral of erotic fulfillment, and above all, Ghost's both caring and severe treatment, enable us to read this desire as an expression of cultural masochism.

Xu's literary masochism was not without precedents. In modern Chinese literary history, various configurations of literary masochism appeared early on as a response to Western cultural imperialism. Instead of rejecting the conjunction of femininity and Chineseness, some intellectuals and writers strategically mirrored and intensified this inscription by disavowing or debasing their own masculinity and at the same time elevating the feminine into a position of strength and authority. While Zhu Ping argues that in the case of Lu Xun and Zhou Zuoren this was in fact a nifty, dialectical plot based on yin-yang gender cosmology to ultimately strengthen and restore China's masculinity,²⁷⁰ Rey Chow delineates how in various male scenarios of masochism by Chen Duxiu, Ba Jin and others an idealized, but at the same time also uncontrollable or loathed femininity can be read as a psychic representation or internalization of China as a mother figure, which is simultaneously maternal and caring, but also infantile and weak.²⁷¹ The ambiguity of the character *gui* in the title of "Ghost Love" captures the novel's masochistic scenario, as it acknowledges the reality of foreign encroachment, but at the same time also intimates the important role of desire and

270 Ping Zhu, "The Masquerade of Male Masochists: Two Tales of Translation of the Zhou Brothers (Lu Xun and Zhou Zuoren) in the 1910s," *Frontiers of Literary Studies in China* 8, no. 1 (2014): 31–51.

271 Rey Chow, *Woman and Chinese Modernity: The Politics of Reading between West and East* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), chapter 4.

love in placing the colonial other, embodied by the exotic, cosmopolitan and supernatural figure of Ghost, into a scenario that follows the rules of the punished and conquered subject.

Deleuze's treatise "Coldness and Cruelty" (1971) provides an interesting model for reading masochism, because it focuses not only on the individual psychology of the masochist, but also on the narrative and worldview established within the philosophical system of masochism. Performing what he describes as a "formal psychoanalysis"²⁷² of masochism, Deleuze argues that we cannot understand masochism if we don't regard it as first and foremost in relation to the temporal form of "waiting" and "suspense," which is literalized in the preferred masochistic practices of suspension and disguise: "Masochism", writes Deleuze, "is a state of waiting. [...] The masochist waits for pleasure as something that is bound to be late, and expects pains as the condition that will finally ensure (both physically and morally) the advent of pleasure."²⁷³ While suspense is the temporal form of the fantasy, the fetish is the "object of the fantasy, the fantasized object par excellence."²⁷⁴

This masochistic fetishism hinges on a "double suspension"²⁷⁵: it suspends awareness of the fact that a woman does not have a penis by sexualizing an object (in Masoch's case furs and whips), but then, and this is where Freud and Deleuze's fetishists part ways, idealizes this hermaphroditized image of the mother as the sole origin of humanity. In distinction to Freud's theory of fetishism as a result of castration anxiety, which prompts in the male subject the need to dominate the feminine, Deleuze argues that in the masochistic situation the fetishist idealizes rather than seeks control over the feminine. In doing so, "femininity is posited as lacking in nothing and placed alongside a virility suspended in disavowal."²⁷⁶ Ultimately, the cruel woman also takes on a paternal role, because she generates the symbolism through which the masochist expresses himself."²⁷⁷ Because the temporal

272 Gilles Deleuze and Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty & Venus in Furs*, trans. Jean McNeil and Aude Willm, Revised edition (Cambridge, Mass.: Zone Books, 1991), 74.

273 Ibid., 71.

274 Ibid., 73.

275 Ibid., 33.

276 Ibid., 68.

277 Ibid., 63.

figure of suspense forces the reader to identify with the victim, which Deleuze contrasts to the “gathering momentum”²⁷⁸ of repetition in the sadistic scene, which forces us to identify with the torturer, we are through the narrative perspective implicated in the construction of the masochist's master. In the end, this means that the aggressor, Ghost, is not a sadistic subject, but an element of the masochistic situation.

In difference to the erotically charged atmosphere pervading Zhang, Ye and even Shi's novel, and the erotic allure Ghost herself exudes, she insists that Xu remain at a distance to her and obey her codex of human-ghost interaction. Rejection is crucial to their relationship, which is also more intellectual than corporeal and the fumes of the cigarettes, which Ghost and Xu are constantly smoking, capture the immaterial quality of their intimacy. In this respect, “Ghost Love” is a paradigmatic example of Xu's wartime novels, in which the relationships between the male protagonists and their female love interests are oftentimes platonic and lack a sexually explicit dimension.

According to Deleuze, the desexualization of love frees the masochist from the superego. In other words, it gives the subject autonomy from the father, who represents (sexual) regulation and repression. By this the masochist constructs woman as the generator of the “symbolism through which the masochist expresses himself”²⁷⁹ and “expels the father from the masochistic universe.”²⁸⁰ The loss of agency to an irresistible or cruel woman within a “symbolic world of perversion,” can be understood also as a rebellion against the “aggressive father.”²⁸¹ Thus, Xu's (and the reader's) suffering at the hands of Ghost, who embodies both aesthetically and politically illicit desires, is not an identification with Shanghai's cosmopolitan culture and a simple rejection of politics, but rather functions ultimately as a strategy for reversing the symbolic hierarchy between the feminine and the

278 Ibid., 34.

279 Ibid., 63.

280 Ibid., 63–64.

281 Ibid., 123–33.

masculine by excluding masculinity, expressed through sexual explicitness, from its configuration of love.

Idealized love is a central theme in the Republican-era works of Xu Xu. Frederik Green understands the depoliticization of love in Xu Xu's 1940s fiction as an attempt to preserve desire as a personal experience, rather than let it become a political tool at the hands of the war propaganda machine.²⁸² Certainly, in Xu's fiction desire and its intersubjective realization in love are never eclipsed by overtly political acts and revolution never supersedes the quest for poetic and personal fulfillment in importance. Stories of personal struggles may have provided a cosmopolitan readership with a more comforting message regarding their own future than the propagandistic literature, which called for personal sacrifice. However, I disagree with Green's reading of both bodily and metaphysical desire as a refuge from society and history, because desire is always historically situated and shaped by social and political forces. Transposing the masochistic scenario within the novel to the field of reader experience, it is possible to understand the pleasure of reading a ghost romance novel in times of war and instability not so much as an expression of complacency and urban individualism, but as the result of a desire to regain control in a situation of humiliation. Although Ghost's back story is vague in details, it does fulfill an important function, because without colonial aggression and resistance struggle Ghost and Xu's platonic romance would lack motivation. Ultimately, Xu Xu's novel turns China's (wartime) suffering, into the erotic and poetic pleasure of desiring a forever unobtainable Ghost. Instead of politicizing literature, "Ghost Love" thereby feminizes China's political crisis.

2.5 Phantom romance and the fetish imagination

I return to my opening quote from Ma Zihua: To him, female phantoms are symbols of feudal oppression, misogyny and an antiquated literary establishment. As such, they signify something

282 Frederik H. Green, "Rescuing Love from the Nation: Love, Nation, and Self in Xu Xu's Alternative Wartime Fiction and Drama," *Frontiers of Literary Studies in China* 8, no. 1 (January 1, 2014): 126–53.

beyond themselves. As fetishes, however, they necessarily do not mean anything beyond their various usages in a community, but rather act, as the anthropologist William Pietz astutely observes in his historical analysis of fetish discourses “as a cultural territory embodying the possibility of movement across diverse [and, as McCallum would add: conflicting] value codes.”²⁸³ Fetishes relate otherwise incommensurable (literary) values, desires and anxieties (such as loss of social status) with the new cultural values of colonialism and capitalism. Ultimately, the phantom romance plot itself can perhaps be understood as a literary fetish practice, because all of the texts discussed so far seek to overcome, successfully or not as the case may be, the boundaries of differences between local attachments, expressed through poetic nostalgia and (sexual) anxieties, colonially encoded vectors of modernization and occidentalist fears and desires.

However, before I proceed to my discussion of Shi and Tang's novels, it is necessary to address the fact that while the spectrophilic perspective of male authors offers insight into urban commodity culture and the changing literary and social landscape of 1930s Shanghai, it fails to take gendered inequality and female consciousness into consideration. Just as May Fourth modernizers imposed liberation on women to further their reform agendas, male modernists mobilized the in many ways opposite figure of the spectralized woman to negotiate co-evalness and contemporaneity with a global, cosmopolitan culture without taking feminine consciousness and its textual representation into consideration. The works of the two female writers I discuss in the following section challenge this modernist appropriation of female spectrality through an aesthetic of spectral femininity.

3 The love of ghosts: femininity and spectrality in 1940s women's popular fiction

The masculinist bias of China's modernization discourse has already been the subject matter of

numerous studies. As Wang Zheng notes: “‘To be human’ in the context of the Chinese

283 William Pietz, “The Problem of the Fetish, I,” *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, no. 9 (1985): 16.

Enlightenment was to be a man with all the constituting 'modern' values.”²⁸⁴ The conjunction of the human, masculinity and modernity is particularly pronounced in the realist literary discourse of May Fourth writers, from which *nüxing* 女性 emerged as “an innocent scapegoat, paying for the crimes that society has committed.”²⁸⁵ How can women express themselves as modern without denying the historical agency of women in the past? And what kind of textual strategies do they employ to achieve, what their male saviors failed to do, i.e. “to posit a concrete historical and textual place for the new woman of China.”²⁸⁶ While scholars working on the role of gender in modern China have furthered deconstructive readings of the “myth of masculine modernity”²⁸⁷ and delineated a number of different theoretical and aesthetic projects, in which the feminine (and to a lesser degree the spectral) is reworked as a powerful mode of expressing (political) resistance and alterity,²⁸⁸ the articulations of spectral femininity in the fictional writings of women has so far not yet been studied.

3.1 Reading women's fiction from the 1940s

Both Shi Jimei and Tang Xuehua belonged to the new generation of writers, who established themselves on Shanghai's literary scene during the 1940s. Zhang Ailing's stardom is well-known, but Shi Jimei actually enjoyed a similar literary celebrity status at the time and was considered to be a “modern Lin Daiyu.”²⁸⁹ Tang Xuehua's literary career never reached the heights of Zhang and Shi's, although she too gained considerable fame during the 1940s and was considered by Tan Zhengbi 谭正璧 (1901-1991) to be one of the most talented writers of the new style of women's

284 Zheng Wang, *Women in the Chinese Enlightenment: Oral and Textual Histories* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 19.

285 Ching-kiu Stephen Chan, “The Language of Despair: Ideological Representations of the ‘New Women’ by May Fourth Writers,” *Modern Chinese Literature* 4, no. 1/2 (1988): 27.

286 *Ibid.*, 23.

287 Amy D. Dooling, *Women's Literary Feminism in Twentieth Century China* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 4.

288 One recent publication is Zhu Ping, *Gender and Subjectivities in Early Twentieth-Century Chinese Literature and Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2015).

289 Meng Zhiyi 梦之仪, *Zhishang guangyin: Minguo wenren yanjiu* 纸上光阴: 民国文人研究 [A Moment in Time Captured on Paper: A Study of Republican-era Literati] (Taipei: Xiuwei chuban, 2013), 151.

fiction.²⁹⁰ Publishing their works primarily in popular fiction magazines such as “Spring and Autumn Monthly” (*Chunqiu yuekan* 春秋月刊) “Kaleidoscope” (*Wanxiang yuekan* 万象月刊) and “The Violet” (*Ziloulan yuekan* 紫罗兰月刊),²⁹¹ these women writers collectively created a new form of middle-brow literature, which combined the stock-in-trade narrative techniques and plots of popular fiction with new feminine ideals. And while they largely abstained from political activism, they creatively adapted to the exigencies of war and political oppression by using fiction as a “highly personalized way of narrating war, history, trauma, and individual growth.”²⁹²

In the wake of the recent Shanghai nostalgia fever, their works are now recognized as important contributions to Shanghai's Republican-era literary culture. However, interest in their works has so far been primarily fueled by the tragic allure some of the key figures of this period exude, particularly Shi Jimei who committed suicide during the Cultural Revolution. With the exception of Zhang Ailing and Su Qing 苏青 (1914-1982), their works are generally not placed within the purview of modern Chinese literary historiography, primarily for two reasons.²⁹³ Firstly, many had close personal and even familial ties to the old guard of “Mandarinduck and Butterfly” (*Yuanyang hudie pai* 鸳鸯蝴蝶派) writers. On the one hand these ties facilitated access to publishing networks, but on the other hand meant that young women writers to a certain extent inherited the biases against their male predecessors. The second important reason for the unjust treatment of 1940s women's fiction is that it focused during a period of immense military threat and political upheaval mostly on domestic life. Moreover, their writings are generally regarded as aesthetically and technically conventional or derivative.

290 Tan Zhengbi, ed., *Dangdai nüzuojia xiaoshuo xuan* 当代女作家小说选 [Selected Fiction by Contemporary Woman Writers] (Shanghai: Taiping Shuju, 1944).

291 For a more comprehensive list see: Huang, *Women, War, Domesticity*.

292 *Ibid.*, 16.

293 In the introduction to the two volume anthology of 1940s women's fiction we can learn for instance that these works “do not subvert the current history of modern Chinese literature, but are its necessary supplement and revision.” Chen Xueyong 陈学勇 and Wang Yu 王羽, ed., *Guixiu ji : Ershi shiji sishi niandai Shanghai nüzuojia xiaoshuo zhi er* 闺秀集：二十世纪四十年代上海女作家小说之二 [Elegant Women: 1940s Fiction by Female Authors from Shanghai], vol. 2 (Shanghai: Shanghai yuandong, 2010), 3.

Because we tend to conflate technical innovation with the progressive, which thereby gains greater purchase over the interpretation of the past, and the backwards-looking, the feminine, the domestic, the citational, etc. with the conservative,²⁹⁴ there is the danger of passing the same judgment on these women authors, and in fact ghost fiction in general, as literary historians in the past did for instance on modernist fiction: what does not articulate a politically progressive agenda or is technically innovative, is not considered historically “significant.” To counter this, I think we can apply Avery Gordon's notion of “complex personhood,” with a slightly different emphasis, also to texts. *Complex textuality* would not mean that we hand out degrees of literary worth nor that we resort to sociological analysis where literary “quality” is lacking, but that we grant texts the ability to be both innovative and iterative, challenging and boring, and, to borrow Gordon's formulation, „simultaneously straightforward and full of enormously subtle meaning.”²⁹⁵

I highlight the importance of textuality not only in an effort to distance my discussion from judgmental discussions on women's popular fiction, but also because the relationship between female subjectivity and the search for alternative textual strategies of reading and writing feminine experience is a core theme in both Shi and Tang's novels. While they certainly knew how to adapt to the exigencies of the literary field of 1940s Shanghai and were enormously productive, not least because they also depended on writing for a steady income, the novels I analyze in the following reveal a keen sense for how their works and their lives took shape in the interstices of an ambivalent fascination with the success of the new woman writer and the negative social inscriptions of traditional femininity, as exemplified in Ma Zihua's essay. Accordingly, both Shi and Tang reveal not only how female phantom discourses affect women, but also use their writings as a feminine literary strategy to restore agency to “backward” femininity. I focus specifically on Shi and Tang's exploration of chronic illness, suicide and both physical and emotional entrapment to argue that

294 Elizabeth Freeman, “Packing History, Count(er)ing Generations,” *New Literary History* 31, no. 4 (2000): 728.

295 Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 5.

they reconfigure discourses of spectrality to express empowerment in entrapment and agency in death, which ultimately blurs the line between text and self, fiction and reality.

3.2 Shi Jimei's „Ghost Month“

“Ghost Month” (*Gui yue* 鬼月) is the title story of Shi Jimei's second collection of short stories published in 1948. The novella explores the topic of arranged marriage versus free love against the mythological backdrop of the seventh lunar month, “ghost month”, when the boundaries between the living and the dead become permeable. You Haitang 尤海棠, the daughter of a local Suzhou innkeeper, is about to become the fourth wife of Old Song, who is one year older than her own father, but is in love with the orphan Changlin 长林, who was taken in by her family seventeen years ago and is treated in the You household like a slave. She persuades him to flee their family and live a life together far away, but Changlin in the end refuses to go through with her plan—partially out of a pragmatic sense that a life together with Haitang would mean endless hardship for both, but also because of his misguided senses of gratitude towards Haitang's father. Infuriated by Changlin's change of heart, Haitang lures him to the lake to kill him and commits suicide thereafter.

Haitang's sense of entrapment is reinforced by the structure of the novel, which begins and ends with “old grandpa Zhang” telling a group of children the myth of “The Milky Way Marriage” (*Tianhe pei* 天河配), the legendary love story between “weaving maiden” (*zhinü* 织女), the Jade Emperor's seventh daughter, and the “buffalo boy” (*niulang* 牛郎), who are fated to only reunite once every year. This immensely popular story foregrounds the importance of family values, persevering devotion and procreation (they have a child), for which the unlikely couple receives the yearly services of the entire cosmos. While this mythological backdrop seems at first a device, with which Shi Jimei foreshadows the tragic love between Haitang and Changlin, it marks in the end a sharp contrast to their love, which is defiant and destructive.

Although Haitang's parents and her fiancée old Song, the “coffin upholstery”²⁹⁶ represent old China, Haitang herself conforms also to a certain degree to a conservative picture of Chinese femininity. For instance, the most tender and affectionate exchange between Changling and Haitang takes place, when Haitang is making her lover a new pair of shoes—a craft, which is in China typically performed by women. She furthermore does not seem to have received any formal education and Shi does not allude to any role models, which could have inspired her ideal of true and free love. By this Shi frames both the ideal of free marriage and her final choice to kill Changlin and commit suicide as following the logic of a universalized structure of feminine feeling and not as expressions of a new age.

Is Shi simply rehearsing a popular motif and thereby reinforcing traditional notions of female behavior? Does Haitang's suicide in this sense then even confirm May Fourth views on women as victims of the “old society” (*jiu shehui* 旧社会) and on female suicide as a misguided and superstition-motivated rebellion against Confucian piety and puritanical notions of female chastity?²⁹⁷ Numerous studies on women's suicide in China have significantly expanded and complicated this judgmental May Fourth discourse and shown that the high suicide rates of women during late imperial times cannot be sufficiently explained by Neo-Confucian moral ideals and that a number of social, economic and legal factors also contributed to the promulgation of women's suicide. Reading suicide as a cultural practice through which women could assert agency over their life's narratives, Grace Fong for instance reads suicide as a form of “self-inscription,” by which women could not only prove their innocence (in front of a court of law), but also enter the textual records of the male historian-cum-admirer of female virtue. As she persuasively argues, this act of

296 Shi Jimei, “Gui yue,” in *Shi Jimei xiaoshuo : Fengyi yuan* 施济美小说：凤仪园 [*Shi Jimei's Novels: Fengyi Garden*], ed. Ke Ling 柯灵 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1998), 14.

297 Paul Stanley Ropp, “Passionate Women: Female Suicide in Late Imperial China - Introduction,” in *Passionate Women: Female Suicide in Late Imperial China*, ed. Paul Stanley Ropp, Paola Zamperini, and Harriet Thelma Zurndorfer (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 3–21.

inscription functioned in late imperial China as a strategy for women to “reincorporate themselves into the dominant discourse.”²⁹⁸

Regarding female suicide narratives in Western literature, Elisabeth Bronfen arrives at a similar conclusion as Fong. Because women are historically frequently associated with the corporeal, they can use “death as a conscious act of setting a mark, as a form of writing with her body, a materialization of the sign, where the sheer material factualness of the dying and dead body lends certainty, authority and realness to this attempt at self-textualization.”²⁹⁹ Although women are in the Chinese cultural tradition not associated with the corporeal in the same way as in the West, the opposition between life and death itself is cosmologically encoded as *yang* and *yin*, male and female. After Changlin reveals his change of heart to Haitang, she suddenly remembers a story from her childhood her late mother used to tell her, in which a clay figurine is brought to life with human blood:

“Even a human-shaped figure can be brought to life, he can be human after all, he is human.” She looked back outside the window. The moon was gradually coming out from behind the clouds. Suddenly a sparkle appeared in her tear filled eyes, that moon behind the dark clouds...³⁰⁰

Haitang's suicide on the one hand follows the logic of female suicide in late imperial literature, because it serves as proof of the sincerity of her passion for Changlin, but is at the same time also a rebellion against an arranged marriage and involves the murder of her lover. When Haitang stages murder and suicide in the reflection of the moon, a conventional metaphor for romantic longing in the Chinese lyrical tradition, she is evidently not contempt on destroying her own and her lover's body, but rather extends her conquest against *yang* into the symbolic realm of the poetic

298 Grace S. Fong, “Signifying Bodies: The Cultural Significance of Suicide Writings by Women in Ming-Qing China,” *NAN NÜ* 3, no. 1 (June 1, 2001): 109.

299 Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body*, 141.

300 Shi Jimei, “Gui yue,” 28.

imagination of romantic love. This shifts the power dynamic not only between yang/masculinity/life and yin/femininity/death, but also between body and text.

The novel ends with grandpa Zhang explaining what has happened to a little child, who naively asks:

“Will they come back from the world of the dead (*yinjian* 阴间)?” No. Why not? Because they are now forever together, do you understand? “They are forever together.” The kid rather cutely booped his head to show he had understood. And sucking on his chubby little fingers, he thought to himself: “Could it be that the world of the dead is better than the world of the living?”³⁰¹

The transformation of body into text is enacted not only literally, when old Grandpa Zhang tells Haitang's story to a group of young children, but is achieved also discursively through Shi's reinscription of a traditional narrative of female agency with modern feminine values and ideals. Furthermore, the mythological background of Haitang's suicide and her crime add a haunting dimension to her self-textualization: just like the story of Nülang, every year, during ghost month, Haitang's actions will be remembered. Shi Jimei uses parallelism and repetition to make this point very clear:

It seemed like there was a fire in her eyes, a fire you cannot extinguish and that never goes out...

Her hatred was like a fire you cannot extinguish and that never goes out....

Her love was like a fire you cannot extinguish and that never goes out...³⁰²

Contrary to the modernist ghost narratives of male writers, “Ghost Month” thus proposes a new trajectory of the ghost romance plot, in which a woman not only chooses to become a ghost, but

301 Ibid., 33.

302 Ibid., 27.

also forces her lover to join her. Thereby, Shi's novel neither rehashes the male realist discourse on traditional women's weakness nor does it nostalgize virtuous femininity.

“Ghost Month” is not Shi's first novel, in which a woman becomes a ghost. In “Eternal Honeymoon” (*Yongjiu de miyue* 永久的蜜月, 1943), however, the heroine turns into a ghost through a disease contracted while selflessly taking care of a neighbor's child during her honeymoon. Appearing to her husband eleven years after her death to reignite his spirit of self sacrifice and to inspire him to continue his work as a doctor in the service of society, he finds inspiration in her feminine virtue and eternal beauty in death. “[...] you are still so beautiful, so young, so movingly cute,...”³⁰³ The female ghost serves here the hierarchic order between life and death, man and woman, *yang* and *yin* (against the historical backdrop of the Second Sino-Japanese war). By contrast, “Ghost Month” does not only highlight the agency of traditional narratives of virtuous femininity, but also imbues them with the ability to challenge the masculine social and poetic order.

Turning herself into a ghost and appropriating the cosmological cycles of repetition and return is for Haitang the only possibility to make her voice heard, which foreshadows not only Shi's own suicide, but also confirms her strategy of self-textualization, because her tragic death facilitated her rediscovery in the late 1990s as one of the most “enchantingly tragic”³⁰⁴ female writers of the 1940s. However, what remains missing in “Ghost Month” is the relationship between women. In Tang Xuehua's “Enigma” the becoming-ghost of women is negotiated through three very distinct female figures, who each embody different views on the relationship between the spectral and the feminine. Contrary to Shi, Tang is not so much interested in the reappropriation of feminine discourses to promote new and arguably equally constricting and heteronormative ideals and values,

303 Shi Jimei, “Yongjiu de miyue,” in *Guixiu ji : Ershi shiji sishi niandai Shanghai nüzuojia xiaoshuo zhi er* (Shanghai: Shanghai yuandong, 2010), 70.

304 Huang, *Women, War, Domesticity*, 192.

but rather employs spectral femininity as a dialogic strategy, which links modern women's lives and historical discourses of femininity.

3.3 Tang Xuehua's „Enigma“

“Enigma” was published in 1945, the last year of the war, in a special issue of *Wanxiang*. The novel consists of a frame narrative and an embedded narrative, which are woven together by a photographic *Rückenfigur*, a German art historical term for a “back figure,” of a woman gazing over the ocean. The frame narrative opens and ends with a discussion of this photograph between an unnamed female narrator and her friend Ling, while in the embedded narrative Ling recounts how the photograph came into her possession during her stay at a Suzhou clinic, presumably for tuberculosis.

In a first step, we can read this image metonymically, as it materially and epistemologically echoes the fetish discourse of male modernist writings of the 1930s. Viewed in this light, the image represents the restriction of female agency and resonates very poignantly with Deleuze's definition of the fetish as a “frozen, arrested, two-dimensional image, a photograph to which one returns repeatedly to exorcise the dangerous consequences of movement, the harmful discoveries that result from exploration; it represents the last point at which it was still possible to believe.”³⁰⁵ But what is interesting about the *Rückenfigur* more specifically is that it constructs a shared gaze. Although the face of the depicted woman is not shown, her gaze guides and reduplicates the viewers perspective. Moreover, this (shared) gaze is central to the novel's exploration of haunting as a form of female agency.

In the embedded narrative, the woman in the photograph, a Miss Zhou, comes to life as an obsessive, ghost-like stalker of a doctor at a Suzhou clinic who she believes to be a *doppelgänger* of her long lost love. When the doctor with the strange and foreign-sounding nickname “la-kuai” 拉塊 (possibly a sinicization of the French surname Lacroix, but the phonetic part of the second character

305 Deleuze and Sacher-Masoch, *Masochism*, 31.

is *gui* 鬼 and might therefore also have supernatural connotations) and his fiancé move to Shanghai to escape her vicious stalking, she miraculously discovers their whereabouts, moves into the house across from their street and continues to stare at them all day. Although the classical ghost romance plot is still recognizable, the old woman's haunting is therefore not grounded in supernatural behavior, but rather in inappropriate social conduct. Moreover, and similar to Shi Jimei's novel, "Enigma" narrates phantom romance from a female perspective. Although the doctor is of central importance to the plot, he rarely makes an appearance and plays only a supportive role to the four main female characters: The narrator in the frame story, her friend Ling, who becomes the narrator in the embedded story, her friend and nurse Lu Hua, who is also the fiancé of the doctor, and Miss Zhou or Misses Chen, the strange and ghost-like woman from the photograph.

Ling is immediately fascinated by Miss Zhou, who follows her friend and nurse Lu Hua every time she comes to visit her. Fashioning herself in the role of a Sherlock Holmesian detective, Ling develops an obsession with the mysterious Miss Zhou and becomes determined to get behind her secret. That "strange old woman"³⁰⁶ with the "face of a ghost"³⁰⁷ and who dresses "in a strange and peculiar manner"³⁰⁸ is to Ling as terrifying as fascinating:

[...] as soon as she moved her red lipstick-covered lips to a grin, a mouth full of crooked teeth appeared, and those traintrack wrinkles on her temples doubled in size. Luckily I could not really drink anything during those days. Otherwise I could not have guaranteed to keep anything safely in my stomach. I closed my eyes and dared not look at her again."³⁰⁹

Slowly Ling manages to piece together the life's story of the strange woman: She had been at a young age engaged to a man from the wealthy Zhou family, but her husband died shortly after their wedding. As a young widow she was allowed to return to school, but after falling in love with

306 Tang Xuehua, "Mi," *Wanxiang* special issue (1945): 86.

307 Ibid., 90.

308 Ibid.

309 Ibid., 85.

another man, her infuriated in-laws forced her to break off the relationship and return to a life confined to the “inner quarters.” After their death, she resumed public life and found an occupation as the warden of the nurses dormitory at the Suzhou clinic, where she and Ling meet.

When Ling towards the end of the novel finally visits Miss Zhou at her room to learn the last details of her story, Miss Zhou offers Ling her copy of “Jade Pear Spirit” (*Yu li hun* 玉梨魂, 1912, by Xu Zhenya 徐枕亚 (1889-1937)), one of the most widely read novels of the Republican period and a classic of the “Mandarinduck and Butterfly” school. Completely worn out from being read over and over again, Zhou explains that the story of Mengxia and Liying reminds her of her own romantic predicament. Just as sickness and the refusal to “age” and “move on” are akin to suicide, because they disrupt the flow of progress and the natural “givenness” of change (aging, loss, etc.), so is reading, because it places “the reader into the liminality between living reality and the dead figures of the imaginary.”³¹⁰ The lives of both Ling and Miss Zhou echo this disruption: while Ling's chronic illness is a form of temporal stagnation, Miss Zhou actually moves backwards in her biography, for instance by changing wardrobe from widow's black to the outmoded fashions of her youth such as putting a ribbon in her hair. As Lu Hua states: “She has completely lost any sense of her proper age and position.”³¹¹ Paradoxically, only the book follows the wear and tear of life: “The book cover was completely torn apart. It really seemed like it had been read countless times.”³¹² In effect, both the book and the photographic image textually perform the life, which the two main female protagonists are incapable of performing bio-logically.

While Ling refuses to accept Miss Zhou's copy of *Yu li hun*, because she has already read it, she does accept the photograph, with which the novel began and of which Miss Zhou has numerous copies. Both the countless reproductions of the image itself and the exchange between Miss Zhou and the chronically ill Ling, who are both unlikely or already incapable of rearing children,

310 Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body*, 157.

311 Tang Xuehua, “Mi,” 91.

312 *Ibid.*, 93.

constitute a homosocial reproductive gesture across generations, which is fueled by what Carol Mavor has termed a “reduplicative desire.”³¹³ But this desire, I would argue, is not directed towards the future through a reinscription of modern values and ideals into age-old tropes and narratives of femininity and female agency as in “Ghost Month,” but rather focuses on the past and the preservation of intimacy across generations and of “strange” and “outmoded” feminine practices, both sartorial and affective. It is Miss Zhou's stubborn refusal to quit staring at the doctor and his fiancée, despite not being mentally ill, as Lu Hua confirms, and despite recognizing the fictionality of her obsession (by drawing herself the comparison between her life and the novel *Yulihun*), that she remains an “enigma” to Ling even after learning her entire story.

At the end of the novel, the narrator “I” in the frame narrative adamantly insists on reading Miss Zhou symbolically as “just a weak woman, sacrificed to the shackles of the old moral system.”³¹⁴ However, her reading completely shocks Ling, who, although young and familiar with modern values, is fated to never be able to move forward in a way her friend's reading implies. What Ling and Miss Zhou share is that they are both incapable or unwilling to conform to the temporal thrust of reform and development and to subscribe to modern practices and values such as sartorial modernization, physical health and biological reproduction. Because Ling seems to have less sympathies for her friend than for Miss Zhou, who embodies the feminine encoded backwardness attacked in Ma Zihua's essay, it seems noteworthy that the character Ling is autobiographically inspired, as Tang Xuehua herself suffered from a chronic pulmonary disease.³¹⁵ While for Ma Zihua the female ghost symbolized the practices and world-views that should no longer have a place in modern China, “Enigma” presents a backward femininity, which is not only

313 Carol Mavor and Viscountess Clementina Hawarden, *Becoming: The Photographs of Clementina, Viscountess Hawarden* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), chapter 1.

314 Tang Xuehua, “Mi,” 95.

315 Meng Zhiyi, *Zhi shang guangyin*, 147.

disturbing and incomprehensible to this new world, but also creates a space, where women's stories are recovered and shared.

Just like Shi Jimei, Tang too stopped writing after 1949, but survived prosecution during the Cultural Revolution despite enormous hardship. The parallels between Shi and Tang's novels and their personal biographies are perhaps coincidental, but are to a certain degree coherent with the story of their literary success, which relied as much on their actual works as on the public's "infatuation with women writers"³¹⁶ and the excruciating minutiae of their lives and lifestyles. They represented a new generation of Chinese women, who could simultaneously embody the self-made spirit of the "new woman" and the poetic suffering of a Lin Daiyu, the apotheosis of sentimental femininity. At the same time, their rewritings of the classical phantom romance plot reveal that they also shared aesthetic ties to Shanghai's pre-war literary scene. However, Shi and Tang's female phantom figures murder and harass their lovers; they act and desire inappropriately. By focusing on the agency of "backward" and conservative women, their novels articulate a view of literary modernity, which embraces femininity in all its symbolic and practiced forms.

316 Huang, *Women, War, Domesticity*, 72.

Chapter 4:

Revolutionizing ghosts for a revolution against ghosts

1 No story there: Ghosts and superstition in Chinese socialist culture

In the previous two chapters I tried to show that both secularist reform zeal and anti-imperialist rhetoric, which tried to eradicate both figurative and non-figurative ghosts/*gui* from literature, and the affinity between the age-old female ghost narrative and gendered experiences of modernization created a literary milieu, in which, albeit under radically new conditions, ghost narratives became once again an important literary topic. But even for staunch secularist leftist writers the anti-ghost paradigm remained pre-1949 a rather abstract ideological notion, which did not necessarily discount ghosts from their imaginative fiction writing. However, when ghosts do appear in early socialist fiction, they are most often carefully divorced from their literary history in China and their religious connotations. This can be observed in Ouyang Shan's novel "Ghost Nest" (*Guichao* 鬼巢, 1936). While the ghosts, *gui*, of the novel's title refer both to the physically real nationalist soldiers and to the Communist victims of a mass assassination, who are now haunting an old theater, it is made very clear right at the beginning of the novel that the ghosts have here no longer anything to do with the "mysterious, monstrous and strange things"³¹⁷ conventionally found in Chinese ghost tales. Another example of leftist ghost fiction is the remarkable short story "The Buffalo" (*Niu* 牛, 1947) by the writer and scholar Yuan Changying 袁昌英 (1894-1973), who is today best known for her play "Southeast Flies the Peacock" (*Kongque dongnan fei* 孔雀东南飞, 1929). The novel explores the tender affection and care between a young boy and an old buffalo, who is wrongfully killed at the end of the novel. While a staging of the ancient Mulian mystery play is of no interest to the young protagonist, he still has a connection to animals and ghosts, which represent to him a private, innocent and imaginative sphere that can no longer communicate itself to the new human world of

317 Ouyang Shan, "Guichao," 594.

verisimilar language. In the end, the death of the old buffalo represents the disappearance of spirituality from a world, in which “the new age was slowly entering China's every corner.”³¹⁸

However, ghosts and ghost-associated rituals and artifacts appear in Yan'an culture production and then from 1949 onward always within judgmental discourses. A very incisive cinematic example is the critique of ghost marriages in the “The Red Detachment of Women” (*Hongse niangzi jun* 红色娘子军, 1961, dir. Xie Jin 谢晋 (1923-2008)), where the second female lead character Hong Lian 红莲 is forced to share her marital bed with a wooden replica of her deceased husband's corpse. Under Xie Jin's skillful direction, this image deftly captures both the rigor mortis of tradition as well as the physical and emotional pain such traditions continue to inflict. A literary example is Zhao Shuli's Yan'an fiction. In comparison to Xie Jin, Zhao Shuli develops in his novels a more complex view on rural “backwardness” and “superstition.”³¹⁹ However, even the most recalcitrant and old-fashioned peasant is under the benevolent guidance of Communism always brought onto the path of reform. A good example of such a transformation is Xiao Qin's mother San Xiang in “Xiao Erhei Gets Married” (*Xiao Erhei jiehun* 小二黑结婚, 1943), who towards the end of the novel finally decides to dress age appropriately and to take down the incense burning altar.

While fiction writers could reform ghosts, things were more complicated in Chinese stage drama, which relies strongly on a fixed repertoire of narratives and conventionalized role types. How should theater reformers adapt their iconic phantom heroines? Zhang Lianhong's case study on adaptations of the figure Li Huiniang from the Ming play “Red Flowering Plum” (*Hongmei Ji* 红梅记, late Ming, by Zhou Chaojun) in the 1950s and 1960s sheds light on the complexity of the “ghost question” in socialist China. Contrary to fiction, ghosts did not disappear swiftly from Chinese

318 Yuan Changying 袁昌英, “Niu 牛 [Buffalo],” in *Wuti ji*, ed. Zhao Qingge (Shanghai: Chenguang chuban gongsi, 1947), 10.

319 Zhao Shuli was as a child trained in divination and geomancy by his father. See: Richard King, *Milestones on a Golden Road: Writing for Chinese Socialism, 1945-80* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2013), 28.

theater and there were in the 1950s still drama critics, who advocated for “good ghosts” to remain on China's stages.³²⁰ But the controversy on the “harmfulness” (*you hai* 有害) of ghosts, in the wake of the enormous success of Meng Chao's *Kunqu* opera “Li Huiniang,” led to the complete disappearance of ghosts from China's stages until the end of the Cultural Revolution (with the exception of the model ballet version of “The White-haired Girl”). Overall, ghosts and religious rituals are rarely more than occasional side notes in socialist fiction from the Yan'an period onward and non-figurative ghosts only reappear in fiction after the end of the Cultural Revolution, most notably in experimental fiction from the late 1980s.

1.1 The class enemy as ghost

Although my subversive appropriation of the title of the socialist ghost story collection “Stories About not Being Afraid of Ghosts” underscores the revisionary trajectory of my case studies on modern Chinese ghost fiction, it simultaneously also highlights that ghosts did not simply disappear from modern China. In fact, the nearly complete absence of ghosts in literature from 1949 onward stands in stark contrast to the wide-spread proliferation of ghosts in political rhetoric and “ritual” from the late 1920s onward.

A good example of the conjunction of Maoist ideology and religiously encoded symbols and rituals are the white paper dunce hats “black gang elements” (*heibang fenzi* 黑帮分子) were forced to wear for public parades and “struggle sessions”.³²¹ First observed by Mao in 1927 in Hunan and widely used during the Cultural Revolution, these hats transitioned in the 20th century from an accessory for a ghost, especially in theatrical performances, to an instrument of humiliation on the national stage. Arguably the most important ghost narrative of Maoist culture is the *Yangge* folk opera “The White-haired Girl,” which was initially conceived of at the Yan'an Lu Xun Academy, but continually re-written and adapted throughout the socialist period and eventually became one of

320 Zhang Lianhong, *Lilian jinghun: Xin Zhongguo xiqu gaizao kaolun*, 150.

321 For a study of Maoist “political religiosities” see Vincent Goossaert and David A. Palmer, *The Religious Question in Modern China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

the model plays of the Cultural Revolution.³²² Its central slogan encapsulates the socialist narrative formula of personal and national development: “The old society forced humans to be ghosts, the new society turns ghosts into humans.”³²³ This developmental narrative designated not only the brute and evil face of feudalism and the life- and nation-threatening dangers of superstition, but symbolized also the socialist tale of personal and social transformation broken down into the simple formula of “socialism equals ghosts becoming humans.”

The relationship between religion and socialist literature has already been the subject matter of numerous studies. The Yan'an period represents in this regard a crucial turning point. Mao's “Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art” (*Zai Yan'an wenyi zuotanhui shang de jianghua*, 在延安文艺座谈会上的讲话, 1942) called upon writers and artists to produce accessible and persuasive literature for the readership in the Communist base areas. The process of popularizing literature and art entailed the adaption of local forms of storytelling, colloquial language, regional dialects and traditional literary forms as well as, less acknowledged, the incorporation of Western and May-Fourth traditions. This had the result, as David Wang puts it in his study of Communist literature from the 1940s, that socialist writers “initiated their readers into 'progressive consciousness' by refamiliarizing them with, instead of detaching them from, the 'feudal unconscious' inherent in traditional fiction.”³²⁴ Concerning more specifically ghosts, Huang Ziping shows in his study of 1950s to 70s novels how the antagonism between “revolutionary” and “counter-revolutionary” was symbolically expressed through recourse to a premodern terminology of righteousness and evil.³²⁵ Christian religion also played a role in revolutionary novels, as Li Yang

322 See Meng Yue “‘Baimaonü’ yanbian de qishi - Jianlun Yan'an wenyi de lishi duozhixing”; and Meng Yue, “Female Images and National Myth,” in *Gender Politics in Modern China: Writing and Feminism*, ed. Tani E. Barlow (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 118–36.

323 He Jingzhi and Ding Yi, *Baimao nü*, 94.

324 David Der-wei Wang, “Reinventing National History: Communist and Anti-Communist Fiction of the Mid-Twentieth Century,” in *Chinese Literature in the Second Half of a Modern Century: A Critical Survey*, ed. Pang-Yuan Chi and David Der-wei Wang (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 42.

325 Huang Ziping 黄子平, “Huilan” zhong de xushu “灰阑”中的叙述 [Narration inside the “chalk circle”] (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 2001). Note: The title of the book is a reference to the contemporary Hong Kong writer Xi Xi's 西西 novel “Fertile Town Chalk Circle Tale” (*Feituzhen huilan ji* 肥土镇灰阑记, 1988), which is based on

argues in his analysis of “Red Craig” (*Hong Yan* 红岩, 1961, by Luo Guangbin 罗广斌 and Yang Yiyan 杨益言) as a “red bible.”³²⁶ These studies share a similar analytical framework, wherein the new battles against the old, feudal and Western, but subconsciously appropriates and adapts those elements it seeks to excise.

However, the anti-traditional impulse, regardless of how successfully it consciously or subconsciously excised or recoded the feudal, is in socialist fiction conjoined to the communist demonology of the class enemy. As Haiyan Lee has argued, the class enemy is not the “ugly antithesis” of communist nationalism, but its “internal supplement.”³²⁷ This demonological paradigm requires both an elevation, or indeed resurrection, of ghosts from their feudal deathbed as culturally significant symbols, and simultaneously their debasement as manifestation of malignancy. Because class enemy narratives relied heavily on China's ancient ghost culture, ghost fiction retained a certain ideological relevance. Moreover, while Marxism regards religion and superstitious beliefs in ghosts and floating tables as a tool for class oppression, it nevertheless relies itself on “the magic of class-based nationalism to perform the integrating and legitimating functions of religion.”³²⁸ What is so interesting about the Chinese case, then, is the fact that the rejection of ghosts and the fantastic in life and in literature and their simultaneous socialist re-inscription became conjoined to the remolding of religious rituals and beliefs into the ideological form of class racism (also called classism).

I focused in the initial research stage for this chapter primarily on fiction, where ghosts and everything that is connected in some way to what could perhaps be called *enchanted consciousness* carry some relevance to the overall narrative. Two linked developments stood out to me: Firstly, ancient ghost-related beliefs and literary practices are recast as self-evident expressions of the anti-

the Yuan dynasty (1259–1368) *zaju* play “The Circle of Chalk” (灰阑记) by Li Qianfu 李潜夫.

326 Li Yang 李杨, *50-70 Niandai Zhongguo wenxue hingdian zai jiedu* 50-70 年代中国文学经典再解读 [*Rereading Chinese Literary Classics from 1950-1970*] (Jinan: Shandong jiaoyu chubanshe, 2006).

327 Lee, *The Stranger and the Chinese Moral Imagination*, 236.

328 *Ibid.*, 50.

revolutionary. I will elaborate on this process in more detail in my discussion of the novel “Uncle Gao” (*Gao Ganda* 高干大, 1943). Secondly, and more surprisingly, ghosts are frequently linked to questions of language, (political) literacy, and self-expression. For this reason, I have chosen to consider the “ghost question” in socialist realist fiction primarily from the vantage point of how it affected the (linguistic) construction of subjectivity. Although ghosts are during this period overall only a very marginal literary subject matter, stories about ghosts continued to be told. A focus on how socialist texts adapt the ghostly provides a suggestive supplement to our understanding of the intersection of Marxist humanism and Chinese socialist aesthetics. Foregrounding the politics of textuality and representation,³²⁹ my central premise is that the symbolic dichotomy between humans and ghosts operates not only on the (superficial) semantic level (i.e. as a topic in imaginative fiction), but also represents how class structures the Maoist language community.

I will first focus on the transformation of ghost-associated religious beliefs and literary practices in socialist literary culture. How are ghost narratives incorporated into socialist fiction? What is the symbolic work of ghosts? In my reading of Ouyang Shan's novel “Uncle Gao” I will try to show how the socialist adaptation of a centuries-old medico-religious discourse serves not only to critique rural superstition, but also transforms popular ghost beliefs themselves into a practice, from which the superiority of socialist modernization is necessarily inferred. “Stories,” on the other hand, reveals how state propaganda adapted the premodern model of elite literati self-fashioning through the cultural practice of collecting strange tales to establish a discourse of order and authority. Instead of focusing on the individual ghost stories, I argue that we can read the collection itself as a narrative.

In the second part of this chapter I then look at the divergent literacies of “humans” and “ghosts” in literary texts: What is the relationship of the “ghost” to language and the expression of the self? First I discuss two 1960s short stories by Zhou Libo, which take inspiration from classical

329 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 166.

ghost stories, but express less a concern for secular reform and center rather on the topic of the spoken and written word in conjunction with revolutionary subjectivity. I then read Zong Pu's short novel "Who am I?" (1979). Those labeled "ghosts" were during the Cultural Revolution not only condemned to violent persecution and humiliation, but simultaneously also deprived of the means to assert themselves as "human."

1.2 The language of humans and ghosts

To summarize, this chapter attempts to differentiate and analyze the various ways ghosts are put into "speech" and the symbolic work of the human-ghost opposition in Maoist literary discourse. This is in line with the general goal of this study to approach ghost fiction not as intrinsically antithetical to modernity, but to historicize ghost fiction and the various personal and aesthetic meanings it acquires, although this does not imply that the meaning of ghosts are at any given historical moment exhausted by their ideological "function." Given this diachronic focus, it may seem surprising that the most important theoretical text supporting my readings is Roman Jakobson's influential essay "Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances" (1956), in which he distinguishes two axes of speech, which functionally correspond to metaphor and metonymy. While I do adapt and modify his insights for the specific literary (con-)texts under discussion, because Jakobson does not concern himself with the ideological underpinnings of different speech patterns and their pathological manifestations, his model provides nevertheless a useful starting point for analyzing how the conjunction of ghost metaphors and classism engendered (counter-)revolutionary subjectivity in socialist fiction.

Roman Jakobson uses the terms metaphor and metonymy to designate not just figures of speech, but two fundamental cognitive processes, which structure every human sign system. From an analysis of two different types of aphasia, he draws the conclusion that two basic axes structure all aspects of language from the phonemic up until the discursive level. The paradigmatic function

of language, whereby one element can be substituted by another based on similarity, is represented by the figure of metaphor. Metonymy on the other hand represents the syntagmatic aspect of language, as it involves the combination of elements based on contiguity. Jakobson does concede that “a competition between both devices, metonymic and metaphoric, is manifest in any symbolic process, be it intrapersonal or social,”³³⁰ but that generally “either of the two gravitational poles may prevail.”³³¹ In the short appendix to this analysis he proceeds to make some very generalized assertions on the role of the metonymic and metaphoric in culture, for which he also inevitably drew the most critical backfire. In his view romanticism, symbolism, Russian lyrical songs and drama are predominantly metaphoric, while in realism, cubism, the epic and cinema the metonymic is the “line of least resistance.”³³²

In the introduction I briefly discussed some origins and meanings of the ghost metaphor during the Republican period and its import on the configuration of literary ghost discourses. *Gui* appear of course in a variety of contexts, where they acquire very different meanings, but they are in anti-ghost rhetoric in the early Republican period used predominantly as metaphors – be this for China's five “enemies” (itself a metaphor), as in Hu Shi's famous article, for the antiquated and conservative citizen, for the opposing political camp, for imperialists, etc. *Gui* are here used metaphorically, because they proposition an equivalence based on similarity, i.e. between an archaic, terrifying and ugly ghost world and something politically threatening or morally dubious in the present.

What is the cultural work of the ghost symbol used metaphorically? Firstly, it posits universal applicability by attributing “ghostliness” as an *essential* feature to something, for instance the Japanese. Secondly, and as a result of this, it does also not require any context, historical or

330 Roman Jakobson, *On Language*, ed. Linda R. Waugh and Monique Monville-Burston (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), 132.

331 *Ibid.*, 130.

332 *Ibid.*, 133.

otherwise, to legitimate its signifying power and be intelligible. Satirical ghost novels such as “Ghostland Diaries,” which I mentioned in the introduction, derive their comical bite precisely from the fact that they push this decontextualization to its limits, even though their sardonic humor is directed at concrete problems.

In contrast, the texts analyzed in the following shift in their use of ghosts towards the metonymic. This is not because the ghosts these texts speak of are materially or politically “real,” which the metaphoric ghosts can be too, but because they require a very specific context and location and are thus only meaningful within the limited context of a specific historical situation. The novel “Uncle Gao” is a particularly telling example of this shift towards the metonymic, because it is named after the novel's main protagonist and Ouyang Shan's participation in the land reform movement further cements the novel's aura of authenticity. The socialist realist novel is not only life-like and based on “real” experiences, but actually thrives to be itself contiguously related to the whole of the nation, its soil and its people. Its meaning and truth relies more than anything on context—a fact, which also sheds light on why many novels and plays were constantly rewritten and adapted.

As will become clearer in my closing analysis of the short story “Who am I?” by Zong Pu, Jakobson's essay is not only useful in understanding the use of language in socialist literature, but provides an interesting analytical framework for understanding the relationship between “engineered language” and subjectivity. Jakobson draws his examples not from “normal” speech, but from interview data of patients with aphasic disturbances, i.e. forms of impaired access to language as a communicative tool, which he groups into two categories: Similarity disorders and contiguity disorders. Patients with a similarity disorder have lost the ability to select and substitute linguistic units from the same group and, accordingly, context becomes tantamount to their ability to produce meaningful sentences. This type of aphasia is perhaps most visible in the patient's

inability to perform meta-linguistic tasks such as explaining one lexical item through another. By contrast, the contiguity disorder is characterized by an impaired ability to combine elements of the language code into meaningful sentences and patients suffering from this type of aphasia will produce agrammatical “word-heaps.”³³³ It is, in other words, the loss of the ability to follow the rules of a language and maintain “the hierarchy of linguistic units.”³³⁴

Transposing these insights to the historical context of languaging in Maoist China it is certainly more apposite to speak not of disorders, but rather of selective muteness or coerced speech. On the one hand, the Chinese state practiced something akin to Jakobson's similarity disorder by forcing language and literature to be literal, materially concrete and context determined. This minimizes language's ability to refer to anything beyond the immediate context and worldview. On the other hand, those persecuted for being “ghosts” were coerced into a contiguity disorder, not because a “ghost” didn't necessarily understand the rules of “proper” speech, but because nothing one said could still be meaningful. These differences in speech patterns available to those making ghosts, interpellating ghosts into existence, and those forced to recognize themselves in this interpellation as ghosts, counter-revolutionaries, demons, poisonous weeds, etc. is the core theme of Zong Pu's novel. My reading of socialist ghost narratives provides not only a historical supplement to Jakobson's structuralist theory of language, but also considers the identity politics of self-imposed or coerced aphasia and muteness.

Because CCP class discourse can be productively theorized as a type of racism,³³⁵ Rey Chow's analysis of languaging and racialization in “Not Like A Native Speaker” (2014) is also highly pertinent to my discussion, although she does not draw on the works of Jakobson. There exists a remarkable parallel between the racial politics of language she is describing and the

333 Jakobson, *On Language*, 126.

334 *Ibid.*, 128.

335 Barend J. Ter Haar, “China's Inner Demons: The Political Impact of the Demonological Paradigm,” *China Information* 11, no. 2–3 (1996): 54–85; Lee, *The Stranger and the Chinese Moral Imagination*.

“ghosting” of humans, especially during the Cultural Revolution. Provocatively juxtaposing Walter Benjamin's mystical thoughts on language and Louis Althusser's theory of ideology with the works of Frantz Fanon, Chow argues that racialization should be understood first and foremost as an “experience with language.”³³⁶ Her reading of Barack Obama's childhood memories of seeing the picture of a man, who had chemically bleached his skin, and Fanon's experience of being called a “negro” expose a “doomed trajectory”³³⁷ in this experience: it is neither possible to simply ignore the devaluation of one's own skintone as one is always already part of a (language) community, in which these hierarchies are inscribed, nor is it possible to come to terms with this, in Obama's case very literally, amputated subjectivity as it correlates sense of worth with tone of skin. In Chow's words:

What Fanon is describing, therefore, is not simply an instance of what we nowadays call hate speech, but also an ontological subtraction and contradiction: the laying-out of a trajectory of self-recognition from which the possibility of self-regard (or self-respect) has nonetheless, been removed in advance.³³⁸

Two consequences unfold from this: Firstly, the black man in Rey Chow's reading and the ghost in our case is not “nothing,” but “hailed as some thing – dirt, negro, nigger.”³³⁹ And secondly, both encounters are marked by a violent separation between human and ghost, white and black man, which Chow calls a “cut” to emphasize the epidermal dimension of racialized linguistic violence. But what is most pertinent perhaps to our present discussion is Chow's insight that the violence of this “experience with language” can be observed in the ways it linguistically amputates “those who bear the brunt of the cut's force/violence,”³⁴⁰ resulting in aphasia or total muteness. As Chow

explains, it is in the same language that this uneven relationship is constructed. While the fantastical

336 Rey Chow, *Not Like a Native Speaker: On Linguaging as a Postcolonial Experience* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 7.

337 Ibid., 6.

338 Ibid.

339 Ibid.

340 Ibid., 7.

is replaced with real horror, ghosts are translated into real anti-revolutionaries and classical ghost stories serve real and immediate political needs, those who were subjected to actual terror and who were named ghosts and demons were in this (linguistic) situation forced to either articulate their subjectivity through a language in which their words no longer had any meaning, or remain mute, voluntarily or coerced.

2 “Uncle Gao” and the political treatment of ghosts

In my analysis of “Uncle Gao” I argue that ghosts become a symptom. A symptom is just like metonymy based on the play of associations and contiguities. And just like metonymy, the symptom too stands for a larger pattern (of disease), of which it is a synecdochic representation. However, I give preference to symptom in this context for two reasons. Firstly, the symptom moves us away from a structuralist theory on different figures of speech, as broadly extended as these may be, to the field of ideology. Who is diagnosing what and how? The symptom is not an innate product of a given structure or system. Instead it draws our attention to the cultural forces, political interests and historical contingencies, by which ghosts as symptoms become symbolically invested. I do not use symptom in a Freudian/Lacanian sense of a (conflicting) desire (and in fact Lacan calls the symptom a metaphor, and desire a metonymy, which gives further evidence to the limitations of the metaphoric and metonymic as analytical tools in absolute terms). I draw the term symptom from Derrida's analysis of the first line of Marx' “Communist Manifesto”: “From the symptom, Marx draws a diagnosis and a prognosis. The symptom that authorizes the diagnosis is that the fear of the Communist ghost *exists*.”³⁴¹ To read something as a symptom is “performative,” because it posits “the real presence of the specter,” although by this it also brings about the “end of the spectral.”

The second reason for my preference of symptom over metonymy is that Chinese socialist realist novels themselves practice a cultural symptomology, through which ghosts are framed as a

341 Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 128–30.

(cultural, political) disease and bodily threat, for which, as we will see in “Uncle Gao,” writers could draw extensively on archaic medical discourses of ghosts as pathogenic forces. For instance, in the *yangge* opera “The White-haired Girl” the magical follicle transformation of the female protagonist Xi'er 喜儿, which gives the opera its title, is not left to stand by itself as a poetic symbol of the “ghosting” of women in the old society, but rather abstrusely explained with her lack of sunlight by living in a cave and a salt deficiency. The symptom has a location, a material basis, a historical context and is thus also susceptible to historical-materialist forces. But most crucially, Ouyang Shan's novel is still capable of acknowledging that a disease is not just an enemy of the body, but also something that requires care and understanding. This narrative of exorcist healing is at the core of its vision of socialist nation building.

2.1 Gao Ganda as revolutionary shaman

The organizational structures, policies and cultural doctrines put forth and tested during the Yan'an period decisively shaped the face of the Maoist state. Just as Yan'an became after 1949 the mythological origin of Communist China, so did Mao Zedong's “Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art” set a bench mark for socialist literary production, which continue to be held in high esteem to the present day. Although Mao can be viewed as the supreme “storyteller, myth-maker, logician and philosopher-king”³⁴² of the Yan'an community, Mao's policies and doctrines remained frequently abstract and underspecified. What constituted exactly, for instance, popularization or accessibility (*pujixing* 普及性) and how did writers strike the fine balance between political message and popular form, especially when they were not groomed into “peasant writers” such as Zhao Shuli?³⁴³ In the process of translating the abstract notion of “proletarian art” into actual texts, writers invariably came up with different solutions, which only over time gave

342 David E. Apter, “Discourse as Power: Yan’an and the Chinese Revolution,” in *New Perspectives on the Chinese Revolution*, ed. Tony Saich and Hans J. Van De Ven, East Gate Book (London, New York: Routledge, 2015), 201.

343 For a very incisive discussion of the developments leading to the cultural policies set forth in the *Talks* and the role of the “peasant author” in Yan'an literary production, see: King, *Milestones on a Golden Road*, Chapter 1.

contour to the notion of “revolutionary popular literature.” Even though the realistic and folkloric style of Yan'an fiction (for instance complex characterization of peasants and party officials with both weaknesses and strengths), would gradually disappear after 1949, it nevertheless set the foundation for the more radical revolutionary culture of the years to follow. While the ghost-fearing, sometimes ill-tempered and physically rather unattractive title hero of Ouyang's novel would be a highly unlikely candidate for the hero role in fiction after 1949,³⁴⁴ Ouyang's political adaptation of archaic ghost narratives is important, because it is perhaps the first text to tie the secular pedagogy of May Fourth fiction to the socialist vision of nation building.

“Uncle Gao” (“Uncle Kao” in the abridged 1957 English translation) is Ouyang Shan's first long novel after moving to Yan'an in 1938. Drawing on his own experiences of participating in the land reform movement in a remote Shaanxi village, the novel can be read, like many other works from the Yan'an period, as a form of fictionalized reportage literature, ideologically streamlined to persuade its readership of the benefits of Communism and its cultural and economic policies. Set in the years before the end of the war in the remote Leopard Valley (豹子沟), the novel chronicles the trials and tribulations of its title hero Gao Shengliang 高生亮 in developing a functional and prosperous rural co-op. But while the struggles of collectivization are the novel's main subject matter, its principal focus lies on the dangerous impact of rural superstitions, especially in connection with traditional medicine. Of all the threats Gao Shengliang faces (stubborn bureaucrats, lazy deputies, ignorant peasants), none is greater than the group of evil shamans and sinister dream diviners under the leadership of a young medicine man named Hao Si'er 郝四儿, who are ruthlessly exploiting an infant mortality epidemic. Ouyang Shan matches the differences between the central antagonists Gao Shengliang and Hao Si'er to their physical appearance. Gao Shengliang is described in the following:

344 It is also debatable if “Uncle Gao” is overall successful in the “accessibility” department, with its lengthy discussion of co-op structure and organization, the implementation of party rules and guidelines, etc.

Despite no longer being the youngest, he [Gao Shengliang] was a big-boned man with strong hands and legs, raven black hair and mustache. And although he had wrinkles all over his face, he did not seem old and his eyes sparkled like two black jewels.”³⁴⁵

Whereas Gao remains throughout the novel an idealized, but nevertheless authentic peasant character, “a member of the Communist Party, who has not yet completely changed his ways,”³⁴⁶

Hao Si'er receives a no less clichéd, but far less complex and sympathetic description:

Hao Si'er was a young man in his twenties. He was short, stinky and extraordinarily delicate and fair skinned. His eyelids and lips were both very thin and his nose was small and devious looking. Although he dressed like a peasant, he looked more the part of a minor shopkeeper.³⁴⁷ (1542)

Responding to the “will of the people”³⁴⁸ (人民的要求) to combat the epidemic and find a trained medical professional for the villagers, Gao Shengliang sets up a medical co-op, which soon turns the fate of the entire co-op around for the better and wins the trust of the peasants. Seeing his livelihood threatened, Hao Si'er starts spreading rumors about the evils of modern medicine.

Enlisting the help of Gao's own son and his wife, the daughter of the former head of the co-op, who is married to Hao, but was once promised to Gao's son, Hao stages an elaborate scenario of scary and strange occurrences, which eventually have the entire valley and Gao himself frightened into believing that they are being punished for letting modern (Chinese and Western) medicine into their homes. Inevitably, however, Gao Shengliang ultimately emerges victorious by killing Hao.

“Uncle Gao” is not one of the most renowned works of the socialist canon and Ouyang Shan himself is today best known for his novel “Three Family Lane” (*San Jia Xiang* 三家巷, 1959). It lies within the nature of literary propaganda that it is not intended to be a work of universal and

345 Ouyang Shan, “Gao Ganda 高干大 [Uncle Gao],” in *Ouyang Shan wenji*, vol. 4 (Guangzhou: Huacheng, 1988), 1484–85.

346 Ibid., 1487.

347 Ibid., 1542.

348 Ibid., 1481.

timeless appeal, but a text with a more or less clearly defined spatio-temporal and thematic scope. Ouyang Shan himself points out that the topic of rural collectivism as it is portrayed in “Uncle Gao” was already by the time of its second edition in 1960 rather dated. Like other collectivization novels, “Uncle Gao” has not yet made a comeback to contemporary readerships despite a growing “red nostalgia” trend. However, its propagandistic nature and out-dated subject matter do not discount “Uncle Gao” from consideration as an important literary text. This importance lies primarily in its appropriation and adaptation of literary discourses of ghosts and demons for a new “revolutionary popular literature.”

2.2 Symptom, syndrome, cure

Ghosts play an important role in premodern medical conceptions of the cosmological etiology of sickness. Because ghosts were viewed as a malignant force, which can invade the body of the living, they were up until late imperial times believed to be a possible cause for disease and death.³⁴⁹ The connection between ghosts and both physical and spiritual health can be further evidenced in the importance of spirit possession in Daoist ritual culture, where the shaman lets demonic forces enter his body to recalibrate the cosmological order for the social body of the community.³⁵⁰ As Judith Zeitlin shows in her seminal study on female ghosts in late imperial elite culture, the body of ghost literature, which flourished from the late Ming to the early Qing period, also took inspiration from medical discourses on the pathogenic properties of ghosts, but with a very different emphasis. Unlike the fiction in the previous chapter, however, socialist ghost narratives are less shaped by these artistically refined late imperial literary discourses of spectrality, than by earlier strange and supernatural tales, where ghosts are appeased through religious ritual (frequently this involves a proper burial) to restore harmony between the world of the living and the “strange” world of ghosts.

349 This medical discourse on ghosts is further elaborated in: Judith T. Zeitlin, *The Phantom Heroine: Ghosts and Gender in Seventeenth-Century Chinese Literature* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007), chapter 1.

350 Kenneth Dean, *Lord of the Three in One: The Spread of a Cult in Southeast China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 42.

Especially in Six Dynasties collections of anomaly accounts medical knowledge frequently appeared side by side with descriptions of strange creatures, abnormal occurrences, mythology, geographical knowledge, etc.³⁵¹

The plot structure of “Uncle Gao” closely follows the same narrative pattern as a medical treatment, which can be broken down into three stages. First, a strange symptom is observed. In this case an epidemic of stillborn children and other untimely deaths. The fact that only young children and woman meet these untimely deaths is not only a reflection of the high mortality rate associated with childrearing in combination with poor medical conditions. Early on in the novel we learn that Gao's wife too had passed away some years ago and that Gao had spent his entire savings on medical treatments, including traditional healers (the loss of his savings also has the result that his son cannot get married). Thus, Ouyang's anti-superstition novel opens with a gloomy and ominous atmosphere, as especially women and children, who meet an untimely and wrongful death, are prime candidates for becoming restless or vengeful spirits. These deaths are meant to foreshadow the haunting events to follow and a number of peasants in the novel actually plan to leave the valley for this reason, although all supernatural occurrences are in the end revealed to be the doing of the evil shaman Hao Si'er, the novel's chief villain.

The second stage of the narrative macro-structure is the diagnosis. Here, Ouyang ingeniously turns the figure of the shaman healer into the evil-doer, who enters the peasant's home and body, and becomes a decisive factor leading to the patient's death. In chapter nine, the wife of the peasant Luo Zhiwang 罗志旺 falls ill with childbed fever and Hao is brought in to administer his treatment. After scolding Luo for going to the co-op doctor first, he starts a series of rituals to

351 The “Classic of Mountains and Seas” (*Shanhaijing*, third century B.C.E. - second century C.E.) is perhaps the most well-known work of this encyclopedic genre, but I am referring here more specifically to the later anomaly account collections such as “A treatise on Curiosities” (*Bowuzhi* 博物志) by Zhang Hua 张华 (232-300 C.E) or the Tang collection “Miscellaneous Morsels from Youyang” (*Youyang zazu* 酉阳杂俎) by Duan Chengshi 段成式 (803-863 C.E) For a systematic discussion of early zhiguai accounts see: Robert Ford Campany, *Strange Writing: Anomaly Accounts in Early Medieval China* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996). On the *Youyang zazu* see: Carrie Elizabeth Reed, *A Tang Miscellany: An Introduction to Youyang Zazu* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2003).

exorcise the “Ghost of Blood,” whom he believes responsible for the woman's state. Hao's exorcist repertoire includes beating his patient with a willow whip and lighting fire crackers over her head, while she is kneeling in the rain. After no sign of improvement, he suggests the following treatment plan:

We now have to undress your wife completely and call upon the spirits to give that Ghost of Blood a good beating with the willow whip and a donkey hoof.³⁵² If she does not improve, we will use two thin hemp ropes to tie her middle fingers together and tighten the rope with a chopstick in the middle until the rope cuts into her flesh and the evil ghost feels the pain and leaves. If he still does not leave, we will have to look where he hides. If he is hiding inside the patient's mouth, we will have to shove donkey and horse dung into it. If it is hiding in the patient's nostrils, we will use a fire-hot nail to burn it out. This treatment has never failed.³⁵³

Luo Zhiwang, however, can no longer bear the site of his wife being tormented and sends Hao off. His wife, significantly weakened even further by Hao's treatment, dies only moments after Hao's departure. The many accurate details testify to Ouyang Shan's more than superficial knowledge of ritual healing practices.³⁵⁴ However, to the reader it is always made very clear that Hao is simply an impostor, driven by greed and jealousy rather than compassion. The symptoms sickness, untimely deaths, and economic woes caused by pricey shaman treatments have led us to the syndrome, i.e. shaman culture.

The third stage is the cure. Taking on the role of the healer or ritual master in traditional accounts of spirit possession, Gao Shengliang finally kills Hao Si'er, restoring the health care system and the harmony of the entire valley. While the destruction of Hao is described as a realistic

352 Black donkey hoofs are believed to ward off zombies.

353 Ouyang Shan, “Gao Ganda,” 1545.

354 Many of the practices described here correspond to the “demon medicine” practices described by Paul Unschuld in *Medicine in China: A History of Ideas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

life-and-death fight between two men, although they each act in a highly symbolic function, his role as a socialist healer is highlighted not only by curing Leopard Valley of the shaman plague. Ouyang actually drives this point home, when he towards the end of the novel describes how Gao Shengliang miraculously only sustained wounds to the left part of his body:

Certainly everybody is now wondering what happened to Gao Ganda? Don't worry, he did not die. Hao Si'er smashed into a rock and died, while Gao got away heavily injured. Apart from abrasions on his skin, his left leg had been crippled and on his forehead was a big hole. What was really strange is that he had during the days of the land reform sustained a scar on the left side of his face and during the Anti-Japanese war another one on his left temple, even though he was not at the front line. Now his left leg was lame. All of his injuries were always on his left side.³⁵⁵

In her seminal study on the numerous adaptations and revision of “The White-haired Girl,” Meng Yue has argued that we should view the relationship between revolutionary art and its popular resources in folk mythology and ethics not simply as a hostile takeover. Rather, the new political discourse relies on the authority of what Meng terms the “folk/popular order” (*minjian zhuxu* 民间秩序): “Only what the folk order determines to be evil, can also be a political evil; only those who threaten to destruct the popular order, can at the same time also be political enemies; and only those protecting this order have political and narrative legitimacy. To a certain degree, it seems that the folk order creates the parameters of the political discourse.”³⁵⁶

In similar fashion, Ouyang Shan portrays economic reform as a complex negotiation with this “folk order,” through which not only politics is “popularized,” but also the popular becomes a site for the configuration of the political. While anti-superstition pedagogy frequently appears in

355 Ouyang Shan, “Gao Ganda,” 1711. The entire passage on his injuries is left out from the English translation.

356 Meng Yue, “‘Baimaonü’ yanbian de qishi - Jianlun Yan’an wenyi de lishi duozhixing,” 80. For a critique of Meng's article see He Jixian, “The White-Haired Girl: Limitations and Potentials of the New Interpretation,” in *Debating the Socialist Legacy and Capitalist Globalization in China*, ed. Zhong Xueping and Ban Wang, trans. Zhou Chenshu and Zhu Ping (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 219–38.

realist fiction outside of Yan'an (for instance Wu Zuxiang's 吴组缃 (1908-1994) satire on lingering superstitious beliefs in "Bamboo Hermitage" (*Lüzhu shanfang* 蓁竹山房, 1932)), these texts differ strongly from "Uncle Gao" as they are not concerned with the urgent need to implement a new political order. I would indeed argue that "Uncle Gao" is the first modern ghost novel, which is socialist in the sense that it does not have an "enlightenment worldview," but a "proletarian worldview."³⁵⁷ Although the topic of collectivization may have ensured "Uncle Gao" a short expiry date, it importantly situates superstition within the struggle for a new economic and political order. Indeed, instead of merely critiquing or ridiculing superstition, Ouyang lets his figures work through their ghost beliefs to arrive at the inevitable conclusion that ghosts are the workings of anti-revolutionary forces. Although the party and socialist ideology guide the gradual disentanglement of these two forces throughout Ouyang's very long novel, they do not act as a magical separating agent. In fact, it is because shaman culture is identified as the disease of the rural community that it cannot simply be negated, but needs careful study and indeed care, which Ouyang's detailed descriptions of shaman practices make very clear.

How ideological reform predicated itself on the medico-spiritual logic of "superstition" is most clearly visible in the figure of Gao Shengliang himself. Gao Shengliang's struggle to establish the medical co-op, his tireless efforts to negotiate between the party and the peasants, mirror his fights and struggles against Hao and his clique. And both are physically and emotionally threatening to himself (he actually has a collapse in chapter eleven) and his household (Hao marries Ren Guihua, who was once the fiancée of Gao's son). In the end, it is Gao, the "not yet fully reformed peasant," and not the party, who brings about the final defeat of Hao. After Hao is made out by two young party cadres, the district officials put together two platoons to search for Hao and arrest him. Gao Shengliang is initially left out and forced to stay back. As a sometimes skeptic, other times

357 Chen Xiaoming, "Socialist Literature Driven by Radical Modernity, 1950-1980," in *A Companion to Modern Chinese Literature*, ed. Zhang Yingjin trans. Qin Liyan (West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, 2015), 82.

convinced believer in ghosts (at one point he truly believes that a witch or ghost flew to his house, miraculously entered without opening the door and cut a snake in two) he is up until the very end of the novel still frightened by the mysterious wailing sounds Hao is sending out into the valley. It is, however, precisely because of this fear that he can in the end recognize Hao for the malignant and ghostly force he is and finds the strength to confront him. Following the mysterious “ghost sounds” Hao is sending out into the valley, Gao tracks Hao down for the final showdown:

Those sounds were so miserable, so chilling, so strange, and seemed now so close to Gao's ears, that his breath stopped, his mouth opened up wide and his eyeballs protruded. In that moment his spine turned numb, his heart and entire body trembled simultaneously and his legs were so weak they wanted to kneel on the ground. He wanted to lift them up, but no matter how hard he tried he could not move. No sooner had this brief weakness passed than Gao had gotten a clear head. The silhouette in front of him and his beliefs led him to the final conclusion: This is not a ghost, this is a human; not a woman, but a man. And this was not any man, but Tiger Valley's young sorcerer Hao, who stopped at no evil deed! This filled him with anger, hatred and contempt, which now gave him courage. Zhao Shijie and his men could not be far away, so he had to seize the opportunity. And he shouted: “Hao Si'er!”³⁵⁸

To put Mao's “Talks” into practice meant not only to make literature more accessible and popular, but also to make the popular an expression of a new reality. While Gao's secular convictions do waver, it is precisely his attachment to this archaic world of ghosts, which make him hear Hao's ghost sounds before anybody else and which give him the courage to confront him. The new cultural and political order can only take hold, when, to borrow from Marx' famous dictum on the

358 Ouyang Shan, “Gao Ganda,” 1705.

relationship between theory and practice, popular superstition aspires to become an expression of the new ideology.³⁵⁹

Ouyang's secularized supernatural novel is the only work I found, which gives its hero actual supernatural abilities, but it does anticipate the ever increasing mystical powers ascribed to socialism itself in the subsequent years.³⁶⁰ However, from a literary historical standpoint more important is how Ouyang adapts the narrative of superstition as such. His (anti-)ghost story articulates no longer a battle between superstitious and secular worldviews, but between revolutionary and anti-revolutionary forces. Moreover, Gao Ganda is both patient and physician. Through him diagnosing and healing “superstition” becomes a metonymy for the process of establishing the rural co-op and ultimately the socialist nation.

Although anti-superstition campaigns did not subside in the years to follow, they are only rarely a subject matter in imaginative fiction. Superstition pedagogy was soon better served by visual genres such as cinema and museum exhibitions, which was partially a result of the “inverted logic” to keep class enemy culture publicly visible, while simultaneously debasing it through an ethnographic gaze.³⁶¹ Another problem with the fictional treatment of ghosts and “ghosts” lies in the ambiguity of aesthetic representation as such, because it almost invariably accrues value to the represented “object,” even if this is entirely negative. At the same time, and in contrast to Ma Zihua's predictions, the political developments raised the relevance of ghost stories to socialist China.

359 I draw this reference from Fredric Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible* (London: Routledge, 2013), 37.

360 Christos Lynteris, *The Spirit of Selflessness in Maoist China: Socialist Medicine and the New Man* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 100. On Maoism as a political religion see Daniel Leese, *Mao Cult: Rhetoric and Ritual in China's Cultural Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) but also S. A. Smith, “Talking Toads and Chinless Ghosts: The Politics of ‘Superstitious’ Rumors in the People's Republic of China, 1961–1965,” *The American Historical Review* 111, no. 2 (January 4, 2006): 405–27. The larger-than-life socialist hero may equally be viewed as a type of socialist “saint”, see: Yi Ying 易瑛, “‘Zaoshen’ yu ‘yushen’ - Lun minjian zongjiao xinyang yu 20 shiji xiaoshuo de zhengzhi xushi ‘造神’与‘娱神’——论民间宗教信仰与 20 世纪小说的政治叙事 [‘Making Gods’ and ‘Entertaining the Spirits’ - On the Political Narration of Folk Religious Beliefs in 20th Century Novels],” *Zhongguo wenxue yanjiu*, no. 4 (2012): 101–5.

361 Lee, *The Stranger and the Chinese Moral Imagination*, chapter 5.

3 “Stories” and the language of collecting

Sparked by Mao's passing reference to the *Liaozhai* ghost story “Green Phoenix” (*Qingfeng* 青凤) at the sixteenth “Supreme State Conference” (最高国务会议) in 1959, the Chinese Academy of Sciences (*Zhongguo kexue yuan* 中国科学院)³⁶² received orders to complete an anthology of ghost stories to illustrate that China “fears nothing.”³⁶³ A first draft was apparently distributed at a “Central Work Conference” that same year, but it was only in 1961, after multiple revisions by He and Mao himself, and only after the draft had also been corrected and approved by other high-ranking party officials, including Zhou Yang 周扬 (1908-1989), Zhou Enlai 周恩来 (1925-1976), Shen Congwen 沈从文 (1902-1988), Liu Shaoqi 刘少奇 (1898-1969) and Deng Xiaoping 邓小平 (1904-1997), that “Stories” was introduced to the public.³⁶⁴ The confrontation with Peng Dehuai 彭德怀 (1898-1974) at the Lushan 庐山 conference in 1959 and the growing dissent with the Soviet Union distracted Mao temporarily from his ghost story project with the result that editorial work on “Stories” spanned almost the entire years of the “Great Famine” (1959-1962). This added Soviet “revisionism” and “natural disasters” to the long list of ghosts China had to combat. He Qifang puts the *raison d'être* of “Stories” as follows:

The ghosts [gui] of these stories do not exist, but in this world there really are numerous things similar to ghosts. These may be big, such as imperialism and its lackeys in various countries, modern revisionism, catastrophic natural disasters and certain members of the class of landlords and the bourgeoisie, who have not yet been properly reformed and are trying to regain their authority in certain low-level organizations to restore the old order. Or

362 Since 1977 this is the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (*Zhongguo shehui kexue yuan* 中国社会科学院).

363 Chen Jin 陈晋, “Zai ‘bu pa gui’ de beihou - Mao Zedong zhidao bianxuan ‘bu pa gui de gushi’ de qianqianhouhou 在‘不怕鬼’的背后——毛泽东指导编选《不怕鬼的故事》的前前后后 [Behind the Scenes of ‘Not Afraid of Ghosts’--The Whole Story on Mao Zedong’s Guiding Role in editing “Stories About Not Being Afraid of Ghosts],” *Dang de Wenxian* 3 (1993): 67–74.

364 Mao had previously referenced specifically *Liaozhai* tales on numerous occasions, including in his famous essay “On Contradictions” (*Maodun lun* 矛盾论, 1937). For a detailed summary of the “Stories” publication history see: Mi Songyi 弥松颐, “‘Bu pa gui de gushi’ de chuban zhaji 不怕鬼的故事》出版札记 [Notes on the Publication of ‘Stories about Not Being Afraid of Ghosts’],” *Minzhu*, no. 9 (1999): 36–37.

they may be small, such as some ordinary trouble or a mistake at work, etc. [...] The only difference between them and ghosts is that they really exist, whereas ghosts do not exist.³⁶⁵

The publication schedule of “Stories” was highly concerted. The introduction and three selected stories were given pre-publication in “Red Flag” (Hong qi 红旗) and “People's Daily” (Renmin ribao 人民日报), before in March that same year People's Literature Publishing House brought out the first commercial edition.³⁶⁶ Significantly shortened translations in German, English, French, Russian, Japanese, and Vietnamese were published simultaneously by the Foreign Language Press, which included illustrations by the painter Cheng Shifa 程十发. Not counting *baihua* and *lianhuanhua* (连环画 “picture book”) editions, a total of six editions exist to date of which only the 1999 edition diverges strongly from the original.³⁶⁷ The editors of the newest edition wrote a new preface, in which they argue for the continued relevance of “Stories” (they highlight in particular Falun Gong as a new threat to “socialism with Chinese characteristics”) and augmented the total number of stories from sixty six to a round one hundred. This edition was furthermore accompanied by the tandem publication “Stories About not Believing in Gods” (*Bu xin shen de gushi*, 不信神的故事, 1999). The following discussion will center on the second print run of the first edition from 1961, as this is the most widely circulated text, on which all subsequent reprints up until the 1999 edition are based.³⁶⁸

365 I modified the official English translation so as to adhere closer to the original text. Zhongguo kexueyuan wenxue yanjiusuo 1961: 4-5; The Institute of Literature of the Chinese Academy of Sciences 1961: 4-5. In the following I give references for the English translation.

366 These are “Song Dingbo Catches a Ghost” (*Song Dingbo zhuo gui* 宋定伯捉鬼, original from the 列异传 “Records of Marvels” attributed to Cao Pi 曹丕 (187-226)), “Black Magic” (*Yaoshu* 妖术, shortened from Pu Songling's eponymous original story from “Liaozhai's Records of the Strange” and “Ghosts hide from Jiang Sanmang” (*Gui bi Jiang Sanmang* 鬼避姜三莽 by Ji Yun 纪昀 (1724-1805)), which are each accompanied by a vernacular translation by the poet and scholar Yu Guanying 余冠英.

367 I was not able to determine the exact print run numbers for each edition. In the 1999 preface the editors give the very low total number of 235 000 for the six editions based on the original anthology in classical Chinese. However, there exist numerous *baihua* and *lianhuanhua* versions of “Stories,” for which print runs seemed to have been significantly higher. For instance the 1979 *lianhuanhua* version published by *Renmin meishu chubanshe* had a print run of 1,4 million.

368 The first and second print run from 1961 differ slightly. The first included six stories, which do not appear in the second print run, where on the other hand a *Song* tale from the *Lei Shuo* 类说 (ca. 1136) by Zeng Zao 曾慥 was added, totaling seventy one stories. Furthermore, the first print run was printed in a classical style with vertical text, running from right to left, and traditional characters.

Apart from the addition or changing of titles in some cases and the elision of short passages, the editors did not change the original texts. Nevertheless, the specific re-reading, or misreading, and editing that shaped “Stories” is just as much expression of a new aesthetico-political practice as Ouyang Shan's newly penned work. I will not assess the book's philological scholarship, because neither am I qualified to undertake such an analysis nor is this within the purview of the present study. Instead I focus on the configuration of a socialist literary ghost discourse: How do these age-old Chinese ghost stories relate to national and global revolutionary discourses in the 1960s? What kind of relationship between literature and reality does “Stories” construct? And how can we relate the language of ghost story collecting to the violent persecution of “ghosts” in the years to follow? Putting my questions this way emphasizes that I view “Stories” not as the “world's oddest anthology of ghost stories,”³⁶⁹ an idiosyncratic curio of China's revolutionary history. Neither should we hastily dismiss “Stories” as a compilation of texts carefully dissected out of Chinese literary history with an ideological scalpel. Rather, I treat “Stories” as a specific configuration of the relationship between literary text, (collective) subjectivity and external reality.

3.1 The language of humans and the trickery of ghosts

“Stories” was conceived as a publication with a very concrete political message for the Chinese people and the world and not part of an anti-superstition campaign.³⁷⁰ Accordingly, superstition is not among the long list of “ghosts,” against which China is fighting. And although the editors repeatedly state that “ghosts do not exist,” they do in fact acknowledge that these stories were written with the conviction that ghosts are real. Unlike the peasants in “Uncle Gao,” however, the socialist readers the editors were addressing in 1961 (in this case at least initially primarily local cadres) could within the logic of socialist development no longer be mired in superstition.³⁷¹ And

369 Tony Allan and Charles Phillips, *Ancient China's Myths and Beliefs* (New York: The Rosen Publishing Group, 2011), 136.

370 For a different opinion see Christopher Marsh, *Religion and the State in Russia and China: Suppression, Survival, and Revival* (London: A&C Black, 2011), 175.

371 Actual anti-superstition campaigning did continue throughout the 1950s and 60s, which saw the publication of such works as “Atheism has defeated religious belief” (*Wushenlun zhansheng le youshenlun*, 无神论战胜了有神论

just as historical-materialist teleology excuses the classical ghost story for insufficient figurativeness, it also necessitates their contemporary interpretation in relation to external realities. What ghosts were to ancient people, reactionaries and imperialist are to Communist China. Superstition designates no longer the fear of ghosts, but the “backward” mindset of those, who do not yet fully understand that “the apparent 'power' and 'strength' of imperialism and all reactionaries at certain times is, historically speaking, merely a transient phenomenon, [...]”³⁷² The ghost stories themselves, as He Qifang explains, are therefore not used “to illustrate the materialist ideas of ancient China,” but are intended to raise the readers level of “political understanding.”³⁷³ As such, they perform the dual task of teaching readers Mao's revolutionary strategy of “strategically despising the enemy” and, as He Qifang admits to a lesser degree, of “tactically taking him serious.”³⁷⁴ Simultaneously, they act also as a reminder that “there are still plenty of devils, ghosts and goblins in the world, and it will take some time to wipe them out.”³⁷⁵ These ghost stories are thus to be read as historical blueprints for the battle against “ghosts” in the present.

How can we classify “Stories”? Partially at least, this revolutionary adaptation of a classical Chinese literary discourse is a result of the privileged role literature and art occupy in non-Western modernities. They constitute the only field, which expresses cultural uniqueness, authenticity and continuity, when everything else is viewed as derivative and belated.³⁷⁶ Also, the predilection for demonic and superstitious metaphors in official rhetoric went well beyond “Stories” and flourished especially during the Cultural Revolution.³⁷⁷ Although, taken at face value, the human and the

(1958), “Do ghosts and gods exist?” (*Shijie shang you guishen ma*, 世界上有鬼神吗, 1962), “The Secret behind so-called ghosts and gods”, “*Guishen*” *de mimi*, “鬼神”的秘密, 1963), “How does witchcraft deceive?” (*Wushu shi zenyang pianren de*, 巫术是怎样骗人的, 1965), and many more.

372 The Institute of Literature of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, ed., *Stories about Not Being Afraid of Ghosts* (Peking: Foreign languages press, 1961), 3.

373 *Ibid.*, 2.

374 *Ibid.*, 12.

375 *Ibid.*, 15.

376 Julia Lovell, *The Politics of Cultural Capital: China's Quest for a Nobel Prize in Literature* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006).

377 Fengyuan Ji, *Linguistic Engineering: Language and Politics in Mao's China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2004), 195.

ghostly distinguishes “us” from “them,” I argue that the pairing also symbolizes a deeper running opposition between language as a vehicle for self-realization and language as a tool for deceit, for which the discourse of ghost story collecting provides an important framework.³⁷⁸

All anthologies are never merely a straightforward reproduction of the past, but the genre “Stories” approximates most closely is indeed the Qing anomaly account collection, of which Pu Songling's *Liaozhai zhiyi*, Yuan Mei's *Zi bu yu* and Ji Yun's *Yuewei caotang biji* are the most important representative works and which make up half of the stories included.³⁷⁹ Analyzing the nexus between the sophisticated Qing anomaly account and the literary expression of selfhood, Lydia Chiang convincingly argues that, in nuce, these collections of strange tales represent a mode of “self-expression through tales told about others and by others.”³⁸⁰ She shows that while a communal discourse of the anomalous in relation to subjectivity does inform these older collections, the individual choices of which subject matter to include, preferences in structure and style, put the figure of the author into sharp relief. Although in the case of “Stories” the party's authorship, the subject collecting/writing, is disguised through the use of old ghost stories, it was early on made very clear that Mao had personally been heavily invested in the publication and commemorative publications rarely fail to include a re-print of his notes on He Qifang's draft.³⁸¹ Accordingly, the writer/reader does not find meaning in the individual stories, although this is of course the collection's alibi, but in the collection itself. To collect, arrange and display textual objects is just as much “a thing whose meaning is governed by myself alone”³⁸² as collecting material objects.

378 As Barend J. Ter-Haar argues, not only revolutionary language, but also class violence reveals certain structural affinities to premodern “demonological paradigms”. See Ter Haar, “China’s Inner Demons: The Political Impact of the Demonological Paradigm.”

379 In the index of books published in the PRCh in 1961, “Stories” (listed respectively in the literature 文学, literacy and culture education 脱盲与文化教育, and classics 古籍 sections) is described as a collection of 70 (sic!) stories taken from classical *biji*, see: Quanguo zongshumu 1961.

380 Chiang, *Collecting The Self*, 52.

381 And of course the stories underwent rigorous editing. I have found twenty major changes to the original texts, mainly changed or added titles and excised passages, and there are a number of explanatory footnotes, which serve mostly lexical purposes, but also at times include ideological commentary.

382 Jean Baudrillard, “The System of Collecting,” in *Cultures of Collecting*, ed. John Elsner and Roger Cardinal, trans. Roger Cardinal (London: Reaktion Books, 1994), 7.

In fact, the collection as such is the book's main content, rather than the individual stories, which convey variations on the same unchanging theme of brave men fighting off, deceiving and ridiculing ghosts. It does not matter from which period, in what kind of social context and in which literary genre the ghost stories were written. The syntagma of this narrative collection is thus synechdochic, because each tale represents a token of the same type of ghost story. Wrested both literally out of their textual and symbolically out of their historical contexts, each tale is put in service of making “the past useful for the present” (*gu wei jin yong* 古为今用) and functions as a guarantor of the self-evident homogeneity of “Stories.” Because “the component texts gain power by being 'representative,' and the collection becomes something more than the sum of its parts,”³⁸³ they collectively tell a narrative of collecting as such.

The crucial question we should be asking then, I believe, is not why Mao wanted to disseminate his ghost-fighting message to local cadres, which he had already done in a number of speeches, but rather why he chose to do so in the form of a ghost story collection. A possible connection could be drawn between the collection and the historical context, when we consider how collecting relates to the formation of subjectivity. In this respect, Baudrillard's rather judgmental (psycho-)analysis of the figure of the individual collector is useful, because he foregrounds the role of collecting in mediating the relationship between subjectivity and reality:

It is because he feels himself alienated or lost within a social discourse whose rules he cannot fathom that the collector is driven to construct an alternative discourse that is for him entirely amenable, in so far as he is the one who dictates its signifiers – the ultimate signified being, in the final analysis, none other than himself.³⁸⁴

Because Baudrillard is most interested in the particular mind-set of the collector, his analysis of collecting as a language spoken through objects focuses on how the collection talks to the collector

383 Leah Dilworth, *Acts of Possession: Collecting in America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 8.

384 Baudrillard, “The System of Collecting,” 24.

himself. What he does not consider is the social dimension of this discourse, which is, however, always present in any collection. Mieke Bal concludes her analysis of collecting as a narrative precisely with this point. She foregrounds how hostility is always a “major factor” in any collection.³⁸⁵ Her examples include the elimination of rivals, the accomplishing of “taste”, competition of expertise, etc. When we transpose her insights onto the collectively enacted and state-promoted narrative of collecting in “Stories”, we can adapt this list to include cultural authority by constructing and disseminating an “indigenous” formulation of revolutionary struggle and the domination of historical meaning. He Qifang himself makes it very clear that the “Stories” project was a response to a specific political situation:

The Institute of Literature of the Chinese Academy of sciences started compiling this book in the spring of 1959 when, all over the world, imperialism, the reactionaries in various countries and the revisionists organized a big anti-China chorus; by the summer of that year the compilation was basically completed. That was the time when revisionists inside the country rose in response to international revisionism and launched their frenzied attack against the leadership of the Party. We decided then to make a further careful selection from the first manuscript and enrich its content.³⁸⁶

If we consider He's martial rhetoric in relation to language as “Maoist technology,”³⁸⁷ we could add here that the human-ghost competition represents not only the fight of “dialectical materialists” against “reactionaries” and natural calamities, but also authoritative use of language itself through which “objective reality” becomes intelligible and revolutionary subjectivity is constituted. Contrary to humans, ghosts only have “tactics” and “tricks,” which are not a language, because they do not actually “say” anything, are outside the “law of history and of actual life” and can only “interfere” through terror and deceit. In this respect, the arbitrariness of the ghost stories included

385 Bal, “Telling Objects: A Narrative Perspective on Collecting,” 114.

386 The Institute of Literature of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, *Stories about Not Being Afraid of Ghosts*, 15.

387 Haiqing Yu, *Media and Cultural Transformation in China* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 139.

provides the necessary, negative foil to the temporal order and ideological clarity established through the language of collecting.

Viewed from this perspective, the stories themselves support this reading. Ghosts frequently put on an elaborate show with the hopes of frightening their human adversaries, while the human protagonists are not only brave, but are also always capable of seeing through the ghost's deceit and evil shenanigans. One example is the story “Black Magic” by Pu Songling, which was reprinted unamended except for the excision of the last paragraph—a commentary by the “historian of the strange” on the perils of engaging with the fortune-teller business.³⁸⁸ As one of only three stories printed in the “Red Flag” promotion of the book, it exemplifies the editing approach of “Stories” as a whole. The story goes as follows: A young Mr. Yu went to see a fortune-teller, who told him that he would die within three days, but that with the help of his magical abilities Mr. Yu's fate could still be changed. Although Mr. Yu believes that the fortune-teller might be right in his prediction, he refuses to pay him a fee for his services and decides to take matters in his own hands. Sure enough, at nightfall of the third day the fortune-teller's predictions come true. First, a shapeshifting midget with a spear appears, which the vigilant Mr. Yu quickly cuts in half with his sword. But upon closer inspection, he discovers that the magical creature was made of paper. Then a different monster appears, “ugly and fierce as an ogre,” which he too slashes to pieces, whereupon he realizes that this creature is actually a clay image. The third and final attack is by a “monstrous giant,” who after being defeated by Mr. Yu's superior swordsmanship turns out to be a wooden figure. However, Mr. Yu's ghostbusting mission does not stop here, because he soon discovers that it was the fortune-teller, who had sent for him to be killed. The first time Mr. Yu tries to confront him, the fortune-teller can escape by making himself invisible, but the second time Mr. Yu arrives prepared with a

388 For the discussion here I am using the English translation of “Stories,” but this tale has also been translated elsewhere, for instance as “Sorcery” in Pu Songling, *Strange Tales from Liaozhai - Vol. 1* (Fremont: Jain Publishing Company, 2008), 99–103.

bucket of dog's blood, which acts as a counter-agent to the fortune-teller's magic. By splashing the blood on the sorcerer, Mr Yu manages to subdue him and hands him over to the authorities.

It is possible to read “Black Magic” as a parable on revolutionary languaging, because it resonates with He Qifang's commentary in the introduction that the revolutionary's “subjective understanding” conforms to “objective reality.”³⁸⁹ The revolutionary exposes the material truth of the magician's trickery as he can expose the monsters and ghosts as mere paper, clay and wood (which also echoes Mao's famous dictum that “all reactionaries are paper tigers”). It is also no coincidence that this story was chosen to be featured as an exemplary story of the collection as it is ultimately the red blood, symbolizing the red revolution, that leads to the final victory over the fortune-teller's “black magic,” black being the color most prominently encoded as anti-revolutionary during the Cultural Revolution.³⁹⁰ “Stories” thus confirms the ideological centrality attributed to storytelling and language rituals such as “speaking bitterness” (*suku* 诉苦) in the Maoist state.³⁹¹ It usurps through its hegemonic language of collecting the political territory of being human, whereas ghosts and counter-revolutionaries (including nature) are chaos, deceit, randomness and incoherence. But although ghosts are no longer part of the revolutionary community (and hence do not require treatment), they can nevertheless still cause trouble and harm if the Chinese people fail to recognize them. To put it in Jakobson's terminology, the ghost/class enemy proceeds metaphorically, i.e. distracts through terror and illusion from his covert activities to disguise his secret plans and desires. The revolutionary, on the other hand, does not disguise himself, but rather acts metonymically as an expression of revolutionary truth.

During the Cultural Revolution no new editions of “Stories” came out and He Qifang himself was prosecuted as a “black gang element.” Old stories from China's feudal past were not the

389 The Institute of Literature of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, *Stories about Not Being Afraid of Ghosts*, 5.

390 A discussion of color symbolism during the Cultural Revolution can be found in Ji, *Linguistic Engineering*, 188–93.

391 Ann Anagnost, *National Past-Times: Narrative, Representation, and Power in Modern China* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).

most welcome reading material during this politically tumultuous period. However, another factor working against “Stories” might have also been the format of the anomaly account collection, history writing traditions in China more broadly and their frequent use of auctorial commentary to control the interpretation of historical events. While the collecting of ghost stories does not show ghosts the same care and understanding as in “Uncle Gao,” it does still acknowledge that it is only through interpretation that a new “moral” of these old stories can come to life. Indeed, He Qifang makes this point in the following commentary on “Black Magic,” which functions as a replacement for Pu Songling's original ending:

If Mr. Yu had not shown himself to be unafraid of magic powers, ghosts or monsters, and if at the same time he was not fully alert and prepared, arms at hand and skilled at fencing, wouldn't he have been killed by the apparitions and devils sent by the fortune-teller? [...] Of course, had it not been for Comrade Mao Tse-tung's [sic] profound theoretical generalizations and the guidance of his teachings, it would not be so easy for us to see the meaning and moral of these stories.³⁹²

“Stories” still regards ghost stories as “fables and satires,” which, to be sure, need to be collected and read in the right way, but does not yet conflate text and reality. However, therein also lies the paradox that “Stories” fails to resolve: ghost fighting stories of the past only reveal through metaphorical reading the metonymic/contiguous relationship between revolutionary subjectivity and reality. During the Cultural Revolution this paradox was tragically solved by treating “black elements” literally as ghosts.³⁹³

392 The Institute of Literature of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, *Stories about Not Being Afraid of Ghosts*, 14.

393 A large number of studies have noted the religious substrate of violence perpetrated during the Cultural Revolution, see for instance Ter Haar, “China’s Inner Demons: The Political Impact of the Demonological Paradigm.” For an account of the religious underpinnings of cannibalism during the Cultural Revolution see Donald S. Sutton, “Consuming Counterrevolution: The Ritual and Culture of Cannibalism in Wuxuan, Guangxi, China, May to July 1968,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 37, no. 1 (1995): 136–72. Dikötter's study recounts many stories of Red Guard violence, in which folk religious motifs can be discerned such as forcing someone to eat excrement as hungry ghosts do. See Frank Dikötter, *The Cultural Revolution: A People’s History, 1962-1976* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016).

4 Speaking as a human and as a ghost

Language plays a central role in all revolutionary discourses and, as Elizabeth Perry and Li Xun argue, “one measure of a movement's revolutionary impact is the extent to which it generates new wordings.”³⁹⁴ But what is the connection between this “language environment,” the configuration of (counter-)revolutionary subjectivity, modes of expressing the self and the “human project” in revolutionary literature? I want to now turn to literary texts, which flesh out more concretely the lines of struggle and the various cuts and “splits,” as Mieke Bal calls it, on which the socialist narrative of not fearing ghosts operates.³⁹⁵ Because the following texts center on language-related topics such as story-telling, prisoner interrogation, “speaking bitterness” and rural literacy campaigns, they shed light on the relationship between the Maoist ideology of class and literature as a Maoist technology of becoming human, i.e. a subject of the Chinese revolution. I first read two short stories by Zhou Libo, which capture the linguistic environment and in one case the “soundscape” of Maoist China, and then end with Zong Pu's short novel published in the post-Mao period, which reveals the importance of non-human narrative perspectives to the literary reflection of China's revolutionary history.

4.1 Revolution talk: two 1960s short stories by Zhou Libo

Zhou Libo (1908-1979) was one of the most critically acclaimed writers in socialist China and is today best known for his two long novels “The Hurricane” (*Baofeng zhouyu* 暴风骤雨, first part published in 1948 and second part in 1949) and “Great Changes in a Mountain Village” (*Shan xiang ju bian* 山乡巨变, 1958). While rural superstition is also treated in the latter novel, I want to discuss here two short stories Zhou wrote in the 1960s. Both in “Storytelling” (*Fangu* 翻古, 1964) and in “Strange Tale from the Literacy Campaign” (*Saomang zhiyi* 扫盲志异, 1963) the fantastical

394 Elizabeth J. Perry and Li Xun, “Revolutionary Rudeness: The Language of the Red Guards and Rebel Workers during the Cultural Revolution,” in *Twentieth-Century China: New Approaches*, ed. Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom (London: Routledge, 2003), 1.

395 Bal, “Telling Objects: A Narrative Perspective on Collecting,” 114.

and the superstitious are not merely narrated as objects for criticism and reform. Instead the humanly and ghostly demarcate the dividing line between the community of meaning and its spectral other.

“Storytelling” opens with a peaceful scenery of a Yunnan village life, where people gather to peel tea buds. A group of children urge an old grandpa to tell them something about the ocean, which they have never seen, hoping to hear some marvelous tale of the “dragon king of the sea” (*hailongwang* 海龙王).³⁹⁶ But as thoroughly reformed peasant, he decides to seize the opportunity for some timely political education and offers them instead a glimpse into life before liberation, when a drought lost him his lease on a small piece of arable land and his ensuing dire poverty forced him to work for the same evil landlord, who had forced him out of his lease. Obviously the children are surprised and disgusted by what they hear and express at the end their gratefulness for their forefathers struggles and vow to “never forget their sacrifices.”³⁹⁷

When political propaganda appropriates the affective bonds these communal storytelling activities promote, it has to perform the double act of discrediting its own cultural roots, while at the same time becoming as much an “ancient” story as possible. Consider the muddled logic in the following brief episode: when grandpa remembers how a sorcerer or shaman had been hired to heal his wife, whose sickness, the reader attuned to the laws of cosmological balancing, may read as a direct result of the catastrophe that had broken down on them (drought and loss of his lease), the ideological framework of the narrative demands that he states such an activity a waste of money, although he obviously participated in the events.

But more interesting to me than the interdependences and latent tensions between the socialist horror tale and the supernatural story, which the children initially hoped to hear, is how

396 Zhou Libo, “Fangu,” in *Zhou Libo duanpian xiaoshuo ji* 周立波短片小说集 [*Zhou Libo’s Short Stories*] (Beijing: Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe, 1979), 282.

397 *Ibid.*, 290.

storytelling is foiled against coerced and voluntary silence before liberation. A literal translation of the title would actually be “opening up the ancient.” The narrator's explanation of *fangu* as the transmission of “ancient and modern knowledge, fantasies, sorrows and pleasures, as told by the elders, from one generation to the next, forever and always”³⁹⁸ resonates with Walter Benjamin's definition of the story as based on knowledge experience (*Erfahrung*) (in contrast to the novel, which is predominantly focused on momentary experience (*Erlebnis*)).³⁹⁹ Socialist narratives on pre-liberation China foreground especially the *Erfahrung* of suffering, which is related to language in two ways: On the one hand, it is the inability to articulate and form resistance. Because people are treated like “farmstock” and because they have yet to learn about Communism, they are left with no choice but to follow the commands of an empty stomach, rather than their rebellious heart.⁴⁰⁰ On the other hand, silence gestures also at the future possibility of full self-realization/articulation, because it also appears in the crucial interrogation scene, where the Communist suspect refuses to talk to the enemy, even if this means death. This is the destiny of grandpa's older brother, who is tortured to death, because he refuses to give up a local leader of the rebellion.

“It does not matter whether he knew his whereabouts or not, he would have never told that pack of demons anything.” The middle school students interrupted with outrage.

“Yes, of course, even if you know something you never reveal anything to the enemy. A real man can accept the consequences of his actions and Shun Tao was a real man. They interrogated him, tried to seduce him, tortured and frightened him, but he never wavered in his conviction to answer everyone of their questions with 'I do not know.' This made Cao

398 Ibid., 281.

399 Walter Benjamin, “Der Erzähler,” in *Walter Benjamin: Illuminationen. Ausgewählte Schriften*, vol. 1 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977), 385–410.

400 Zhou Libo, “Fangu,” 286.

Mingchen and Ding Laoman furious so they brought out the stomping poles⁴⁰¹ and tortured him until he started bleeding out of his eyes. But Shun Tao still refused to speak.”⁴⁰²

Interrogation and torture play a vital role in socialist narratives, because they allow for the historical silence of the oppressed to be framed not only as a sign of weakness, but also as an act of rebellion. Just as withholding information is the very literal refusal to communicate, storytelling is its polar opposite: community, value, care and memory, which are at the same time the articulated achievement of the revolution, but simultaneously also reach back into time immemorial through oral storytelling as an expression of folk ethics.

A similar opposition appears in “Strange Tales from the Literacy Campaign” (*Saomang zhiyi* 扫盲志异, 1963), but in a much more light-hearted and comical manner. It is the story of a conservative peasant who first suspects his two daughters-in-laws' male teacher of making improper advances and then has similar misguided thoughts that a newly appointed female teacher is motivating his son's studies for the wrong reasons. The title reference to the *zhiguai* genre makes it very clear that the father's apprehension towards co-education is not only misguided, but unnatural in a cosmological sense as it violates the moral order and immanent cosmology of the new world. The old man of course just barely meets the criteria of this new world as a “middle peasant” (*zhong nong* 中农), who had for a long time secretly harbored admiration for the lifestyle of landlords and “not believed in the party,” because he was under the influence of the “numerous slanderous rumors about the Communist party spread by the Nationalists.”⁴⁰³ As the first teacher

explains, spreading rumors and keeping peasants illiterate is “the trickery previously monopolized

401 The term used here is *caigang* 踩杠. Apparently, this torture method involved tying heavy poles to the hands and back calves of the kneeling detainee, which were then weighed down by the interrogators, and was also applied during the Cultural Revolution. See: Shui Luzhou 水陆洲, “Wenge xilie zhuanqi: Sanshiwu qingcha wu yi liu 文革系列专题: 三十五、清查五·一六 [Special Report 35 from the Cultural Revolution Series: Interrogating the May 16 Counterrevolutionary Clique],” *Redchinacn.net*, November 4, 2013, accessed December 6, 2016, <http://www.redchinacn.net/portal.php?mod=view&aid=13612&page=12>.

402 Zhou Libo, “Fangu,” 289.

403 Zhou Libo, “Saomang zhiyi,” in *Zhou Libo duanpian xiaoshuo ji* (Beijing: Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe, 1979), 271.

by the landlords, rich peasants and the capitalist class to put on airs and with no respect for humans.”⁴⁰⁴ And he goes on: “Today, the party and the government require all workers and farmers to learn culture and not to be open-eyed illiterates.”⁴⁰⁵ In this beautiful world of peasant literacy there is youthful laughter⁴⁰⁶ and an entire tapestry of sounds of prosperity and abundance such as frogs vigorously croaking and a swollen mountain river, which are repeatedly referenced throughout the story.⁴⁰⁷ The not yet properly reformed father, on the other hand, is the one with the secret longings, who finally has no other option but to “bite his teeth,” i.e. keep silent, because he realizes that his fears have no political and moral validity and his language has no basis in reality.⁴⁰⁸

In both of Zhou Libo's short stories, storytelling, memory, (political) literacy, and national prosperity are conjoined through the core theme of personal and national self-realization. Standing against a vague historical background of a supernatural/superstitious past, the revolutionary enemy only operates through rumors, deceit, trickery, lies and unfounded suspicions. Language actually only realizes its full potential as a communicative tool after liberation. Herein lies another importance of the interrogation scene. It showcases both the innate spirit of righteousness of the Communist fighter and reveals that the interrogator's world view is inherently incomplete and will therefore never be able to stop “the irresistible power of the wheels of history.”⁴⁰⁹

4.2 A talking ghost: Zong Pu's “Who am I?”

Just as words and stories make revolutionaries, a random comment or slip of the tongue could be construed as a crime against the people. In “Who am I?” Zong Pu narrates the last delirious thoughts and memories of the scientist Wei Mi 韦弥 as she is wandering aimlessly through the streets after the shocking discovery of her husband's corpse. Both had been subjected to grueling

404 Ibid., 276.

405 Ibid., 277.

406 Ibid., 280.

407 Ibid., 265, 266, 270.

408 Ibid., 280.

409 The Institute of Literature of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, *Stories about Not Being Afraid of Ghosts*, 6.

struggle sessions by university colleagues and neighbors and the story ends with Wei Mi ending her life as well. Instead of questioning her tormentors and the ideological system, she performs something akin to a struggle session against herself by continually raising the same tormenting question: “Who am I?” In the end, her mental crisis leads to complete corporal and linguistic dissolution of the self: “I am ...!”⁴¹⁰ If we apply Jakobson's model of aphasic patterns to Zong Pu's story, this outcome can be predicted. In the contiguity disorder, the last word to be preserved is invariably the first person pronoun, as it is the least dependent on grammatic context.⁴¹¹

Wei Mi's mental breakdown is translated into two (quasi-)mythical narratives of exile, which Zong Pu uses to express Wei Mi's experience of persecution and humiliation. The first is the biblical garden of Eden, from which man was banned after eating from the fruit of knowledge.⁴¹² Zong Pu ingeniously recasts man's ban from the heavenly realm as the experience of intellectuals (like herself), who the hallucinating Wei Mi now sees crawling on the ground like snakes, forever banished from the heavenly. Moreover, she inverts the moral valences of the heavenly and the earthly in her last delirious moments, when she sees the character *ren* “human” flouting up in the sky.⁴¹³ Even though Wang Jing, who otherwise holds the novel in rather high esteem by arguing that “any study of the modern history of the Chinese problematic self should begin with this unostentatious story,”⁴¹⁴ sees this symbol as a sign of the authors' “hollow congratulatory homage to a figurative humanism,”⁴¹⁵ she fails to mention that the earthly is actually the realm, to which Zong Pu wants to bring humanity back: “Only when *ren* has returned to earth, can there be a real spring.”⁴¹⁶ Upon closer inspection of the floating character “human,” Wei discovers “black spots”

410 Zong Pu, “Wo shi shei?,” in *Zong Pu daibiao zuo* 宗璞代表作 [Representative Works of Zong Pu] (Zhengzhou: Huanghe wenyi chubanshe, 1987), 99.

411 Jakobson, *On Language*, 126.

412 Zong Pu, “Wo shi shei?,” 96.

413 Ibid., 99.

414 Jing Wang, *High Culture Fever: Politics, Aesthetics, and Ideology in Deng's China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 34.

415 Ibid., 35.

416 Zong Pu, “Wo shi shei?,” 99.

like herself. These turn out to be other “bones, snakes and insects digging in to it [the character *ren*], pushing it, biting it! They wanted to overthrow and break 'human' into pieces, so that they could once again walk in human glory.”⁴¹⁷

The other foil for Zong Pu's impressionistic short story is Kafka's “The Metamorphosis” (1915), which resonates not only in the symbolism of Wei Mi's wounded insect body,⁴¹⁸ but also in her perception of self-alienation as becoming-insect. Nevertheless, her hallucinatory fantasies of the self are not exclusively gothic horror fables of faceless insects and snakes, but also give contour to a poetic realm, in which these wounded insect bodies turn for brief moments into “white flowers”⁴¹⁹ and wild geese:

In that moment, Wei Mi felt like she was flying with this group of geese. She remembered the year 1949, when she had crossed the Atlantic to return to her homecountry, had hurriedly taken a plane from Shanghai to the already liberated Beijing and the plane had to find a window to make its descent amidst the bombs exploding around them. [...] She was flying home, flying towards the revolution! My home, my beloved mother! The revolution that great furnace!”⁴²⁰

Wei Mi's flight into revolutionary fervor finds its dead end in mid-air, when she suddenly stumbles to the ground. Her suicide by drowning then takes her even further “underground,” where she joins the other insect-intellectuals. It is against the Maoist cult of the human that Zong Pu pits a small army of wounded insects, who in the story only Wei Mi can hear and understand.⁴²¹ However, “Who am I?” shows that, in hindsight, it is this subterranean/subaltern voice that remains audible in the new era. By dissolving the symbolic coherence of the human narrative into a entomological gothic tale, Zong Pu's short story vividly captures the invasiveness of the human paradigm all the way

417 Ibid., 99.

418 Ibid., 97.

419 Ibid., 95.

420 Ibid., 98.

421 Ibid., 97.

down to the microscopic level of dust and insects. Zong Pu's alternative aesthetic of selfhood is certainly fragmentary, incoherent and therefore aphasic, but less in the sense of producing “word heaps” and more in the sense of an aesthetic technique, which experiments with bricolage and allegory to imagine alternative ways of being intelligible.

5 China's voice

The imagination of China's modernization along the metaphorical axis of muteness and literacy was not a Maoist invention and finds at least one important precursor in a speech Lu Xun gave in 1927 in Hong Kong entitled “Mute China” (*Wusheng de zhongguo* 无声的中国), which provides an interesting foil to the political value placed on language and literacy in socialist China, the distinction between humans and ghosts, and the literary politics of life, death and haunting.

In this speech, Lu Xun's main target is *wenyan* 文言, written classical Chinese. Lu argues that classical Chinese still served China well up until the Ming dynasty, but was then so brutally squashed under Manchu rule that it turned into an “antique curio,” which is now obstructing China's path towards modernization. As Lu Xun puts it :

To restore this for many years now mute China, is not an easy task. It is just like ordering a dead person: “Come back to life!” I don't understand much about religion, but I think this would indeed constitute what in the field of religion is considered a “miracle”.⁴²²

In the following he explains the importance placed on language reform not only to China's “literary revolution,” but to China's prospects of becoming a voice on equal foot with other nations. His concluding remarks frame his thoughts again within the life and death metaphor: “We have two choices: We can either embrace classical Chinese and perish, or give it up and live.”⁴²³

China's muteness is the result of anachrony and Lu Xun's advocacy for *baihua* stresses synchronization via the logic of parallelism: once spoken and written Chinese have become

422 Lu Xun, “Wusheng de Zhongguo 无声的中国 [Mute China],” in *Lu Xun quanji*, vol. 4 (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1987), 13.

423 Ibid., 15.

synchronized, China as a nation will be contemporaneous with the rest of the world. And although Lu Xun's rhetoric operates heavily with religious metaphors, language reform is for China nothing less, but also nothing more than an existential question. Literacy is a way of finding life in the new world, a way of catching-up and not about exclusion. Hence, if China does not reform, she will simply die. Ghosts are here absent, because this death, in Lu Xun's view, would be absolute.

The languaging scenarios in socialist China discussed in this chapter echo Lu Xun's ideas in as much as both stress the important role of language to China's modernization. And both share a somewhat similar rhetoric, which relies heavily on religious symbols and metaphors. However, underlying Lu Xun's concept of literacy is an inclusionary vision. It is about joining the world, whereas in for instance "Strange Tales from the Literacy Campaign" literacy and its sonic extensions such as frog croaking and laughter index the extent of a subject's revolutionary transformation. Literacy is here not about joining the world, but the Chinese revolution. And naturally, once this political system breaks down its language system collapses as the linguistic breakdown of the protagonist in Zong Pu's short story vividly captures. But her novel also reveals the great irony that the socialist ghost-fighting legacy set the path for the politically subversive direction the Chinese ghost story would take in the post-Mao period.

Chapter 5: Figurations of the inhuman in Jia Pingwa's *Baiye* and Yu Hua's *Di qi tian*

1 Past and future ghosts

Two years after Mao's death in 1976 and the end of the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese literary system recovered almost completely and the emergence of a tidal wave of “scar”-literature (*shanghen wenxue* 伤痕文学) that dealt predominantly with individual tragedy and hardship during the Cultural Revolution and took an oftentimes very critical tone towards the party, was as good a sign as any that the pinwheel of the state's ideological compass had shifted in a more liberal direction. While literature and the arts remain vulnerable to shifting ideological positions and political opportunism,⁴²⁴ at least regarding supernatural figures such as ghosts and fairies, censorship and official criticism has almost completely ceased. Meanwhile, in television and cinema, where there exists a law against the representation of supernatural figures, cultural workers doing the state's bidding are much more concerned with the policing of violence and pornography than with superstition.

Yet, almost all major writers of the post-Mao period have written novels and stories with ghosts or other figurations of the uncanny (see introduction). There are various reasons for the renewed importance of spectral perspectives. With the collapse of a totalizing socialist culture institution, as I argued in the preceding chapter, the moral valences of humans and ghosts, to a certain extent, switched places. While the entymological perspective in Zong Pu's “Who am I?” focuses on individual experience, other writers have used inhuman figures, either as subject matter or narrating consciousness, to explore more complex issues of national history and individual memory, trauma and amnesia. Mo Yan, who likes to invoke Pu Songling as his spiritual mentor, has produced some of the most interesting novels in this genre, notably “The Reunion of Comrades”

⁴²⁴ A detailed account of the shifts in the „literary weather“ of the 1970s and 1980s can be found in Eugene Perry Link, *The Uses of Literature: Life in the Socialist Chinese Literary System* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2000), 15–36.

(*Zhanyou chongfeng* 战友重逢, 1993) and “Life and Death are Wearing Me Out” (*Shengsi pilao* 生死疲劳, 2006).

At least two further reasons for the renewed interest in ghosts and other inhuman figures need to be mentioned. One is the reception of foreign literary concepts such as Latin American magical realism and European modernism. For instance, Zong Pu, Can Xue and Yu Hua have all expressed their indebtedness to the works of Franz Kafka.⁴²⁵ Another reason is the search for alternative, non-realist literary modes through the revival and adaptation of premodern literary forms, including *chuanqi* and *zhiguai*. Examples of new experiments in the *zhiguai* genre include early experimental fiction by Yu Hua such as “1986” (*Yi jiu ba liu* 一九八六, 1987), Jia Pingwa's short story collection “Stories from Mount Taibai” (*Taibaishan ji* 太白山记, written in 1982), and, once again, Mo Yan, with the short story collection “Supernatural Talk” (*Shenliao* 神聊, 1993). I will return to the premodern cosmological (or moral-philosophical) concept of the strange and cosmographic genre of the *zhiguai* later on in my discussion.

The majority of ghost novels from the contemporary period address issues of memory, trauma and the writing of alternative histories and rediscovered tradition. For instance, Wang Anyi's “A Celestial Match” (*Tianxian pei* 天仙配, 1997) explores the contestation between state and local narratives of the past, which resurface when a party official lays claim to the corpse and life story of a posthumously married revolutionary heroine, but the local villagers uphold the importance of myth and ritual order over national memory politics.⁴²⁶ The literary search for tradition is the unifying theme of “root-searching literature” (*xungen wenxue* 寻根文学) and film, mostly from the 1980s, and represents an effort to rebuild Chinese culture out of the wasteland left by the Cultural

425 Qi Shouhua, *Western Literature in China and the Translation of a Nation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) chapter 5.

426 This short novella is discussed in Ban Wang, *Illuminations From The Past: Trauma, Memory, And History In Modern China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004) and Andrea Riemenschneider, *Karneval der Götter: Mythologie, Moderne und Nation in Chinas 20. Jahrhundert* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2011).

Revolution, although this ethnoromantic desire may turn out to be just as deadly, as demonstrated by Su Tong's short story "The Completion of the Ritual," which I discussed in the introduction. What both of these perspectives share is a strong focus on liberating or restricting notions of the past and of backwardness, in temporal or cultural terms. Crucially, most of these works were written before the violent suppression of the Tiananmen student protests in 1989, after which most of the experimental and daring writers, who had brought Chinese literature back to the world stage during the early 1980s, turned to writing more easily digestible and profitable fare (including Yu Hua, whose latest novel is analyzed in the following discussion). By the early '90s the high-tide of experimental ghost fiction had ebbed off and it seemed as though consumerism had not only replaced religious beliefs more effectively than May Fourth and socialist modernizers ever had, but also reduced the stubbornly returning voices of literary ghosts into mere whispers.

This death sentence, however, came too fast. New social, economic and environmental crisis also created seismic shifts in China's religious landscape, where ritual networks are today regaining importance in community building and environmental protection.⁴²⁷ While Chinese literature is rarely as directly inspired by these re-emerging religious traditions as in the case of Jia Pingwa's novel "White/Night," the revival of various religious practices has more generally helped to counter the increasing reduction of the spectral to a metaphor for the ruthless and degraded habitat that China's economic miracle created with a more vibrant, optimistic and grass-roots oriented perspective on ghosts.

In this last chapter I investigate literary representations of ghosts in relation to China's ongoing and vast social transformation and its consequences, for instance labor migration and

427 Ann Anagnost, "The Politics of Ritual Displacement," in *Asian Visions of Authority: Religion and the Modern States of East and Southeast Asia*, ed. Charles Keyes, Laurel Kendall, and Helen Hardacre (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994), 221–54; Kenneth Dean and Zhenman Zheng, *Ritual Alliances of the Putian Plain. Volume One: Historical Introduction to the Return of the Gods* (Leiden, Brill, 2009); Prasenjit Duara, *The Crisis of Global Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

environmental degradation. The texts I discuss are the two urban ghost novels “White/Night” by Jia Pingwa and “The Seventh Day” by Yu Hua, which both accrue a central role to ghosts and the spectral in China's swiftly changing economic and social landscape. In both works, the spectral designates not a failure to come to life as in China's uninhabited “ghost cities” (*guicheng* 鬼城) or the atrocities of capitalism as in Arundhati Roy's “Capitalism: A Ghost Story.” Rather, the ghostly and the inhuman offer cultural perspectives of development for the socially disenfranchised. Furthermore, both novels share a similar post-secular perspective as they blur the distinction between the religious and the secular, the private and the public, the irrational and the rational, and in Jia's case the economically profitable and the ethical. In “White/Night,” for instance, a religious performance turns into a mode of voicing political protest. And in “The Seventh Day,” the hierarchies of secular, capitalist society have also taken over the afterlife, where deceased businessmen and government officials have a VIP waiting room and enjoy expedited cremation services.

But while examples such as the aforementioned may bring the distinction between secular and non-secular spaces into question, they still do so in secular terms, because they translate what is other and potentially irrational into forms of meaning-making which are entirely commensurable with a Weberian developmental rational, in which the religious may serve entirely non-religious purposes and is in fact subject to the same rationalization process as all other aspects of social life. Instead, I see the post-secular perspective of these novels most developed not in their incorporation of religious elements into the urban experience, but in their exploration of how this hybrid space fosters various new networks and exchanges with what Rosi Braidotti sums up as “non-human, post-human and inhuman forces.”⁴²⁸ The unburied dead in “The Seventh Day” and the fantastical figures in “White/Night,” such as a reborn, a man that turns into an infant, and another that becomes

428 Rosi Braidotti, “In Spite of the Times The Postsecular Turn in Feminism,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 25, no. 6 (January 11, 2008): 16.

an insect, are a way of using predominantly ancient Chinese traditions and beliefs in Jia's case, and mostly a generic, globalized brand of Christian spirituality in conjunction with a Daoist eco-topia in Yu's, not only as a poetic resource, but also as aesthetic models for dynamically engaging with the complexities and contradictions of China's transformation in the post-Mao period. Exploring spiritual possibilities glossed neither in religious nor non-religious terms, both novels bring attention to the importance of affective and aesthetic resources in imagining post-humanist and post-secularist perspectives. At the same time, it will also become clear that these works share, to a certain extent, concerns similar to the ghost fiction studied in the preceding chapters, most notably in their insistence on breaking down the boundaries between the material and the immaterial, the cognitive and the affective.

Although I cannot fully assess here the entire spectrum of political and philosophical debates on post-secularism, I give in the following a short overview on current debates in and on post-secularism in order to clarify my usage of the concepts post-secular, post-human and inhuman and how they pertain to the study of Jia and Yu's novels. My readings will proceed then to focus specifically on the perhaps unexpected intellectual affinities and intersections between Jia and Yu's literary engagement with anomie, social injustice and figures of the inhuman in China today and the moral and aesthetic concerns expressed in the premodern concept of the strange.

2 Post-secular, post-human, inhuman

What does the term secular designate besides the institutional separation of the state and the church? Weber's secularization hypothesis is well-known. It equates modernization with the disenchantment of the world, because as science progresses, human beings become capable of making decisions based on reason rather than faith. Thus, the secular does not simply mean “not religious,” but rather designates the steadily growing space of the social and political, while the religious falls into the sphere of the individual and the private – and in the event of some secular

eschaton vanishes completely. Therefore, whether the term secularism is used descriptively or proscriptively, it always involves the conviction that religion will or should not be considered a matter of public interest.⁴²⁹

Whether religion has returned or the religiosities of everyday life were simply not recognized by scholars,⁴³⁰ it is today quite clear that Weber's modernization theory seems no longer adequate. Although the notion of a post-secular age is highly contested,⁴³¹ there is at the very least a broad consensus that “a revival of the debate on the relationship between religion and the public sphere”⁴³² is currently taking place. However, anti-secular and non-secular positions vis-à-vis secularism need to be distinguished. While anti-secularists and non-secularists alike share the conviction that beliefs have or should have a public vector, they differ sharply in their reasons for rejecting secularism, or one particular version of secularism. Anti-secularists uphold religious doctrine, morality, “tradition,” and so forth, against the institutions of the secular state. Christian extremist violence against Planned Parenthood in the U.S.A. is one highly mediatized example of a movement with an anti-secular agenda. The temporal politics of anti-secular post-secularism are backward-looking in a restorative sense and frequently aligned with politically conservative agendas and their attendant racist, neo-colonialist and sexist ideologies. By contrast, non-secular post-secularism does not necessarily reject the notion of secularism tout court, but highlights rather its tacit exclusionary assumptions, its inglorious historical legacy and its intellectual rigidities. Non-secular perspectives are numerous and encompass diverse approaches such as neo-pagan feminism,

429 Interestingly, writing in 1932 Gu Jiegang argued against the abolition of traditional ritual festivities with the argument that these allowed women an important respite from domestic confinement, see Gu Jiegang 顾颉刚, “(Lou Zikuang) ‘Xinnian fengsu zhi’ xu (娄子匡)《新年风俗志》序 [Preface to ‘New Year Celebration Customs’ (by Lou Zikuang)],” in *Gu Jiegang quanji* 顾颉刚全集 [*The Complete Works of Gu Jiegang*], Beijing di 1 ban, vol. 15 (Beijing Shi: Zhonghua shu ju, 2010), 547–49.

430 Partha Chatterjee, “The Nation in Heterogeneous Time,” *Futures* 37, no. 9 (November 2005): 925–42.

431 Gregor McLennan, “The Postsecular Turn,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 27, no. 4 (2010): 3–20.

432 Braidotti, “In Spite of the Times The Postsecular Turn in Feminism,” 5.

eco-spiritual community building and a wide range of what Rosi Braidotti summarily refers to as “non-theistic brands of situated neo-humanism.”⁴³³

From a humanities studies perspective, post-secularist research agendas involve not just the recognition that beliefs are relevant to modern life and political practices, and that self-professed secular institutions also rely on various practices, which can be viewed as religious. Post-secularism, more importantly, also studies beliefs, faith and religious formations not as an a priori contradiction to modernization and science.⁴³⁴ Post-secular and cosmopolitan perspectives align on this point; so-called backward religious movements such as Islamic Jihad, just like cosmopolitanism itself, constitute a mode of “world-making,” which is very much in touch with 21st century realities and its tele-technologies, although Islamic Jihad lacks a dynamic ethical framework.⁴³⁵ As such, we can observe that secularism is not without faith, and neither is religion simply irrational and backward.

Furthermore, post-secular critiques of political subjectivity as predicated on (Western) rationality and science have not only drawn attention to gendered and racial biases in secularization theory—for instance the depiction of Europe as secular, rational and masculine and the Middle East as religious, backward, feminine, etc., but also advanced possible alternative models for “oppositional consciousness” and non-secular civic engagement.⁴³⁶ These include affirmative engagement with post-human formations such as software codes and non-human forces such as animals and sentient mountains.⁴³⁷ Indeed, because of the importance of the environment in non-anthropocentric models of political agency and post-human ethics, Rosi Braidotti goes so far as to posit that an “eco-philosophical dimension is essential to the postsecular turn.”⁴³⁸ Whether eco-

433 Ibid., 7.

434 Ibid., 7–8.

435 Henrietta Moore, “The Fantasies of Cosmopolitanism,” in *After Cosmopolitanism*, ed. Rosi Braidotti, Patrick Hanafin, and Bolette B. Blaagaard (New York: Routledge, 2012), 97–110.

436 Braidotti, “In Spite of the Times The Postsecular Turn in Feminism,” 3–4.

437 Moore, “The Fantasies of Cosmopolitanism.”

438 Braidotti, “In Spite of the Times The Postsecular Turn in Feminism,” 16.

philosophical or techno-asceticist⁴³⁹, all post-humanist approaches share two core ideas. Firstly, post-humanism takes from the deconstruction of the secular and its attendant universalisms (human rationality, scientific objectivity) a view of the culture-nature division as a continuum,⁴⁴⁰ which avoids the intellectual stigmatization of the irrational and immaterial so common in the sciences⁴⁴¹ and which feminist cultural studies of natural sciences address.⁴⁴² Secondly, with the liberation of modes of thought and apprehension from the secular division into “public and private, reason and emotion, fact and morality, the cognitive and the visceral”⁴⁴³ post-humanist social sciences include also previously undervalued or empirically neglected resources such as “desires and the imagination.”⁴⁴⁴ The extension of ethical relations to the spectral is one important line of inquiry in this vein, as exemplified by the already mentioned “Ghostly Matters” by Avery Gordon (1997), which productively combines literary studies with methodologies from the social sciences.

Outside the emergent academic field of post-secular studies, strands of French post-structuralism developed critical accounts of humanism and ethics, which arrived at similar theorizations of the non-human or inhuman. While these have been enormously influential in the current debates, e.g. Braidotti's elaborations of Deleuzian nomadism⁴⁴⁵ and Derrida's influence on spectrality and animal studies,⁴⁴⁶ post-human theory does not fully converge with spectrality studies (Abraham/Torok; Derrida) nor with other philosophies of the *inhuman* (Lyotard, Deleuze/Guattari). Since I already discuss Derrida's notion of spectrality in the introduction, I add only, at this point, some remarks on Lyotard's definition of the *inhuman*.

439 Ibid., 7.

440 Ibid., 16.

441 McLennan, “The Postsecular Turn,” 8. The great exception to this scientific trend is of course psychoanalysis (e.g. phantoms and fantasy in Abraham and Torok) and its various reworkings in French post-structuralist thought.

442 Braidotti, “In Spite of the Times The Postsecular Turn in Feminism,” 14.

443 McLennan, “The Postsecular Turn,” 8.

444 Braidotti, “In Spite of the Times The Postsecular Turn in Feminism,” 16.

445 Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory: The Portable Rosi Braidotti* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

446 Blanco and Peeren, *The Spectralities Reader*; Dawne McCance, *Critical Animal Studies: An Introduction* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2013).

Lyotard's inhuman distinguishes itself both from Braidotti's eco post-humanism and the ghosts of Marx, Derrida, and Gordon, as he uses the term in two very different, but related senses. The first meaning of the inhuman refers to the cruelty and violence committed in the name of *Development*, “the ideology of the present time [...],”⁴⁴⁷ which refers both to the educational system and its “constraint and terror” to guide us out of “the obscure savageness of childhood”⁴⁴⁸ and to the political and socio-economic discourses, which legitimate themselves through the mythological certainty of the destiny of this development, i.e. free market competition, cost distribution, human rights, democracy, etc.⁴⁴⁹ The other inhuman is the “lack of humanity” embodied by the child:

Shorn of speech, incapable of standing upright, hesitating over the objects of its interest, not able to calculate its advantages, not sensitive to common reason, the child is eminently the human because its distress heralds and promises things possible. Its initial delay in humanity, which makes it the hostage of the adult community, is also what manifests to this community the lack of humanity it is suffering from, and which calls on it to become more human.⁴⁵⁰

The inhumanity of the child persists as a “remainder,” as “traces of an indetermination,” which bring the inhumanity of the “system” into painful view.⁴⁵¹ Childhood refers here not only to a biological developmental stage, but serves also as an allegory for how human reason constitutes itself through its fear of indeterminacy. The crucial point for Lyotard is not the control imposed by education, reason, knowledge and so forth, which is to a certain degree necessary, but that a transformation so vast and profound has taken place that the ideology of development and its rationalization of humanity has become the unquestioned justification for violence and exploitation.

447 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 6.

448 *Ibid.*, 4.

449 *Ibid.*, 5.

450 *Ibid.*, 3–4.

451 *Ibid.*, 3.

Current development ideology, therefore, does not actually lead to progress for humankind, but simply to more efficient processes. If we want human thought in the end to be more than “a poor binarized ghost,”⁴⁵² and resist the violence of current politics, the only option left is “the miserable and admirable indeterminateness” of childhood, which just like the arts, “remains loyal to humankind uniquely through its inhumanity in regard to it.”⁴⁵³ Just as “development is the very thing which takes away the hope of an alternative to the system from both analysis and practice”, “it is the task of writing, thinking, literature, arts, to venture to bear witness to it.”⁴⁵⁴

There are a number of intersections between Lyotard's inhuman and Derrida's spectrality. The obvious commonality is that both designate what cannot be fully assimilated into a linear teleology and therefore embody difference, alterity, undecidability, and so forth. However, the more important convergence for the present purposes lies in the fact that both draw ethical and political insights from what is not (fully) visible and in an ontological sense present. Literature and the arts represent privileged outlets for exploring the discourses of the inhuman and the spectral, because of their “historical expertise” with the invisible, immaterial, fantastic, spiritual, etc. Jia Pingwa's novel in particular reimagines the cosmographic genre of the *zhiguai* to draw out unexpected and hidden affinities between the past and the present, humans and animals, and lastly, also, China and the world.

3 Jia Pingwa's “White/Night”

Jia Pingwa (1952-) is widely recognized as one of the most important contemporary Chinese writers. His literary career now spans more than four decades and his artistic *oeuvre* comprises not only fiction and some poetry, but also paintings, calligraphy and numerous essays (*sanwen* 散文). “White/Night” is the follow-up novel to the immensely successful and highly controversial novel

452 Ibid., 17.

453 Ibid., 2. Lyotard tags this sentence as a Theodor W. Adorno quote, but does not give a specific reference.

454 Ibid., 7.

Feidu (废都, 1993), which was banned in China for many years and has only recently been translated into English as “Ruined City: A Novel.”⁴⁵⁵ Although “White/Night” shares with “Ruined City” the same narrative backdrop of Xi'an 西安, which throughout the novel is referred to as “Western Capital” (Xijing 西京), and a similar ethnographic focus on the figure of the urban „idler“ (*xianren* 闲人) as well as the same continuous narrative format without any chapter divisions, its publication was in the aftermath of the ban on “Ruined City” a veritable “non-event”⁴⁵⁶ and has received scant academic attention.⁴⁵⁷ There are further very obvious parallels between the two novels, such as the fact that they both start with a supernatural event—the appearance of four suns in “Ruined City” and the mysterious rebirth of a man and his *qin*-harp in “White/Night”—and objects representing China's distinct cultural heritage such as traditional musical instruments and calligraphy tools have important narrative functions in both novels.

But “White/Night” distinguishes itself from “Ruined City” not only because it lacks the graphic and licentious sexual scenes characteristic of its main protagonist Zhuang Zhidie's 庄之蝶 “spermatic journey,”⁴⁵⁸ but also in terms of the social strata to which its main protagonists belong. While the renowned writer Zhuang belongs to the semi-privileged and rather well-off group of cultural idlers (*wenhua xianren* 文化闲人), the men that Jia Pingwa portrays in “White/Night” are social idlers (*shehui xianren* 社会闲人) who have far less economic and cultural capital than Zhuang Zhidie and his artist friends. For instance Ye Lang 夜郎, the central protagonist, has no fixed occupation, while his best friend, Wang Kuan 王宽, is a police officer and another friend of

455 For a very incisive study of this novel see Carlos Rojas, “Flies’ Eyes, Mural Remnants, and Jia Pingwa’s Perverse Nostalgia,” *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 14, no. 3 (2006): 749–73.

456 Yiyan Wang, *Narrating China: Jia Pingwa And His Fictional World* (London: Routledge, 2006), 113.

457 Apart from mentions in Chinese papers on *Feidu*, the novel is also very briefly discussed in David Wang's *The Monster That Is History*. The only in-depth reading to date is in Wang, *Narrating China*. Jia Pingwa himself, however, has expressed great disappointment over this. See: Gan Chenyan 干琛艳, “Zuopin zui xihuan ‘Baiye’ Jia Pingwa: Juli nuobei'er shi yongyuan 作品最喜欢《白夜》贾平凹：距离诺贝尔是永远 [Jia Pingwa, Who's Favorite Novel is 'White/Night', Says He Will Never Receive a Nobel Prize],” *Xi'an Xinwen Wang* 西安新闻网 [Xi'an News Online], March 29, 2005, accessed December 5, 2016, http://www.xiancn.com/gb/news/2005-03/29/content_513749.htm.

458 Julia Lovell, “Finding a Place: Mainland Chinese Fiction in the 2000s,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 71, no. 1 (2012): 9.

theirs, Wu Qingpu 吴清朴, runs an unsuccessful restaurant even though he is a trained archaeologist. These characters cannot afford the luxurious obsessions of the cultural idlers, although they spend just as much time talking about music and art. But the most interesting aspect of “White/Night,” which does not feature in its predecessor novel, is the Mulian 目连 mystery play and its story of the Buddhist monk Mulian, who travels to the underworld to rescue his mother. In the aftermath of the *Feidu* scandal and the ban on the book, allegedly on account of its pornographic content, it went largely unnoticed that Jia's follow-up work focuses on ghosts and the supernatural, again a frequently censored topic in modern Chinese literary history.

3.1 Mulian in Xijing

The Chinese Mulian legend is based on the Indian Buddhist figure of Maudgalyayana, but the story itself is suspected to be of Chinese origin, because it conjoins Confucian ideals with Buddhist and Daoist beliefs and ritual practices.⁴⁵⁹ It tells of the monk's travels through hell to save his mother and is the mythological explanation for the ghost feast offered during the Yulanpan 盂兰盆 festival during the Seventh lunar month. From at least the time of the Song Dynasty (960-1279) Mulian's legendary descent to the underworld was dramatized in up to one week long performances and it is this operatic tradition that the protagonists in “White/Night” bring to a revival. The opera singer Nan Dingshan 南丁山, whom Ye Lang meets at the beginning of the novel, explains the Mulian mystery play to him in the following words:

Part of the traditional repertoire of the Shanxi Qin opera is the story “Mulian rescues his mother,” which makes a great big jumble out of everything, hell and heaven, reality and history, actors and spectators, the on-stage and the off-stage. Nobody has performed that play for many decades, but now we sure live in times, in which nobody minds saying what should not be said, everybody wears the clothes they should not wear, and is simply doing

459 Stephen F. Teiser, *The Ghost Festival in Medieval China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 28.

everything they should not do. As soon as men get rich, they become courageous, but men still fear men. Men fear men and men also fear ghosts. So if we started to perform the Mulian cycle there would most definitely be a market for that.⁴⁶⁰

This archaic ghost performance plays not only a thematic role throughout the novel, as Ye Lang becomes involved in the newly founded Mulian performance troupe, but is also reflected in the character of Ye Lang himself. As a peregrinating vegetarian he is the modern-day incarnation of the mythical monk Mulian, although in this case he is trying to bring down a corrupt government official rather than saving his mother. In fact Ye Lang, who lost his parents before coming to the city, lacks any form of kinship based ethics, as he divorced his first wife for undisclosed reasons and ends up abandoning his second wife and child. On the other hand, he is a reliable friend and also helps strangers to the best of his abilities. Ye Lang's makeshift ethics is exemplified in the fact that he is initially a vegetarian, but starts to eat meat again mid-way through the novel.⁴⁶¹ This is a direct reference to the most widely circulated version of the tale, in which the mother's violation of Buddhist dietary law is one of the primary reasons that Mulian has to rescue her from hell.⁴⁶² In Jia's modernized version, Mulian is trying to rescue his friends as much as himself, and his efforts are ultimately futile.

At the beginning of the novel Ye Lang's quest is introduced, but it plays only a very sporadic role. As is explained, Ye Lang acquires a position as the assistant librarian through his friend Zhu Yihe 祝一鹤. But when his friend falls out of political favor and another official, Gong Changxing

460 Jia Pingwa 贾平凹, *Baiye* 白夜 [*White/Night*] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui chubanshe, 2007), 5.

461 *Ibid.*, 177.

462 This key scene from the earliest text of a Mulian play (1582, by Zheng Zhizhen) is translated in Victor H. Mair, *The Columbia Anthology of Chinese Folk and Popular Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 304–8. For a comprehensive introduction to the various Mulian texts and a complete translation of one late Qing “precious scroll” (*baquan* 宝卷) version of the Mulian tale, “The Precious Scroll of the Three Lives of Mulian” (1876), see Beata Grant and W. L. Idema, *Escape from Blood Pond Hell: The Tales of Mulian and Woman Huang* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2012). A very interesting, gender-focused analysis of the various transformations of the myth can be found in Sufen Sophia Lai, “Father in Heaven, Mother in Hell: Gender Politics in the Creation and Transformations of Mulian’s Mother,” in *Presence and Presentation: Women in the Chinese Literati Tradition*, ed. Sherry J. Mou (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), 187–213.

宫长兴, takes over his position, Ye Lang also loses his post. Shortly after, Zhu also suffers a nearly fatal stroke, which triggers a slow developmental regression into infancy. Partially to avenge his friend, but also to enact vengeance for himself, Ye Lang sets a number of legal and illegal plots in motion in order to bring Gong Changxing down, though in the end these plots backfire on him and the novel closes with the police arriving at a Mulian performance to arrest Ye Lang.

Unrelated to the Mulian plot is the other narrative through-line of the novel, which is Ye Lang's relationship with two women, Yan Ming 颜铭 and Yu Bai 虞白. He decides in the end to marry the model, Yan Ming, whom he abandons (along with their child) after discovering that she had cosmetic surgery done before coming to Xijing, although he is—in true “Dream of the Red Mansion” (Honglou meng 红楼梦)-inspired tragic love story fashion—more attracted to the chronically ill Yu Bai, with whom he shares a love of *qin* music and classical poetry.⁴⁶³ Yan Ming represents Ye Lang's suppressed memory of his own journey to the city, while the refined Yu Bai embodies his longing for social and intellectual status.

But just like in the Mulian opera, where the legendary quest of the monk Mulian to find his mother is, from an audience perspective, often less important than the scary, bizarre and highly entertaining encounters Mulian makes along his journey, “White/Night” too has a strong episodic character. Indeed, Ye Lang's encounters often form closed stories, which do not have any bearing on the overall plot. Apart from characterizing Ye Lang and his idler friends, Jia uses these episodes to explore a wide variety of subject matter such as Chinese music and poetry, character divination, traditional painting, paper cutting, food, Mulian staging techniques, and religious ceremonies, which overall give the novel a strong anthropological quality. Furthermore, Jia Pingwa continued to

463 For a discussion of the “ideology of the qin” and its function in the characterization of the relationship between Ye Lang and Yubai see Wang, *Narrating China*, 119–20. The tonal system of Chinese poetry is an important motif in the entire novel; The two characters ping 平 and ze 仄 refer to the “level” and “oblique” tone, and appear in the name of the restaurant Ye Lang and Nan Dingshan meet, in the rhyme pattern of the poem the born-again played before his self-immolation and are also used in a wedding couplet written by Yu Bai, in which *pingze* 平仄 is a play on *pingce* 平侧, which intimates love making, Jia Pingwa, *Baiye*, 33.

pursue some of these topics in succeeding short stories such as “Ku Mairong” (苦麦荣, 2002), a figure who in “White Night” teaches Yu Bai the craft of paper cutting.⁴⁶⁴ However, I disagree with Yiyan Wang's assessment that Jia represents here “the everyday life of ordinary people.”⁴⁶⁵ Rather, the fact that only very few cultural practices commonly identified as Western, and of negative moral connotation such as cosmetic surgery and tourism play a role in Jia's *Xijing* shows that “White/Night” has little to do with the reality of social life in Xi'an in the 1990s and much more to do with Jia's personal interest in Chinese culture.

In fact, Jia only learned of the Mulian performance tradition when he attended a conference on this subject in 1993 in Sichuan. He has also explained that inspiration to write his two first urban novels came to him during a visit to the U.S.,⁴⁶⁶ where apparently he realized how little people outside of China know about Chinese culture, although he also states in the afterword to “White/Night” that he assumes his Chinese readers to suffer from a similar lack of knowledge when it comes to the Mulian myth.⁴⁶⁷ But regardless of Jia's possible pedagogic or sentimental reasons for exploring traditional Chinese crafts and cultural practices, they do not serve a merely documentary function in a novel, which makes no effort at claiming verisimilitude and instead foregrounds the instability of perceptions, real and mental boundaries, and so forth. This is most visible in the social idler himself, who performs, in Jia's *oeuvre*, the role of a threshold figure between the rural and the urban, life and death, what is to come and what is fading away. As such, the idler both embodies and deciphers a changing reality.

464 The shifting meanings of paper-cutting in China's modernization discourse are discussed in Ka-ming Wu, “Paper-Cuts in Modern China: The Search for Modernity, Cultural Tradition, and Women's Liberation,” *Modern China* 41, no. 1 (January 1, 2015): 90–127.

465 Wang, *Narrating China*, 114.

466 Rojas, “Flies' Eyes, Mural Remnants, and Jia Pingwa's Perverse Nostalgia,” 753.

467 Jia Pingwa, *Baiye*, 293.

3.2 *Xianren* culture at the threshold

The threshold culture of the *xianren* is symbolically grounded in the metaphor of the midnight sun and the figure of the born-again. The first symbol is already within the title *Baiye*,⁴⁶⁸ which is a combination of Ye Lang's first and his primary love interest Yu Bai's family name, but also means midnight sun. On the one hand, the title refers to the inverted sleep patterns of the hero and heroine of the title; Ye Lang begins sleepwalking under the magical spell of the key found in the ashes of the born-again, whereas Yu Bai, suffering from “mental weakness,”⁴⁶⁹ often sleeps during the day. On the other hand, it is also a reference to the ghost novel “Record of a Night Walk in Chang'an” (*Chang'an yexing lu* 长安夜行录, by Li Zhen 李祯 (1376-1452)) and the genre of nostalgic ghost literature in general, which flourished during the Ming period, but commonly took the Song or Tang period as its historical setting.⁴⁷⁰ *Chang'an yexing lu* is the first of twenty-two novels in Li Zhen's collection “More Tales told by the Lamplight” (*Jiandeng yuhua* 剪灯余话, first print in 1433). The story is about a traveler to Xi'an, who suddenly finds himself in the company of a ghost couple from the Tang dynasty. They demand his help to set the historical records on the wife's rape by the Tang prince Li Xian (李宪, 679-742) straight, but when he wakes up the next morning the ghosts and their house have vanished.⁴⁷¹

The second significant symbol of idler culture is the reborn man. Returning to life for no discernible reason and resolved to return to his family, the born-again finds himself quickly faced with the challenge of convincing people that he is in fact a modern day miracle. While he is able to gain his wife's confidence, because he knows intimate details of their life together, his children

468 In 1981 Jia Pingwa also wrote a short essay with the same title (see *Jia Pingwa wenji* 贾平凹文集 [Collected Works of Jia Pingwa], ed. Wang Yongsheng 王永生, vol. 11 (Xi'an: Shanxi ren min chu ban she :, 1998), 124–27), but other than the topic of sleeplessness this much earlier text has no bearing on the novel.

469 Jia Pingwa, *Baiye*, 65.

470 A discussion of this *huaigu* 怀古 sentimentality can be found in Zeitlin, *The Phantom Heroine*.

471 This novel and other literary representations of Chang'an in the Ming and Qing period are discussed in Hu Xiaozhen 胡晓真, “Yexing Chang'an: Ming Qing xushi wenxue zhong de Chang'an 夜行长安:明清叙事文学中的长安 [Nightwalking in Chang'an: Chang'an in Ming and Qing Prose],” in *Xi'an: Dushi xiangxiang yu wenhua jiyi* 西安: 都市想象与文化记忆 [Xi'an: Urban Imagination and Cultural Memory], ed. Chen Pingyuan 陈平原, Wang Dewei 王德威, and Chen Xuechao 陈学超 (Beijing: Beijing daxue, 2009), 182–94.

“schooled in materialism and not superstitious”⁴⁷² adamantly insist he is a fraud. Struck with grief over her children's inability to recognize their own father, the mother commits suicide. Shortly thereafter, the reborn man self-immolates after giving one last performance on the *qin* harp he had brought with him from the afterlife. His death is indirectly responsible for the revival of the Mulian performances, but also brings together Wang Kuan and Ye Lang, who both take an interest in the *qin* music that the born-again played right before his self-immolation. Furthermore, Wang Kuan retrieves from the ashes the key to the born-again's home, which he gifts to Yelang. The reborn man's key later becomes the centerpiece of a flirtatious game of borrowing and lending between Ye Lang and Yu Bai. But the key, which soon loses its purpose, because the born-again man's house is demolished, also has a very clear symbolic function. As the possible cause of Ye Lang's mysterious sleepwalking activities, it forms a symbolic unity with the culture of the social idler, which is just like the reborn man, who seems to have put a spell on the key, and the midnight sun, a transient anomaly, standing on the threshold of life and death, a vanishing and a new China, the animate and the inanimate, etc. The idlers themselves do not know where they belong, but face rejection from both fronts. For instance, towards the end of the novel, Wang Kuan returns to his family's *yaodong* cave house, but is soon forced to recognize that he no longer belongs, neither at his hometown village nor in the city.⁴⁷³ In the case of Wu Qingpu, his return has even more disastrous consequences, since soon after resuming his old job as archaeologist, he is stung to death by a swarm of bees.⁴⁷⁴

But despite being unlike the *Xijing* people and “always standing on shaky ground,”⁴⁷⁵ the threshold figure of the idler in Jia's *oeuvre*, is just like the *flâneur*, the beggar or the gambler in Walter Benjamin's study of Paris, strongly associated with modern urban culture. What

472 Ibid., 3.

473 Jia Pingwa, *Baiye*, 268.

474 Ibid., 271–72.

475 Ibid., 77.

distinguishes him from these other figures, with whom he shares many qualities, is his status as a rural migrant, who embodies, arguably more than any other figure, the ambivalent dynamics of China's rapid urbanization. While during the Maoist years the *hukou* household registration system effectively curbed labor migration by restricting citizen access to government services to their registered hometown, China's "floating population" (*liudong renkou* 流动人口), i.e. citizens who no longer live at their *hukou*, today makes up over ten percent of its total population.⁴⁷⁶ The Chinese state has addressed this demographic situation, rife with potential for social unrest, through a set of policy changes, although a flexibilized version of the *hukou* system still remains in place.⁴⁷⁷ "Peasant workers" (*nongmin gong*) are also a frequent topic in Chinese media and public discourse, because they provide not only the actual low-wage labor without which China's growth would not be possible, but also because their journey to the city functions as a projection screen for the developmental trajectories attributed to China's transformation as a whole, from an agrarian to an industry-driven economy, from tradition to modernity, from "backward" to educated, and so forth.⁴⁷⁸

These socio-political contexts play only a subordinate role in Jia's narration of the idler migrant, because he focuses exclusively on men who have already established themselves securely enough in their new urban environment as to no longer face any economic woes. Most importantly, the "idler" in Jia Pingwa's first two city novels does not enter the public space primarily as a peddler of his labor, and in "White/Night" there is in fact not discernible reason why Ye Lang needs to be in Xijing. His idling therefore gestures towards possibilities of dissent, which developmental narratives focused on the economic and social plight of migrant workers tend to gloss over or

476 Shahid Yusuf and Tony Saich, *China Urbanizes: Consequences, Strategies, and Policies* (Washington: World Bank Publications, 2008), 71.

477 Zhan Shaohu, "Rural Labor Migration in China: Challenges for Policies," *Policy Papers* No. 10, UNESCO, Paris, 2005.

478 For a very insightful study on migrant worker representations in China see Wanning Sun, *Subaltern China: Rural Migrants, Media, and Cultural Practices* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014). For a discussion of female migrant worker representations see Justyna Jagusik, "Cultural Representation and Self-Representation of Dagongmei in Contemporary China," *DEP - Deportate, Esuli E Profughe*, no. 17 (2011): 121–38.

disregard. Although Jia's idlers also hover between tradition and modernity, the rural and the urban, Jia imaginatively zooms in on the cultural spaces the idlers occupy and their relationship to the different real and imaginary layers of the urban environment. In an early essay, he describes the idlers as following:

The idlers are by no means simply four-limbed creatures with no brains. You could even say, they are quite intelligent, are cultured, because they enjoy buying books, which they however rarely finish reading. But they already know enough, about Freud and Hou Yi, Mengzi, Homer, Picasso and Ah Q. When hitting the streets at night, while dragging the hems of their jeans along the ground, they almost invariably meet one of their own, [...], talking about women they sure enough also bring up Nü Wa.⁴⁷⁹ And talk of business kowtow [*guandao* 官倒, government backed investor] takes them to Godot [*Geduo* 戈多]. But most of the times they discuss life, which leads to talk on the earth turning around itself and how we are all hanging upside-down from the planet. Someone yells: God is dead! And someone steps out to pee and spit on the ground, while cursing: earth is too small!⁴⁸⁰

In this satirical essay there is no explicit mention of migrant contexts. And while there is consensus on the fact that this is a new phenomenon, there is also no mention of China's economic and social policy changes. Instead, Jia intensifies the satire by letting a number of scientists give their opinion on the reasons for the recent surge in urban idlers:

Reports state that at a high-level conference, an astrophysicist explained that there is a correlation between the rise in black spots on the sun and the number of idlers. However, a geographer explained that these idlers are the result of vegetation loss and degradation. And an anthropologist stubbornly stuck to his opinion that there were just too many people on

479 Nü wa 女媧 is in Chinese mythology the creator of mankind.

480 Jia Pingwa, "Xianren 闲人 [Idlers]," in *Jia Pingwa wenji*, ed. Wang Yongsheng 王永生, vol. 12 (Xi'an : Shanxi ren min chubanshe :1998), 242–43.

earth; when a gourd grows too many flowers, there will always be some that don't produce any fruit.⁴⁸¹

In “White/Night” the figure of the idler stands in contrast to the tourist and, more importantly, the bureaucrat and urban entrepreneur, because he does not consume or capitalize on a fetishized past, but playfully appropriates whatever serves his immediate physical and intellectual needs. Although the idler figures in both “Ruined City” and “White/Night” are marked in more complex ways by China's current transformations, they are just like the idlers of this early sketch not the (waste-)product of immediate, day-to-day realities, but existentially connected to natural-historical processes on a planetary scale. This dimension of *xianren* culture is motivated by its intimate connection to the city of Xi'an, which was as Chang'an 长安 the capital city of China from the Han (206 BC – 220 AD) up until the Tang dynasty (618 – 907).⁴⁸² Jia himself grew up in rural South Shaanxi 陕西 and came to Xi'an for the first time in 1972, but it took him another twenty years before he began writing fiction with an urban setting. Apart from the city novels “Ruined City” and “White/Night”, and the more realist “Earthgate” (*Tumen* 土门, 1996) and “Happiness” (Gaoxing 高兴, 2007), amongst others, Jia also wrote an essay to accompany a collection of old Xi'an photographs, “Old Xi'an: Evening Glow of an Imperial City” (*Lao Xi'an: Feidu xieyang* 老西安: 废都斜阳, 1999). Discussing burial practices during the Republican period, Jia suddenly has this comment on Xi'an's idlers:

If a baby less than one year old died, it was wrapped in a bundle of rags or weeds, set in a bamboo basket and left outside the door to be picked up by the “idler,” who got paid for carrying it outside the city and taking care of it. Today there is a popular expression in Xi'an,

481 Ibid., 243.

482 For a historical account of city planning in Chang'an and later Xi'an see Bruno Fayolle Lussac, Harald Høyem, and Pierre Clément, eds., *Xi'an: An Ancient City in a Modern World : Evolution of the Urban Form, 1949-2000* (Paris: Éditions Recherches, 2007).

“idler,” which refers to men loafing around the streets with nothing to do. However, “idler” was originally used for bareheaded men, who wore black loafers with white soles, carried an iron shovel on their shoulder and exclusively practiced the trade of collecting and burying dead infants.⁴⁸³

At least half of this short vignette is based in fact. Infants and children under the age of ten were up until the early 20th century often not given the same funeral rites as adults and only received very humble burial arrangements or, in cities, were dropped off at so-called “baby towers”.⁴⁸⁴ However, I could not find any source to corroborate Jia's claim that Xi'an or any other Chinese city ever had a trade for child burials run by one social group. On the other hand, Jia's essay is an entirely subjective portrait of Xi'an, intended to capture, as he explicitly states, its “soul” rather than its (photo-)realistic history.⁴⁸⁵ Therefore, I read the idler also in this essay as part of Jia's fictional *Xijing*.

What role does the idler play in the “Old Xi'an” essay? Firstly, children and the idler belong to the margins of community life, because they are not yet or not fully subject to the hierarchies governing kinship relations and social class. Secondly, while the children represent the inhumanity and raw savageness, from which society sets itself apart, the idler performs the role of the functional outsider, who removes the other inhumanity of death and destruction embodied by the infant corpse, and which poses a threat to the community, thereby ensuring public health and ritual order. In this function, the figure of the idler comes very close to the “historian of the strange” and the infant corpse functions here as an anomaly much like the strange items compiled in historical *zhiguai*.

483 Jia Pingwa, *Old Xi'an: Evening Glow of an Imperial City*, trans. Ma Wenqian (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2001), 119; Jia Pingwa, *Lao Xi'an 老西安* [Old Xi'an] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui chubanshe, 2006), 39. My translation is a heavily modified version of the official English translation.

484 Christian Henriot, *Scythe and the City: A Social History of Death in Shanghai* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), 228–29.

485 Jia discusses at great length the scarcity of photographic archive material in the case of Xi'an, which is an ingenious sequitur to his imaginative biography of Xi'an, Jia Pingwa, *Lao Xi'an*, 5.

Jia Pingwa makes a direct connection between the temporary anomaly of the *xianren* and the historical compilations of “strange writings” when he has Ye Lang invoke Pu Songling's *Liaozhai zhiyi* in his fantasy about a ghost appearing at his window and, in another episode, reads a story from the *Soushen ji* (“Records of the Search for Spirits”, by Gan Bao, ca.), which the opera actor Nan Dingshan always carries in his pocket.⁴⁸⁶ The concept of the strange, in Chinese expressed by the characters *yi* 异, *guai* 怪 and, later on, *qi* 奇 finds its earliest expression in the “anomaly account” (since at least the Tang period referred to as *zhiguai*), which Robert Campany defines as a “genre devoted to the cosmographic task of displaying anomalies to their audience.”⁴⁸⁷ According to Campany, these compilations reflect a centrist ideology, because in the process of collecting and ordering curious occurrences, magical objects and exotic places from the margins of the geographically and cosmologically known world, these texts reaffirm the power of the center. While early historians of the strange used this model as a vehicle for “cosmological reflection and religious persuasion,”⁴⁸⁸ the figure of the idler turns this textual practice into lived experience, as he himself collects the infant corpses and places them in an appropriate relationship to society. And just as *zhiguai* and *chuanqi* collections and their generic offspring were never part of the canonical texts, which is why Judith Zeitlin speaks of Pu Songling's *Liaozhai* as rooted in “private forms of historiography,”⁴⁸⁹ the *xianren* operates from the fringes of society.

However, the figure of the idler, as the embodied ideology of recording the strange, serves Jia not to advance a specific religious agenda, but rather as a life practice, which governs Ye Lang's perception of reality and guides his actions. For instance, retribution is Ye Lang's most important moral principal, which not only serves his own purposes, but also benefits complete strangers, although he sometimes shows great reluctance to act on this impulse, because it goes against his

486 Jia Pingwa, *Baiye*, 14, 52.

487 Robert Ford Campany, *Strange Writing: Anomaly Accounts in Early Medieval China* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996), 30.

488 *Ibid.*, x.

489 Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange*, 2.

selfish nature. He brings, for instance, the case of a group of peasants, cheated out of their entire harvest of medical fungi (*Wolifporia extensa* or 茯苓 *fuling*),⁴⁹⁰ to Wang Kuan's attention, and when Wang Kuan is put in charge of a politically sensitive stolen bicycle case and the pressure to solve the case nearly gets him killed, Ye Lang steals an identical bicycle for him in order to help him close the case, though he keeps his friend in the dark on this detail.⁴⁹¹

As the “curator” of today's strange, Ye Lang's life can be read as a display of strange encounters and cultural curiosities. Often times these episodes and objects involve a supernatural component. This is something, which is not yet present in both the satirical vignette and the Xi'an essay. For instance, three central characters in the novel undergo a transformation towards figures of the posthuman or inhuman, which is one very common narrative motif in anomaly accounts: Ye Lang ends on stage as the ghost bird Jingwei, Zhu Yihe turns into a silkworm-like infant, and Wang Kuan into a hybrid being, part Maoist-era model worker Lei Feng, part insect. But although these transformations are partially expressed in images and thought-figures grounded in the cosmological concept of the strange, they articulate spectral concerns and intimate posthuman developmental trajectories that shed light on the nationalist appropriation of heritage discourses and also express a desire for alternative trajectories of cultural modernization.

3.3 A mummy, fossils and strange transformations

One very common transformation in early *zhiguai* texts is from human to immortal or transcendent (*xian* 仙). These stories served as founding legends for shrines, temples and cults honoring specific individuals.⁴⁹² Towards the end of the novel, we learn of one such temple figure during Wang Kuan's spontaneous visit to Wu Qingpu, who is now working as an archeologist outside the town of Ziwu.⁴⁹³ A local guide, we are told, had led the archeologists to the site of a temple, which dated

490 Jia Pingwa, *Baiye*, 57.

491 *Ibid.*, 59.

492 Campany, *Strange Writing*, 251. See also Chapter four: 2.2 Symptom, syndrome, cure.

493 Jia Pingwa, *Baiye*, 269.

back to the Western Jin dynasty. Even more unusual than their discovery of a set of Jin stone reliefs is the shriveled mummy of a monk sitting inside an earthen jar. According to the guide, this mummy has been in the possession of the temple for more than one hundred years, although during the Cultural Revolution, a local devotee hid the mummy inside his home. Because of the humidity in the region, which makes natural mummification impossible, popular legend attributes the transformation to the monk's superior skills at Daoist alchemy. However, there is a bizarre epilogue to this story. Shortly after the ending of the Cultural Revolution, a traveling doctor arrived at the township and decided, upon hearing of the monk's improbable feat, that his own moral credentials qualified him to follow in the monk's footsteps and replicate the transformation. He built a wooden box, which he had hung from a rock behind the temple and which he had locals nail him into. Inevitably, after three months the wooden planks started to rot and all that was left of the doctor were his bones and teeth.⁴⁹⁴

This short episode is significant because it appears towards the end of the novel and contrasts with the developmental trajectories suggested by Ye Lang, Wang Kuan and Zhu Yihe's respective transformations, which reach at this point their climactic moment. It presents the idea of the modern world setting the clock back to a bygone age of magical alchemy and cosmological reciprocity as a tragic farce. Accordingly, Wang Kuan responds with laughter and incredulity: “What kind of man wants to be an immortal?!”⁴⁹⁵ But because Jia highlights the “vacuity of long-standing cultural forms”⁴⁹⁶ at such an important moment in the narrative, it also recasts the novel's fascination with the excruciating minutiae of exotic cultural objects and presents their historical origins as an empty if not hypocritical gesture. Is it really possible to bring a ritual festivity such as the Mulian play and all the other beliefs and practices detailed in the novel back to life, to restore their vibrancy?

494 Ibid., 271.

495 Ibid.

496 Chow, *Not Like a Native Speaker*, 63.

Heritage studies in China use the thought-figure of the “living fossil” (huo huashi 活化石), which on the one hand validates the Mulian performances as the subject of scientific interest, and simultaneously disavows their contemporary relevance as dynamic expressions of religious beliefs and political dissent.⁴⁹⁷ As David Holm points out, all forms of ritual theater are in China usually “described as ‘living fossils’ (huo huashi) and their origins traced back to the Nuo ritual of classical times, as mentioned in the Confucian Analects and as described so colourfully in Han dynasty sources. The intervening two thousand years are seen as an unbroken line of tradition, [...]”⁴⁹⁸ Although Jia shares the belief that the revived Mulian plays represent “fossilized” versions of some of China's most ancient performance techniques and ritual practices, that they are, in short, a window back in time, he nevertheless has no misconceptions about the purposes that they serve today. In the novel, the Mulian performances are not only a religious activity, but also act interchangeably as a business opportunity for Nan Dingshan and his unemployed actor friends, as a demonstration of power for businessmen with the financial resources to fund such an extravagant event, and as a showcase for insider knowledge, which licenses condescension towards cultural outsiders. The latter function is demonstrated when Ye Lang, during one performance, directs the actor playing a Wuchang 五猖 (one of five “fierce deities” who exorcise[s] ghosts) to capture the company's wealthy patron, who is of course not in on the joke.⁴⁹⁹

To be sure, the title protagonists, Ye Lang and Yu Bai, share a deep fascination with the past, which is just like the Mulian “fossil” or the white coral he gifts her “beautiful, because it is dead.”⁵⁰⁰ This is partly a reflection of Jia Pingwa's personal interests in China's ancient cultural

497 Ellen R. Judd, “Mulian Saves His Mother in 1989,” in *Memory, History and Opposition Under State Socialism*, ed. Rubie S. Watson (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1994), 105–26.

498 David Holm, “The Death of Tiaoxi (The ‘Leaping Play’): Ritual Theater in the Northwest of China,” *Modern Asian Studies* 37, no. 4 (2003): 864.

499 Qitao Guo, *Ritual Opera and Mercantile Lineage: The Confucian Transformation of Popular Culture in Late Imperial Huizhou* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 186.

500 Jia Pingwa, *Baiye*, 164.

heritage.⁵⁰¹ However, the possibilities for taking this knowledge into a new direction seem very limited. Apart from being a topic of discussion and poetic contemplation between the novel's nostalgia-sick idlers and their friends, Yu Bai learns from the old Madam Ku the art of paper cutting, from which she develops her own technique of cloth cutting. Jia Pingwa seems to want to showcase here the creative potential of traditional crafts beyond being the still-born child of oriental nostalgia put in service of Xi'an's tourist economy with its Tang-dynasty theme park and its “superb new sites, buildings and bridges, which are neither Western nor ancient, blindly changing the city's face, wantonly making everything fake.”⁵⁰² Here Jia takes a somber view of modernity that is captured in the story of the traveling doctor: Just as modern man can no longer transform himself into a Daoist saint, it is likewise no longer possible to make Xi'an ancient again or to revive the old cosmologies through ritual theater. This sentiment is tied to the imagination of Xi'an as the “DNA of the Chinese people”⁵⁰³ and the cities' central role in current heritage debates. Ye Lang comments on the domestication of Chinese heritage for the tourist industry by comparing it to wild animals put on exhibition in a zoo: Can they still be considered wild after being imprisoned?⁵⁰⁴

Jia's text may critique the consumption and capitalization of Chinese culture by tourism and savvy entrepreneurs, but he fails to explore a number of other forces shaping this debate, such as the Chinese state or the global cultural industry. “White/Night” is full of corrupt officials and reckless business hooligans, but Jia is reluctant to identify systemic causes for highly-controversial topics such as urban housing demolition, heritage plundering, etc.⁵⁰⁵ Instead, sexism regrettably suffuses the book's portrayal of heritage vis à vis shallow Westernization; Yu Bai's noble family descent, her

501 For instance, Jia Pingwa is just like Ye Lang a great aficionado of the *Xun* 埙, an ancient, egg-shaped flute. In “Ruined City” the figure of Zhou Min is also a *Xun* player.

502 Jia Pingwa, *Baiye*, 179.

503 Zhang Deli 张德丽, Zhao Xitao 赵喜桃, and Wang Cong 王匆, “Dangdai Xi'an wenhua de jiegou, gongneng ji diwei yanjiu 当代西安文化的结构, 功能及地位研究 [The Structure, Function and Position of Xi'an Contemporary Culture],” *Tangdu xuekan* 27, no. 1 (January 2001): 83.

504 Jia Pingwa, *Baiye*, 252.

505 “White/Night” and “Ruined City” both prove Julia Lovell's point that contemporary Mainland fiction frequently lacks interest in exploring the roots of China's current social and political problems, see Lovell, “Finding a Place.”

frail constitution, domesticity, erudition, poetic sensibilities and handicraft interests are pitted against Yan Ming, who, as her name, “beauty inscribed” already captures, surgically changed her appearance because she was born with a cleft palate, and works as a hostess. Although she is the caring mother figure of the two, because she has Ye Lang's child and also helps take care of Zhu Yihe after his stroke, her role overall remains limited to embodying a sexualized and shallow image of urban modernity. Staging the difference between the local and the foreign in gendered terms also reveals how the novel at times falls too easily into a nativist conservatism, which pits local substance against foreign façade.

By contrast, the male idler reveals a more complex negotiation of modernization, because he neither stands on the side of tradition nor represents a modern man, who consumes or capitalizes on the past like the tourist or the business man. Xi'an's city walls, where Ye Lang and his friends frequently meet, symbolizes his ambiguous threshold position.

One side of the narrow alley was lit by moonlight, the other was covered by the shadow of the city wall. Ye Lang walked along the line separating light from dark, but felt like the moonlight was as sharp as glass and painfully cutting his body in half. He briefly looked back and, seeing nobody around, brought out some urine, he sprinkled back and forth while walking. He thought to himself: Let me write Xijing a dedication!⁵⁰⁶

His is a privileged vantage point to decipher the cultural fossils of the past. When visiting the folklore museum, which used to belong to Yu Bai's family and in which she still has an apartment, he immediately grasps the meaning of its architecture:

Suddenly Ye lang understood:

506 Jia Pingwa, *Baiye*, 12–13.

“That treasure bowl on the roof beam means 'entering is a gift,' the Eight Immortals on the wooden beam on top of the engraved brick gate mean 'looking up gives longevity,' the hat wings carved on to the main beam mean 'look behind you to see an official,' the old coins hanging above the window sill mean 'reach out for money,' and the bat-shaped keyhole rosettes on the door step mean 'stand here for good luck!'”

Yu Bai clapped her hands: “That's right, you said it right! The folklore museum has been open now for many years, but none of the thousands of visitors recognized its symbolic meaning.”⁵⁰⁷

Having a (literal) key to the past, however, does not ensure stability for Jia's social idlers. On the contrary, Ye Lang and his idler friends end up either in prison, dead or struck with severe illness. At the same time, the urban space of Xijing is an extension of the idler's inner life. The idler both internalizes its culture of rampant corruption and moral indifference, but also acts as a catalyzer for change, if only in perspective.

Zhu Yihe's transformation into a silkworm-like infant captures this process most evocatively. There is reason to believe that this change was caused initially by the shock of his political downfall, yet this defeat slowly manifests itself in two complementary figures of life, new beginnings, and creation.

Zhu Yihe suddenly rolled to the other side and fell out of his bed, which pulled the blanket away from him. His naked body, squirming now on the floor, revealed his translucent skin, through which one could almost discern his internal organs. A long thread of saliva was hanging from his mouth, which extended from his bed to the ground. Ah Chan said it out

507 Ibid., 94.

loud: “Silkworm!” Ye Lang looked back with his tear-filled eyes and was shocked. Seeing Zhu Yihe's fat and plump body like this reminded him of a baby.⁵⁰⁸

Animals, in fact, have various functions throughout the novel: to describe people, especially “horseface” Ye Lang, as a bad omen,⁵⁰⁹ as the favorite subject matter of the local artist and fortuneteller Lu Tianying 陆天膺, as pets (Yu Bai has a turtle and a dog, who is the incarnation of a courtesan, can nod and cry),⁵¹⁰ as culinary delicacy (e.g. donkey penis),⁵¹¹ as nuisance (e.g. Yu Bai's lice)⁵¹² and, in Wu Qingpu's case, even as killers. But similar to Zhu Yihe, Wang Kuan and Ye Lang's relationship to animals goes beyond the quotidian and takes on a spectral dimension, which is particularly accentuated in Ye Lang's last performance as the birdghost figure Jing Wei 精卫 who enters into dialogue with Mulian. These figures of the nonhuman and spectral act, to a certain degree, as a substitute for the disfunctional rituals of the past. A specifically Daoist horizon of transcendence is also intimated in Zhu Yihe's name, which literally means “wishes to become one with a crane.”⁵¹³ He reaches the cocoon stage of his transformation, quite appropriately, in one of Ye Lang's dreams, which echoes the original butterfly dream of Zhuangzi.⁵¹⁴

But these transformations no longer take place within the old cosmological categories. The case of the good-natured Wang Kuan tellingly combines his continuous transformation into a beetle, attributed to his psoriasis, with his growing dedication to live a life as selfless as the secular god Lei Feng.⁵¹⁵ Indeed, when Wang decides to seek the help of a Henan skin specialist, he turns this trip into a pilgrimage to raise money for the erection of temples in honor of his idol. Although his transformation makes him a social pariah (for instance, he is no longer allowed to use the public

508 Ibid., 284.

509 Ibid., 116.

510 Ibid., 104.

511 Ibid., 124.

512 Ibid., 187.

513 There is also the Chinese proverb *yi qin yi he* 一琴一鹤, which means “only a qin and a crane” and is commonly used to describe honest and uncorrupted officials.

514 Jia Pingwa, *Baiye*, 204.

515 Ibid., 284–85.

bath house), it is, at the same time, the cause of his last and most dedicated act of selflessness, which may cost him his life. To Nan Dingshan he explains: “If I die, so be it. That might just even encourage people to give more than when I were still alive! Do you think I would regret not making it all the way? In fact that would be all the more moving.”⁵¹⁶

The ideal agent of Jia's worldly ethics is, importantly, not Mulian, but the mythological creature Jingwei, who Ye Lang plays right before his arrest. Jingwei is the reincarnation of Yandi's 炎帝 (the Flame Emperor) daughter, who drowned in the Eastern Sea. As Jingwei she vows to exact retaliation and dedicates her life to filling the sea with twigs and pebbles. Commonly the Jingwei bird symbolizes inspiring or stubborn persistence and dedication to a cause, but in Ye Lang's self-scripted version of the tale he draws a symbolic parallel between the Jingwei bird and the born-again by performing in the play's final scene the same mysterious *pingze* 平仄-rhythm on the *Qin* as the reborn before his suicide. Contrary to the telos-driven journey of the filial Mulian, the Jingwei bird as much as the born-again express dedication to causes which lead to self-extermination, i.e. returning to a life they can no longer lead and depriving themselves of their own means of subsistence. Without the religious or political ideologies, which conjoined ideals of self-sacrifice to concrete anticipations of the future, in this world or the other, the voluntary or involuntary self-sacrifice of the idlers can only express a vague and morally amorphous hope for change.

What meaning do these transformations have in the overall corrupted world of Xijing, where “regressed humans congregate after they can no longer adapt to nature and the universe,”⁵¹⁷ as the wise cow in “Ruined City” philosophizes? While the protagonists of “Ruined City”, again, in the words of the cow, “no longer have Buddhism in their hearts and have lost the spirit of the monkey,

516 Ibid., 285.

517 Jia Pingwa, *Ruined City: A Novel* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016), 262.

pig, and horse,”⁵¹⁸ the social idlers in “White/Night” move, in spite of everything, towards overcoming this loss. Although the material remainders of China's cultural heritage have through the process of modernization become emptied out, shallow and depleted of their social dynamism, the transformations experienced by the novel's protagonists move forward precisely by going back in historical (Wang Kuan), biological (Zhu Yihe) and cosmological (Ye Lang) time. But the logic of the *zhiguai* relies on a spectral taxonomy rather than a normative temporal order. The spectral effect results from the conceptual cross-contamination the anomaly reveals; neither is the past external to the present, nor man external to nature.

Spectrality, in Pheng Cheah's succinct phrasing, is “presence given by alterity.”⁵¹⁹ In “White/Night” this alterity is the corrupted world of Xijing, under whose very thin veneer of modernity the dysfunctional remainders of the past create nostalgia and mayhem. For a large part of the novel, Jia seems to take a sometimes nostalgic and other times harsh second look at China's cultural heritage. But the social idlers also offer a third, more radical perspective, because to them the flawed nature of tradition, tainted as it is through the radical iconoclasm of the 20th century and the nationalist and consumerist agendas it now serves, actually enables the idlers to mobilize it as a cultural resource. Taking the spectral view on Chinese traditions does then not mean that the haunting of tradition arrives from a premodern time, but, rather, involves the recognition that because traditions have *survived* in and through May Fourth iconoclasm, secularism, socialist anti-traditionalism, etc. these discourses are not external to tradition proper, but are the condition of its continued existence.

To recall, Jia started his city novel project abroad and it is thus driven significantly by the question of the role that China's heritage plays in a globalized cultural economy. While a return to the preternatural order of the past appears impossibly naïve, the ethics of the strange and hybrid

518 Ibid.

519 Cheah, *Spectral Nationality*, 390.

allow Jia to create a cultural space, in which the socialist hero Lei Feng and Wang Kuan's tortured insect body, fashioned after Kafka's Gregor Samsa,⁵²⁰ are co-eval despite belonging to different times and places. In “Ruined City” Zhuang Zhidie writes “magical realist” stories, but the social idlers in “White/Night” stage their own lives as caught between the linear, teleological time of development and progress, and the strange time of the *zhiguai* and the Mulian theater, in which wild animals, Maoist propaganda figures and mythical ghosts can foster community values and solidarity for a society that has allowed indifference to become its primary affective response to life.⁵²¹ The lack of a higher cosmological order means that the idler's quasi-supernatural transformations serve no identifiable purpose, just as it is unclear why Ye Lang must remain in Xijing at all costs, but this lack enables Jia to extract a variety of perspectives on possibilities for a post-human ethics from China's archives of the strange and marvelous.

At the end of the novel Jia tilts the ethical and historical equilibrium between these multiple realities and life forms in favor of the subaltern of linear time. In a postmodern twist on Lu Xun's iron house metaphor of Enlightenment, Ye Lang comes up with a new project for Xijing – a zoo, in which humans are locked into cages and the animals can roam freely.⁵²² In Lu Xun's apocalyptic allegory on the awakening of the Chinese nation, the iron house symbolizes the suffocating power of tradition, which remains indestructible and inescapable, no matter whether we are awakened to our own demise or remain asleep, blissfully unaware of our impending doom. Writing within the context of *baihua* language reform and national salvation, Lu Xun and his fellow forward-thinking intellectuals took it upon themselves to spearhead China's awakening. At the same time, however, Lu's allegory also draws attention to the “heteronomic power of classical language” since it accuses “traditional Chinese thought from within its very own poetics of exemplarity” and sagely

520 At one point, Yu Bai views Ye Lang as suffering from the same confused state of mind as Kafka, Jia Pingwa, *Baiye*, 31.

521 Such strange characters appear of course also in “Ruined City,” notably Zhuang's mother, who lives between the world of the living and the dead.

522 Jia Pingwa, *Baiye*, 289.

“prescience.”⁵²³ May Fourth iconoclasm draws its authority and formulates its critique of tradition from the very system and language it set out to discard.

The situation in “White/Night” is a different one: Not only do its main protagonists express a longing to return to this iron house, the “heteronomic power” of tradition today is weaker than during Lu Xun's time, because we are now even further removed from that imaginary past, from which we are nevertheless trying to source new meaning and value. The comparison to Lu Xun presents itself as particularly salient to our reading, because Lu Xun wrote on several occasions about the Mulian opera. But while he could draw from his childhood memories, Jia relied solely on the materials he acquired at a conference and other academic literature. Nevertheless, in “White/Night” access to the past is both a limitation to development and a resource for Jia's critique of urban modernity. While Yu Bai, who leads a secluded life in the folklore museum, or the medical doctor, who tried to become a sage, express a longing to return to Lu Xun's prison house, their cultural nostalgia appears both tragic and farcical. At the same time, Yu Bai and Ye Lang's sleeping disorders are equally expressive of a malfunctioning modernity, predicated as it is on the notion of awakening and a firm cognitive grasp of reality. Ye Lang's zoo gestures towards a radically different cultural order, in which humanity does not return to the old iron house, but rather creates, in the image of the old, a new prison. The domestication of animals and the commodification of culture are to Jia two sides of the same coin. Standing on the threshold of tradition and modernity, Jia's idler is socially and historically positioned to recognize the deficiencies and values on both sides. Although Ye Lang's simplistic reversal of hierarchies may appear impossibly naive and, keeping his cunning strategizing in mind, may also be a clever business ruse to capitalize on modern man's longing for nature, catered to with spectacles of nature-tainment, it is nevertheless an important detail in Jia's novel, because he endows the “strange creature” *yizhong* 异种, as Mulian calls

523 Gloria Davies, *Worrying About China: The Language of Chinese Critical Inquiry* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007), 51–52.

Jingwei and who embodies China's spectralized heritage, an ability to express a utopian desire. This desire can be formulated as the injunction to make it *strange* and to retrain our perception of the world, especially from the perspective of the disenfranchised Other.

And yet the question remains: Why does Jia right at the end of his long novel establish this new outlook towards animals, when, for instance, the founding of a new sectarian movement might be more expected? To be sure, animals figure just as prominently in *zhiguai* as deities and ghosts, and Jia's novel certainly also partakes in the world literary genre of magical realism, which Homi Bhabha has famously defined as “the literary language of the emergent postcolonial world.”⁵²⁴ Local religiosities, sacred rituals and the literary forms they have fostered play an important role in magical realism, and Jia, as I have shown, makes ample use of this. It is therefore quite possible that Jia inserted the example of the zoo in reaction to the ban on “Ruined City” and in order to emphasize the value of practical ideas over transcendental ideals, which could have landed him the charge of endorsing “superstition.” Another less obvious understanding of this passage presents itself when we consider its narrative mode of magical realism in the context of the colonial reification of alterity; by foregrounding the subaltern position of animals, which are through the idlers related symbolically as much to Mulian as Lei Feng, Jia tacitly draws attention to elite third-world writers' complicity in the representation of the foreign world as irrational and impenetrable. Animal welfare has a more global ethical appeal, because it transcends the particularity of the magical world of the opaque Other. In distinction to the rest of the novel, the zoo project foregrounds a shared reality, rather than a division of the world into a disenchanting, secular West and a supernatural, spiritual East.

But from here arises also the question of why Jia chose the format of the long novel (*changpian xiaoshuo* 长篇小说) instead of compiling a collection of *zhiguai* tales as he did in his

⁵²⁴ Homi K. Bhabha, ed., *Nation and Narration* (London, New York: Routledge, 1990), 7.

earlier work “Stories from Mount Taibai” (1982). Keeping Walter Benjamin's distinction between the story and the novel in mind, the insertion of a truncated utopian vision could also be read as a concession on Jia's part to the format of the novel, since it offers an explanation for the novel's vast and seemingly chaotic fictional universe and thus also stifles the richness of possible interpretations. As soon as the indeterminate promises of cultural transformation and rebirth take the form of a practical example, the vibrancy of Jia's strange world of Xijing appears suddenly diluted and choked up.⁵²⁵

Jia Pingwa is not the only writer who has focused primarily on the publication of long novels since the early '90s, which was quickly proclaimed the decade of the “long novel fever” (*changpian xiaoshuo re* 长篇小说热). While some conservative literary critics in China like to survey this vast field to gauge the standard of current literary talent, or lack thereof, the surge in long novels from the '90s onward certainly points to a change in the literary market.⁵²⁶ That commercialization and artistic quality are not incommensurable has no bearing on the fact that today novels are the most profitable fictional genre, and not only in China. To date, Jia Pingwa has written sixteen long novels (including the recently published “Jihua” (*Jihua* 极花, 2016)), which makes him at the very least one of the most productive writers within the field of high-brow or so-called “pure literature” (*chun wenxue* 纯文学). It may be that the novel lends itself more readily to the logic of the product than other narrative forms, and the explosion of long novels in the '90s seems to confirm Franco Moretti's argument, at least in this case, that the “rise” of the novel is linked to the birth of consumer society.⁵²⁷ As a commodity, “White/Night” flows, just like Ye Lang's

525 For a discussion of Walter Benjamin's storyteller in postcolonial novels see Pheng Cheah, *What Is a World?: On Postcolonial Literature as World Literature* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 321–24.

526 He Zhenbang 何镇邦, “‘Changpian re’ dailai de fengshou - 1998, 1999 changpian xiaoshuo chuanguo manping ‘长篇热’带来的丰收——1998, 1999 长篇小说创作漫评 [Bumper Harvest in the Wake of the ‘Long Novel Fever’ - A Cursory Review of Long Novels from 1998 to 1999],” *Xiaoshuo pinglun*, no. 2 (2004): 34–40.

527 Franco Moretti, “The Novel: History and Theory,” *New Left Review*, II, no. 52 (2008): 111–24. For the Republican period, this argument does not seem apposite, but I am not familiar enough with Moretti's works to assess their applicability to Republican-era literary history.

zoo, with and not against the consumer capitalist stream, although its length and descriptive exuberance are not geared towards easy consumption and fast global circulation (through literary criticism and translation), which probably holds true for many of Jia's long novels.

What further links the novel and consumerism is that they can both be viewed as secular substitutes for religion. In this view, the theocracy of the brand as much as the meaningful narrative of the novel compensate for the loss of a larger belief system. Walter Benjamin makes this link regarding the novel when he states that it is a concomitant symptom of the “secular productive forces of history,”⁵²⁸ or in Lukacs' phrasing, “the epic of a world abandoned by God.”⁵²⁹ The modern Chinese novel's relationship to secularization also has a more straightforward dimension, because the May Fourth brand of modern fiction understood itself as an important vehicle for the dissemination of secular thought, which resulted in the literary imagination of the religious as an “estranged heterotopia.”⁵³⁰ From here arises the question of what role Jia's “White/Night” could play in imagining those alternative histories and communities that it writes on its magical realist flag. Despite its clear posthuman and ecocritical leanings it seems questionable whether “White/Night” as a novel has any bearing on the expression and practice of the postsecular ethics its updated *zhiguai* narratives extol.

And yet, the insertion of Ye Lang's zoo project does help pull the novel's overall strong cultural nostalgia towards the present and thereby also reminds us that literature not only “belongs to the realm of civil society,”⁵³¹ but can also become a form of imaginative participation in current debates beyond institutional channels—significantly, there is no commentary by Wang Kuan or Nan Dingshan, through whom the reader learns of Ye Lang's idea or any indication of sarcasm on Jia's

528 Walter Benjamin, “The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov,” in *The Novel: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory 1900-2000*, ed. Dorothy J. Hale (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 364.

529 An introduction to the role of the novel in secularism can be found in Susanna Lee, *A World Abandoned by God: Narrative and Secularism* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2006).

530 Lee, *The Stranger and the Chinese Moral Imagination*, 38.

531 *Ibid.*, 29.

part. As a footnote to Lu Xun's iron house allegory it expresses both the recognition that what we consider to be heritage has in fact already been destroyed, turned into a museum or been commodified, but also that the utopian power residing in these residual premodern artifacts and beliefs, which could curb man's rampant abuse of natural and cultural resources, have also survived in and through these antagonistic forces. Ye Lang's amusement park explicates how the resources for resistance to secular modernity and its attendant normative and teleological discourses, such as speciesism, are transmitted through the globally circulated ideologies that promise their undoing—just like Jia ambivalently juxtaposes the endless rebirth of the *zhiguai* and the post-human hopes it may foster with the secular novel, on which it nevertheless relies as the most apposite format for circulation in the Chinese and the global literary market.

4 Yu Hua's “The Seventh Day” and inhuman environments

After a seven year hiatus from publishing fiction, Yu Hua returned, in 2013, with “The Seventh Day.” By virtue of Yu Hua's fame it was guaranteed to become an overnight bestseller, but has been generally ill-received by critics for being poorly written and derivative of popular news reports and online gossip.⁵³² But as was the case with Jia Pingwa's novel, the religious leitmotif of “The Seventh Day”, which Yu Hua further emphasizes by prefacing the text with the corresponding Genesis quote (both in English and in Chinese),⁵³³ is rarely taken into consideration, particularly by Western critics

532 Although the Chinese debate revolved primarily around the question whether Yu lacked imagination, I admit that I too think that Yu Hua's novel suffers from some shortcomings, which I will contextualize towards the end of this chapter. From a topical viewpoint, I take particularly issue with its gender values, which I will briefly discuss in the following, but there are also a number of smaller missteps. One example is the gratuitous platitude Yu Hua inserts in a passage, which narrates Yang Fei's stepsister's move to the US and ends with the remark that “after completing her degree, she remained in the US to work, married an American and had two beautiful mixed-blood children.” Yu Hua, *Di qi tian* (Beijing: Xin xing chu ban she, 2013), 93. Such remarks appear not only unrelated to the novel, but also reveal a more unreflective side to Yu Hua, which sits uncomfortable with his image (in the West) as a cosmopolitan writer-intellectual. Coincidentally, Allan Barr does not translate the racial term *hunxue* 混血. For a discussion of popular Chinese race “fusion” theories, which reflect the highly prevalent belief in the superior beauty and intelligence of Eurasian mixed children and contemporary racial hybridity discourses in general see: Emma Jinhua Teng, *Eurasian: Mixed Identities in the United States, China, and Hong Kong, 1842–1943* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013). Because all of these issues do not pertain to my discussion of spectrality and the inhuman and I have no interest in judging so-called literary quality, I do not discuss them here any further. See also my remarks on textual complexity in chapter three.

533 In English it is given as: “And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made.”

and translators, who are even less likely to be coerced into toeing the party's anti-superstition line than their mainland Chinese counterparts. For instance, the biblical quotation does not appear in the English translation by Allan H. Barr, and Carlos Rojas goes neither into the Christian symbolism of the title nor has anything to say on the role of death rituals and mourning in his discussion of the novel.⁵³⁴ The reasons for this neglect or disinterest can only be speculated upon. One aspect of this problem is certainly what Charles Laughlin calls an “enlightenment bias,”⁵³⁵ which has meant that the role of the religious and superstitious in the conceptualization of China's literary modernity has only recently gained traction in Chinese studies.⁵³⁶

More specifically, the novel's exploration of contemporary death rituals echoes the scene of the wailing female mourners in Ba Jin's novel “Family” (*Jia* 家, 1931). As Rey Chow astutely analyzes, Ba Jin's male narrator expresses his modern intellect by experiencing tradition as a feminine cacophony of the absurd and hypocritical.⁵³⁷ By contrast, Yang Fei's search for his father represents an intense longing for new and meaningful forms of ritually expressed norms and values. Whereas the mourning ritual in “Family” establishes a distance from the once familiar surroundings, Yu Hua presents the afterlife as a place, where an estranged and menacing relationship to society can be mended and overcome. In the era of Xi Jinping's “China Dream,” capitalist pressures leave the living no room for conviviality and stranger sociality. Ruthless exploitation looms large and everybody is fighting to survive the economic battle.⁵³⁸ In this

534 Carlos Rojas, *Homesickness* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2015), 273–77. His interpretation focuses predominantly on the role of the media in the circulation of both information and affect.

535 This quote is from Charles Laughlin's introduction to the three-day panel session he organized together with Ni Zhang at the ACCL 2015 in Shanghai, entitled: *Modern Chinese Culture and the Uncanny: “Superstition” as a Critique of Enlightenment*, in which I participated with a paper on 1930s and 40s urban ghost novels.

536 I am indebted to my supervisor Andrea Riemenschneider, who generously shared with me her manuscript on environmental modernization and Xi Jinping's “China Dream,” in which she discusses among many other texts also “The Seventh Day”: *Dreams of Shanshui: Landscape Aesthetics and China's Environmental Modernization* (unpublished). While her discussion focuses on Yu Hua's reflections on ritual practices in the post-Mao period, where she also incisively relates “The Seventh Day” with Rey Chow's reading of Ba Jin, my own analysis focuses on Yu's eco-aesthetic of the spectral and inhuman.

537 Chow, *Not Like a Native Speaker*, 63.

538 A incisive discussion of the Chinese state's prohibition of stranger sociality as a tool for populace control can be found in Lee, *The Stranger and the Chinese Moral Imagination*, 1–29.

dystopian world of the living, spiritual activities are just another scam (for example, incarnation in the US comes at a surcharge⁵³⁹); nature only appears as what Marc Augé calls a “non-place” and is, in the novel's world of the living, completely absent.⁵⁴⁰ But while the world of the living is dominated by the logic of capital, which even extends itself into the afterlife though, for example, the cremation industry, the novel's ghost figures and their utopian land of the unburied dead also articulate the desire for a new eco-poetic vision of social life. Although environmental degradation is only once directly thematized, when smog causes a bus crash,⁵⁴¹ the novel makes an important connection between the loss of ritual order and China's landscapes, in which the average worker today no longer has the financial means to secure one of the few remaining pristine burial plots.

Those in the plastic seats had plots measuring one square yard, whereas the burial grounds for the VIPs were all at least six acres. [...] Five out of the six burial plots were established on mountain peaks, facing the sea, encircled by clouds, the most uplifting and awe-inspiring ocean-view grave sites imaginable. The sixth was in a dale where trees grew thickly, streams gurgled and birds sang, and where a natural rock that had been rooted there for hundreds of thousands of years served as headstone. These days everyone wants to eat organic foodstuffs, the owner said, but his was an organic headstone.⁵⁴²

The ironic twist of Yu Hua's novel lies in the fact that now that religious rituals and ghosts are allowed and have even been incorporated into consumer society, the natural surroundings that burials would necessitate are either destroyed or only available to the economically affluent. “Even

539 Yu Hua, *Di qi tian*, 102.

540 One example for nature as a non-place, i.e. a place, which does not contribute to or produce identity and to which people accordingly experience no connection, are the grass fields in Chinese parks, which have no trespassing signs set up. These spaces can neither become a part of community life nor do they in any way reflect the specificity of their cultural surroundings, see Marc Augé, *Non-Places* (New York: Verso, 2008).

541 Yu Hua, *Di qi tian*, 182; Yu Hua, *The Seventh Day*, trans. Allan H. Barr (Melbourne: The Text Publishing Company, 2015), 172.

542 Yu Hua, *Di qi tian*, 13; Yu Hua, *The Seventh Day*, 13–14.

dying,”the people in the plastic seat section of the cremation parlor waiting room clamor, “has become unaffordable.”⁵⁴³

The most important topic explored in “The Seventh Day” is the connection between the plight of China's lower social rungs (*diceng*) and the need for a more eco-conscious modernization. Accordingly, my reading will focus in particular on the imaginary landscapes of the living and, more importantly, the dead, where the abandoned ghosts are temporarily enjoying “relief from the sorrow and inhumanity that permeate the world of the living.”⁵⁴⁴ While Jia Pingwa's novel draws on the cosmographic logic of the *zhiguai* to create modern tales of the inhuman, Yu Hua's novel is more concerned with poetics of the inhuman. In the end, Yu Hua's novel does indeed reveal just how weak alternative, subaltern literary perspectives have become, since his wandering ghosts remain confined to their penumbral retirement home and can no longer haunt, but on the other hand also speaks to the tenacity and continued importance of the spectral in articulating critical viewpoints of China's modernization.

4.1 A society of ghosts

The novel begins with the death of the middle-aged office worker Yang Fei 杨飞 in an accident explosion at a restaurant and narrates from his viewpoint the first seven days of his journey through the afterworld, where he meets former loved ones and family members, but also complete strangers who share with him the same misfortune of not being able to afford a burial plot and are thus forced to remain in the fringe world of the unburied dead. As the genesis quote clarifies, the title refers to the seven days of earth creation, which Yu Hua applies to the work of memory in the afterworld: It takes Yang Fei seven days to recollect his life and to find closure on his life's story by tracking down his foster father Yang Jinbiao 杨金彪 in the afterworld, who had left him after falling severely

543 Yu Hua, *Di qi tian*, 15. Here the translation is my own, but I also draw on Allan Barr's translation in the following quotes. Page references are given for the original text.

544 Deborah Treisman, “This Week in Fiction: Yu Hua,” *The New Yorker*, August 19, 2013, accessed December 6, 2016, <http://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/this-week-in-fiction-yu-hua>.

ill. But the number seven, and specifically the seventh day, also hold ritual significance in Chinese burial rituals, as it used to be custom to keep the coffin of the deceased in the house for at least the first seven days after expiration and it was said that the soul of the dead may return to its former home on the seventh day after death (called *touqi* 头七, literally “first seven”).⁵⁴⁵ Viewed in this light, the novel can also be read as a seven-day mourning ritual for Yu Hua's cast of tragic heroes, who fell off China's high-speed modernization train.

During his journey, Yang Fei meets significant people from his life such as his ersatz foster-mother, Li Yuezhen 李月珍, his ex-wife Li Qing 李青, and eventually also his father, but he also meets strangers, whose stories he had heard of or read in the news. These stories alternate with Yang Fei's memories, which provides continuity to an otherwise fragmented narrative. In unchronological sequence we learn that Yang Fei's life began as tragically unfortunate as it ended by being born on the toilet of a train. Unaware of what was happening, and fainting right after birth, Yang Fei's mother accidentally let the baby fall right through the toilet hole onto the tracks and only managed to find her child many years later. Luckily, Yang Fei was unharmed and a young switch-man found him. After nursing him, with the help of a lactating friend, Li Yuezhen, he decided to adopt the baby and raise it as his own. Self-sacrifice and complete devotion characterize their relationship. By adopting a non-kin, Yang Fei's father relinquished the possibility of marrying, because the one woman with whom he enters into a short relationship forces him to choose between her and the foundling. Yang Fei later on also gives up on a life with his biological mother, because he cannot bear the idea of being separated from his adopted father. And when his father is diagnosed with lymphoma, Yang Fei quits his job and moves into a small apartment next to the hospital in order to

545 James L. Watson and Evelyn Sakakida Rawski, eds., *Death Ritual in Late Imperial and Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 41. However, Yu Hua stated in an interview that although he was well aware of the belief in *touqi* he only had the biblical narrative in mind during writing, qtd. in Liu Jiangkai 刘江凯, “Yu Hua de ‘dangdaixing xiezu’ yiyi: you ‘Di qi tian’ tan qi 余华的‘当代性写作’意义: 由《第七天》谈起 [The Meaning of Yu Hua's ‘Contemporary Writing’: A Discussion Starting with ‘The Seventh Day’],” *Wenxue pinglun*, no. 6 (2013): 123.

take care of him. Their story ends in the world of the living, when his father disappears so as to be no longer a financial burden on his son. This also means that they can reunite in the afterworld, as Yang Fei can be sure that nobody has organized any funeral arrangements for his father. Indeed he eventually tracks him down in the parlor of the crematorium (having not seen him the first time he passed through the crematorium on his way into the afterworld), where his father is still helping out strangers as selflessly and tirelessly as when he was alive.

Despite sharing a similar post-secular leitmotif and a strong episodic character, “The Seventh Day” is a very different novel than “White/Night”; while Jia's picaresque tour de force focuses squarely on the cultural dimension of urban modernity, Yu Hua turns the spotlight on a set of very concrete social issues related to and exacerbated by China's fast-paced modernization. Topics include police abuse, the one-child policy and forced abortion, urban housing demolition, coerced relocation, political corruption, emigration to the US, bigotry, China's working poor youth as well as widespread judicial injustice, amongst others. All of these stories, including Yang Fei's own, focus on the tragedy and absurdity of life in China today, but have nothing to say on the underlying economic, political and cultural causes for specific social maladies and injustices. Accordingly, the Chinese state appears mainly in the role of a cover-up agency, who makes dead bodies disappear, spreads false reports and buries news stories. For instance, Li Yuezhen discovers by accident that the local hospital had disposed of aborted fetuses by dumping them into the river, but right after this discovery she is herself fatally injured in a car crash. Moreover, all of the corpses disappear yet more mysteriously when the hospital morgue is sucked down a sink hole. But government officials shortly after come up with the excuse that the bodies were already cremated before the sinkhole incident and stages a news conference at the funeral parlor to publicly display the “twenty-seven tiny urns.”⁵⁴⁶ Family members and the public suspect that the ashes were

⁵⁴⁶ Yu Hua, *Di qi tian*, 108.

tampered with, but nobody in the end could prove a cover-up. Li Yuezhen's presence in the afterworld, where she has become the leader of the group of unfortunate baby ghosts, is proof that it was indeed not her ashes that were returned to her family.

This relentless exposure of hardship and injustice is juxtaposed with the heroic altruism of regular *laobaixing*. One particularly heart-wrenching story of self-sacrifice revolves around the suicide of a young woman named Liu Mei 刘梅, but frequently referred to as “mouse girl” (*shumei* 鼠妹) on account of her underground living quarters. When her boyfriend learns that she ended her poverty-stricken life, because he gifted her a fake iPhone, he sells one of his kidneys to buy her a resting place in the afterworld. Adding injustice to tragedy, he also dies from an infection resulting from the operation and fails finally to reunite with Liu Mei in the afterlife, as shortly before his arrival she is sent off to her final resting place where she will no longer decompose.

Throughout the entire novel there is no villainous figure, and Yang Fei has compassion, or at least shows no indignation towards anybody, even for those who made grave mistakes while still alive, such as his ex-wife, who remarried for money, or the police officer who in a violent fit of rage castrated a male prostitute. Once dead everybody gets along, as grudges do not “cross the frontier between life and death.”⁵⁴⁷ Even the police officer and his victim turn their deadly animosity into a peaceful friendship, save for the occasional squabble over retracted chess moves. What gives the unburied dead the ability to overcome their fear, mistrust and greed is not only their shared plight of not receiving posthumous care, but more importantly the ability to exchange their stories face-to-face.

We sat around the bonfire, and in the spacious silence there quietly surged a thousand words and ten thousand comments – the sound of many humble lives presenting an account of themselves. Every one of the self-mourners had bitter memories too painful to recall, of that

547 Ibid., 143.

departed world; every one was a lonely orphan there. Mourning ourselves, we gathered here, but when we sat in a circle around the green bonfire, we were no longer lonely and abandoned.⁵⁴⁸

The memory economy of the dead contrasts with the telemediatization of the other in the world of the living, which does not bring society closer together, but rather has exacerbated estrangement and apathy. When, for instance, Liu Mei announces her suicide on the online messaging forum QQ she receives advice only on how to kill herself and requests not to commit suicide in specific neighborhoods, because that would bring bad luck.⁵⁴⁹

In “The Seventh Day” Yu Hua also reworks the shockingly cruel death, in 2011, of the toddler girl Wang Yue, which temporarily alerted the Chinese news media and the “wired public” to sound the alarm signals on China's moral crisis.⁵⁵⁰ The video of a public security camera had captured how the two-year old girl was hit consecutively by two trucks, before being left on the ground by both drivers and ignored by numerous passers-by until finally an elderly female garbage scavenger carried the girl to the sidewalk and alerted the mother. In the novel, Yu Hua has Yang Fei's wet nurse and ersatz mother, Li Yuezheng, get hit first by a BMW, then by a truck and then by a delivery van. Her death does not immediately lead to a media spectacle, but it occurs right after her discovery of the dead fetuses, which generates a huge outcry among netizens despite government efforts to keep the story out of the news. But in Yu Hua's bleak snapshot of contemporary civil society, things always go from bad to worse. Under public pressure the government eventually agrees to cremate the remains of the dead babies and fetuses, but when their bodies disappear in the sink hole incident they again fake their cremation by stealing ashes from other people's urns. Retelling the tragic Wang Yue incident in conjunction with the cruel enforcement of Chinese birth

548 Ibid., 164; Yu Hua, *The Seventh Day*, 156.

549 Yu Hua, *Di qi tian*, 117–18.

550 Lee, *The Stranger and the Chinese Moral Imagination*, 1.

laws extends the logic of the “medical refuse” to society as a whole, where no government and no person protects the vulnerable and no act of altruism or protest against moral indifference, such as Li Yuezhen's, goes unpunished.

In contrast to life, the land of the unburied dead is a utopian idyll at the fringes of the afterworld, which distinguishes itself from the expansive emptiness in the other parts of the afterlife by its pastoral landscape. In describing this place Yu Hua's language suddenly becomes cloyingly tender, as the following passage, in which Yang Fei sees the land of the unburied dead for the first time, exemplifies.

To my amazement I now saw another world, one where streams were flowing, where grass covered the ground, where trees were thick with leaves and loaded with stone fruit. The leaves were shaped like hearts, and when they shivered it was with the rhythm of hearts beating. I saw many people, most of them just bones, but some still fleshed, walking back and forth.⁵⁵¹

When in the novel's final scene Yang Fei again describes the land of the unburied dead, this time to Liu Mei's boyfriend Wu Chao 伍超, he paints an idealistic picture of the unburied afterlife, which is also an unmistakable stab at China's “harmonious society” (*hexie shehui* 和谐社会), the leit-metaphor for state policy under former head of state Hu Jintao:

“Go on over,” I said to him. “The tree leaves there will beckon you, the rocks will smile at you, the river will greet you. There's no poverty and no riches; there's no sorrow and no pain; no grievances and no hate... there everybody is equal in death.”⁵⁵²

551 Yu Hua, *Di qi tian*, 126; Yu Hua, *The Seventh Day*, 120–21. [modified]

552 Yu Hua, *Di qi tian*, 225; Yu Hua, *The Seventh Day*, 213. [modified]

The vibrancy of this bucolic and pristine nature contrasts with the nightmarish world of the living, which is constantly enveloped in the “heavy smog” (*nongwu* 浓雾), with which the novel portentously opens.⁵⁵³

Heavy smog lay in the air, when I left my apartment and pushed myself out into the barren and murky city.⁵⁵⁴

While environmentally caused illnesses are conspicuously missing in Yu Hua's line-up of tragedies, the environmental theme expressed in the eco-utopia of the unburied is also reinforced by the cover art of the Chinese edition. It shows a close-up of a human-shaped ice figurine sitting on a stone stair, melted to the point that it resembles an emaciated Giacometti sculpture. In the image, only one other figure can be discerned from the blurry background, but these were actually part of the large-scale “Melting Men” urban art installation by Brazilian artist Nele Azevedo (1959-), which was showcased in Berlin in 2009 (see illustration 6). The piece featured hundreds of miniature ice figures perched in long rows on the steps of the Gendarmenmarkt, where they quickly melted in the summers heat. In this case, the installation was commissioned by the World Wildlife Foundation to raise public awareness of global warming, but is actually part of the artist's “Monumento Mínimo” project, in which she staged similar interventions in cities around the globe.

Azevedo's art project resonates with the theme of Yu Hua's novel on two levels. Firstly, it further highlights Yu Hua's focus on the physical and emotional costs that humans pay for China's economic development. Just as the figures made of frozen water draw attention to the consequences of the global consumer economy, so too are the economically disenfranchised and victims of neglect, injustice and government cover-ups forced to remain in the land of the unburied, where

553 The Chinese word for smog is just like in English also a compound of smoke and fog, *yan* 烟 and *wu* 雾. But because in modern Chinese adjective (*nong*) plus a two-syllable noun (*yanwu*) is often shortened into a two-syllable compound noun, *nongwu* could either mean “heavy fog” or “heavy smog.” Alan Barr indeed translates *nongwu* throughout as “heavy fog.” However, in common parlance *nongwu* always refers to heavy air pollution.

554 Yu Hua, *Di qi tian*, 3; Yu Hua, *The Seventh Day*, 3.

their flesh gradually rots away until they are mere skeletons. At the same time, this brings them back in touch with their natural surroundings, which turn out to be just as much “unburied” and “unmourned” as the ghosts.

In the quiet circle of sitters I heard the dancing of the fire, the tapping of the water, the swaying of the grass, the sougning of the trees, the rustling of the breeze, the floating of the clouds. These sounds seemed to be pouring out their woes, as though they too had suffered many reverses and ordeals too painful to recall.⁵⁵⁵

In “The Seventh Day” this spectral nature is in life only eerily present through absence—a void squatted by the polluted air.

Secondly, the image from Azevedo's interventionist art project also enables us to consider how “The Seventh Day” blurs or reinforces the boundaries of literature, religious practice and political activism. The skeleton is a key figure in this respect as it usually represents the equality of all men in death, though in “The Seventh Day” it is the last punishment the downtrodden must endure. Crucially, there is no democracy in death. “Mouse girl” in particular dreads the moment that her flesh will start to rot and she will become one of the “people, who only have their bones left of them,”⁵⁵⁶ because youthful beauty appears to be her only source of self(-worth). Feminine beauty, regrettably, reinforces here the social hierarchies of the afterlife, as the powerful and wealthy can enter their final resting grounds with their flesh intact, while the less fortunate are forcefully stripped of their last layer of dignity. As the abject other to the ritual order proper, they guarantee that the hierarchies of life are also maintained in the afterlife.

But just as Baudrillard's inhuman signifies both the inhumanity of the system and the other of humanity, Yu Hua's bare-boned ghosts, stripped even of their right to haunt the living, also allow

555 Yu Hua, *Di qi tian*, 164; Yu Hua, *The Seventh Day*, 156.

556 Yu Hua, *Di qi tian*, 125; Yu Hua, *The Seventh Day*, 120.

for a more hopeful perspective. This is illustrated most evocatively in the novel's climactic scene, in which the unburied organize a ceremony to send Liu Mei off to her final resting ground. One of the old skeletons explains the procedure:

“People over there make distinctions between family and strangers,” the hoary old skeleton continued, “but there are no such demarcations here. With interments over there one needs to be bathed by one's kith and kin, but here we are all her family and we all need to bathe her. People there use bowls of water to bathe a body; here we cup our hands to make a bowl.” [Most of the characters make an appearance at this point, among them the hospital babies discovered by Li Yuezen who now play a vital role in the ritual] Li Yuezhen carried the babies one by one to the broad tree leaves beside the river. As the babies lay on the leaves that swayed in the breeze, their song was no longer intermittent, but flowed freely like the river water itself. Mouse Girl, surrounded by grass and flowers, heard the nightingale chorus rising and falling on all sides, and without conscious effort she began to sing the babies' song.⁵⁵⁷

As much as the ritual reinforces the theocracy of money and wealth, the process itself simultaneously highlights the artistic and ethically progressive potential of the de-humanized inhuman to build a new socially inclusive and environmentally conscious community. In contrast to “White/Night,” where the Mulian opera and the cosmological views expressed in early *zhiguai* play an important role in the narrative, Christianity has in “The Seventh Day” less a thematic and more a structural and philosophical function. Firstly, as I have already mentioned, the myth of God's creation of earth organizes and guides Yang Fei's journey in the afterlife. But secondly, it also functions as the mythological backdrop for a utopian vision of future society, as demonstrated by the scene quoted above. Significantly, the ritual itself takes place on the sixth day, which in the

557 Yu Hua, *Di qi tian*, 197–200; Yu Hua, *The Seventh Day*, 188–90.

biblical cosmogony, of course, is the day God created all living creatures including man and decided that his work was complete. This hopeful vision contrasts with the bleak perspective observed through the rest of the novel, but also affirms the overall message in “The Seventh Day” that China is in desperate need of a stronger civil society. Although those who end up here do not come of their own volition and may not have made any mistakes in life, Yu Hua paints a very clear picture of humanity's overall failure to create a just and prosperous society. After the failures of anthropocentric utopianism, the chastized and marginalized wandering ghosts, who have no kin to provide for them after death, offer greater promise for the future than the society of living humans.

The entire novel is squarely focused on this message, arguably at the expense of character and plot development. And for all the grievances and abuses it details, the novel's overall aesthetic is uncontroversial and politically harmless. Whereas Yu Hua's previous style in works such as “To Live” and “Diaries of a Blood Merchant” stood out for its robust humor, punctuated now and then by scenes of the grotesque and abject, his guarded narration in “The Seventh day” is, I believe, indicative of Yu's ongoing role change from writer to social observer and commentator, which inevitably also entails taking his writings in a less confrontational direction. While many quickly jumped to the conclusion that Yu Hua was either lazy or had run out of creative ideas, his previous and subsequent essay publications as well as the cover art by Azevedo all point towards this shift.

Yu Hua is not a political activist and like most Chinese writers keen to eschew any direct confrontation with government agencies, yet he has nevertheless become one of the most important dissenting creative voices from within mainland China today. Yu Hua's latest publication is an essay collection published one year after “The Seventh Day” and entitled “We Live in Great Disparity” (*Women shenghuo zai juda de chaju li* 我们生活在巨大的差距里), which he published in China contrary to the highly acclaimed essay collection “China in ten words” (*Shige cihui li de zhongguo* 十个词汇里的中国), which was printed first in 2010 as a French translation and in 2011 in Taiwan.

While the causes for disparity and inequality have continuously shifted throughout the 20th and 21st century, there is still a need for writers who are not afraid of ghosts and who champion the various opinions and issues made visible through their appearance. In the difficult to finesse political terrain of contemporary China, Yu Hua is one of them.

Conclusion: The meaning and significance of “not being afraid of ghosts”

This study traced the very diverse stories told about and by ghosts over the course of modern Chinese literary history from the early Republican period to the present. Whilst “Stories About Not Being Afraid of Ghosts” is only one small part of this study, I suggested in the introduction that a wider-angled, “against the grain” understanding of “not being afraid of ghosts” can be regarded as a common principle of modern Chinese ghost fiction. My concluding remarks will therefore focus on two questions: Firstly, how does “not being afraid of ghosts” relate to the findings of each chapter? And secondly, what implications does “not being afraid of ghosts” have for our understanding of modern Chinese literary history?

The first question returns us to the problematizations of the human-ghost relationship in modern China. As a literary practice, “not being afraid of ghosts” reflects modern literature's persistent role in the production, dissemination and critique of the values and experiences conceptualized along the symbolic distinction between humans and ghosts. Whilst the modalities of representing the living human as a figure of Enlightenment, rationality, revolution, scientific and economic progress have been a driving force in Chinese literary history, which is also reflected in the emergence of literary and aesthetic theories focused on this question, the same cannot be said of ghosts. Rather, ghosts first appear in modern China as an obsolete weight and as figures of crisis and transition. Accordingly, and in contrast to the theoretically highly invested figure of the ideal human, the need for conceptualizing the ideal ghost or the right way to tell ghost stories never presented itself with similar force. On a general level, modern Chinese ghost fiction is driven instead by the dynamics of the ephemeral, marginal and transient, and is shaped predominantly by moral and political considerations of the not-yet human, no longer human or inhuman. This explains

the stylistic and ideological heterogeneity of ghost fiction in modern China and the very different meanings of “not being afraid of ghosts” presented in each chapter.

Viewed in this light, the importance of Shao Xunmei's ghost story project lies not so much in its idiosyncratic concept of the modern ghost story as such, but rather in its recognition of this dynamic. Shao's logic is as simple as it is persuasive: In a frightening world ghost stories make sense, because they can represent the often times elusive, invisible and hidden nature of terror and fear in intelligible and recognizable (literary) form. However, Shao and many of the contributors focused primarily on distancing themselves from actual ghost beliefs, which stifled their exploration of the ways ghost fiction could more concretely reflect the experience of China's modernization.

Nevertheless, Shao's argument reappears many years later in similar fashion in He Qifang's introduction to “Stories,” which is surprisingly less cumbered with actual ghost beliefs. For He (and Mao), the ghost story is once again understood as an apposite form to address (and construct) a politically dangerous climate. Although the writing of new ghost stories would have proved a difficult task in the 1950s and 1960s, He's understanding of classical ghost stories actually follows a very similar logic as Shao's: The ghost story translates a hidden and invisible enemy into a concrete shape. Moreover, classical ghost stories lend themselves particularly well and arguably better to this logic than any new ghost story, because Maoist classism relied heavily on the religious symbols and practices, of which these stories tell.

However, the meaning of “not being afraid of ghosts” does not exhaust itself in the confrontation with or construction of a terrifying world. While the ambivalent love of ghosts expressed in modernist texts, the ideological care for ghosts in Ouyang Shan's “Uncle Gao” and the sociological ghost discourses in Jia Pingwa and Yu Hua's urban ghost novels do not reflect the same aesthetic and political values, they share a recognition that ghosts and haunting not only involve

horror and fear, but are also deeply relevant to modern China. Ouyang Shan's anti-superstition novel reconceptualizes rural healing practices as a road-map of reform. And the phantom romance plot in late Republican Shanghai fiction serves both male and female writers to envision new cultural functions of femininity and spectrality to reflect, cope with and negotiate the gendered terms of Shanghai's (cosmopolitan) literary modernity.

On a general level, these texts speak predominantly to a haunting, which is understood in temporal terms as a subjective, literary, or cultural relationship between the past and the present, the future anterior and the future present. Although I have consistently argued against a reading of modern Chinese ghost fiction as a return of tradition, traditional Chinese ghost discourses unsurprisingly superseded the Western Gothic tradition or Judeo-Christian beliefs in importance to my readings. But although haunting involves pastness, it is not necessarily limited to temporal frameworks. While an inquiry into spatial configurations, such as in haunted house narratives, did not emerge as a significant theme in Chinese ghost fiction, social marginalization cropped up as one of its main concerns, not only as a strategy of exclusion and disenfranchisement. Despite strong thematic and stylistic differences, Jia Pingwa and Yu Hua's novels both reveal a wider-angled view of haunting as a strategy for rendering absence and thus also mechanisms of marginalization visible. Thus, “not being afraid of ghosts” involves not only confronting a terrifying reality, but also a perspective on ghost encounters and hauntings as a literary solution to a paradoxical causality: Just as the present gives pastness—and its related meanings of the irrational, religious/superstitious, marginal, inhuman, etc.—new meaning, so does pastness offer a framework for understanding the present.

Thus, what can the “not being afraid of ghosts” paradigm contribute to our understanding of China's literary modernity? Certainly, the popularity of a text such as Xu Xu's “Ghost Love” or the considerable efforts put into “Stories” by high-ranking party members and Mao himself, suggests

that ghost stories may have never been as peripheral to modern China as its literary histories suggest. However, in my opinion more important than ghost fiction's contribution to recent revisions of Chinese literary history are the questions these text raise about the flows and interactions of ideas and values in modernity. Ghost fiction and its registers of haunting offer a distinct vision of the complex and often violent dialectic between the past and present, the urban and the rural, the secular and the religious, the central and the peripheral in modern China.

The view on China's modernity as a radical rupture with the past and an embrace of Western values and ideas has in the last two decades yielded to a revalidation of tradition as an important force shaping this process. This reflects theoretical developments in the field of the humanities and social sciences in general, where modernization is no longer understood as a unidirectional temporal and spatial flow of ideas and values from a secular, scientific “West” to a religious, magical “East” and where a view of “tradition” as “reinvented” has become almost *de rigueur*. Although, as Rey Chow and others have pointed out, this approach runs the risk of producing “orientalist” idealizations of the non-West as a site of immutable difference, a large and still growing number of studies have very successfully delineated how a local perspective on practices and strategies of *doing modernity* can bring unique characteristics of China's modernization process to light without anchoring these in “national character,” “Chinese tradition,” etc. Two scholarly works in this vein cited in this study are Gloria Davies' analysis of the “heteronomic power of tradition” in *May Fourth thought*, and Lydia Liu's study of the role of translation as an “encounter between languages” in China's early modernity.

Because modern Chinese ghost fiction operates in the interstices of crisis representation, (re-)emerging aesthetics of the ghostly and local archives of religious imagination, it enables us to consider haunting as a form of cultural agency. We can situate this agency in a first step on the textual level, because ghost narratives are a way of making (formal, aesthetic) sense out of a

paradoxical situation, for instance the ambiguity of simultaneous desire and aversion towards the foreign expressed in novels such as Zhang Kebiao's "Mirage." Moreover, as ghost stories are among the most recognizable and globally circulated forms of Chinese literary culture, they involve also issues related to the production, consumption and dissemination of Chineseness. I did not discuss the illustrations accompanying the translations of "Stories," but they could have further supported my argument in this respect. Although Cheng Shifa's ink drawings are clearly influenced by modern realism, they not only depict scenes from classical stories, but also employ classical visual elements such as stylized smoke and calligraphy. As such they give the translations overall a much more Chinese feeling than the Chinese version. A similar, but much more ambiguous self-orientalizing gesture can also be detected in Jia Pingwa's novel. However, Jia's exploration of the Mulian opera and historical archives of the strange come closer to what Rey Chow has described in her discussion of Zhang Yimou's early movies as a "tactic" that sells Chineseness to a global audience, but simultaneously also throws the Western, orientalizing gaze back on itself.⁵⁵⁸

But haunting understood as a range of agency and in Avery Gordon's formulation a "social experience"⁵⁵⁹ does not only move in a literary-historical dimension and raise issues about Chineseness and nationalism, but also involves broader questions about the terms of Chinese modernity. For instance, anachronisms such as the coffee-drinking ghosts in the embedded "classical" ghost story in Xu Xu's "Ghost Love" demonstrate how haunting can challenge the linear time of calendars and watches. As such, it has a political dimension, which is not always as playful as in Xu Xu's novel. In particular Shi Jimei and Tang Xuehua's novels mobilize haunting to explore the transgressive agency of backward femininity. Despite being robbed of their capacity to haunt the living, the agency of Yu Hua's ghosts is directed also at a environmentally and socially more

inclusive politics. With an eye towards Hong Kong ghost movies and ghost fiction of sinophone

558 Rey Chow, *Primitive Passions: Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography and Contemporary Chinese Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

559 Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 201.

literary communities outside of the PRCh—two notable absences in this study, the cultural and political entanglements of haunting as agency and social, metaphysical, geographical and ethnic marginality appear a particularly relevant and fruitful topic for future studies. However, the stories about “not being afraid of ghosts” within these broader regional networks of haunting remain to be told elsewhere.

Appendix 1: Illustrations

Illustration 1: "An X-ray view behind the scene" ([X]Guang zhi muhou X 光之幕后) by Chen Haoxiong 陈浩雄, *Lunyu banyuekan* 92: 945.



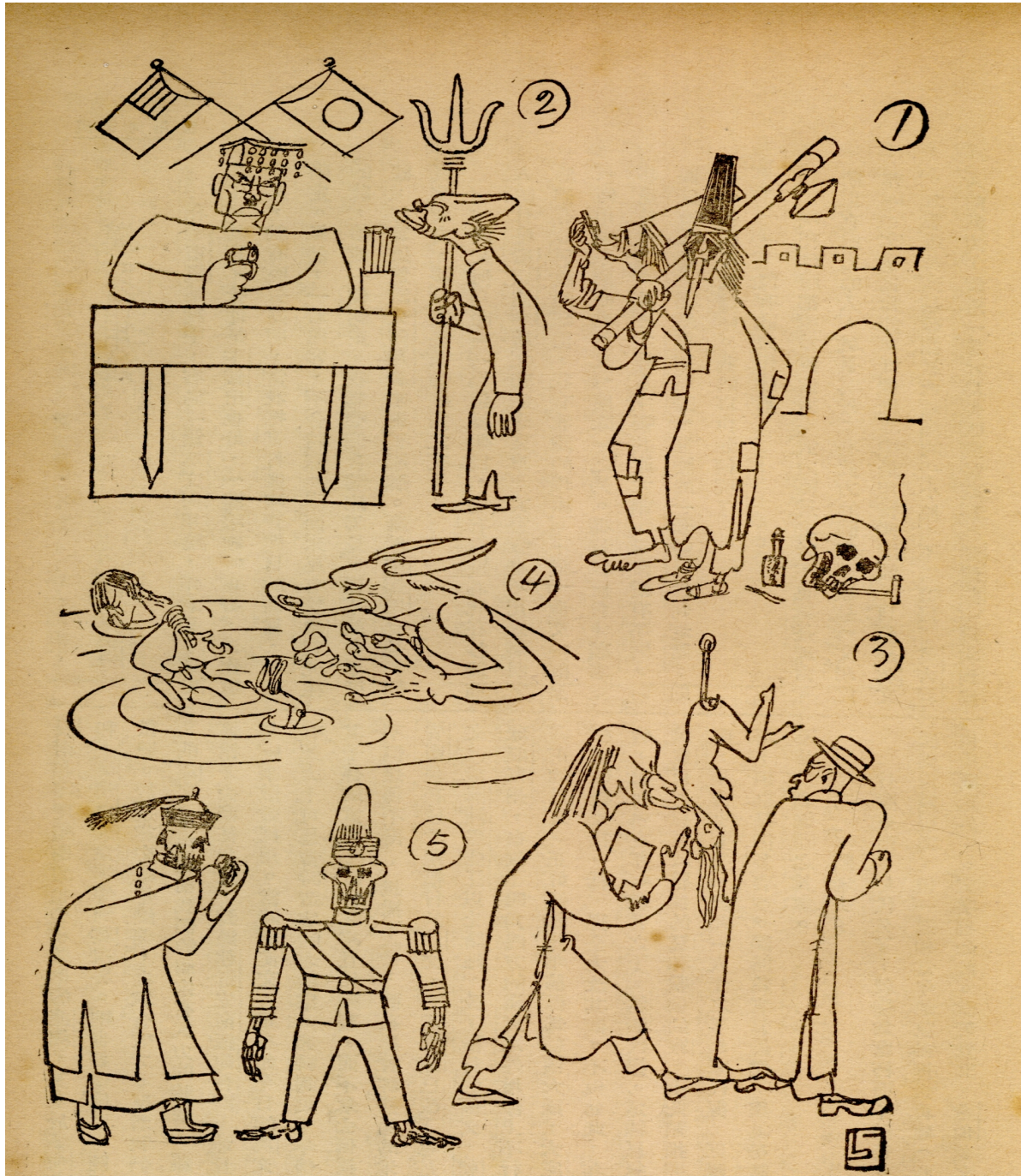
作雄浩陈

後幕之光「X」

Illustration 2: "New Guiqu" (Xin guiqu 新鬼趣图) by Lu Shaofei 鲁少飞, *Lunyu banyuekan* 91: 924.



Illustration 3: "Record of Jingu's [Tianjin] ghost shadows" (*Jinshan guiying lu* 津沾鬼影录) by Gao Longsheng 高龙生, *Lunyu banyuekan* 92: 1001. The explanation reads: "1) Black and White Wuchang [Impermanence] (opium ghost and white face ghost) 2) Yama and a minor ghost (XX and a traitor) 3) Hung-to-death ghost (Those who lure customers to unlicensed brothels and gambling halls) 4) The female ghost in a sea of blood (The prostitutes of Luoma Lake [famous Republican-era brothel in Tianjin]) 5) Returned to life zombies (warlords)"



高龍生作

津沾鬼影錄

答) 鬼死勾 (3) (奸漢與XX) 鬼小與羅閣 (2) (鬼面白與鬼片雅) 常無二白黑 (1)
 (閩軍) 屍僵之活復 (5) (女妓之湖馬落) 鬼女之中池汚血 (4) (者馬拉作馬鬚媚暗

Illustration 4: “The Eye-less Ghost” (Wuyan gui 无眼鬼), by Xuan Wenjie 宣文傑, *Lunyu banyuekan* 91: 876. The subhead reads: “This man specializes in collecting the ghosts of wronged characters. All evil needs to be punished and purposefully excised so that it can be handled with one hand alone and there be no delay. (Furthermore, this man [himself] no longer has his eyes and eyebrows, but still goes about his business as usual, which truly is a relief.)”



Illustration 5: Untitled manhua by Zhang Leping 张乐平, *Lunyu banyuekan*, 92: 962.

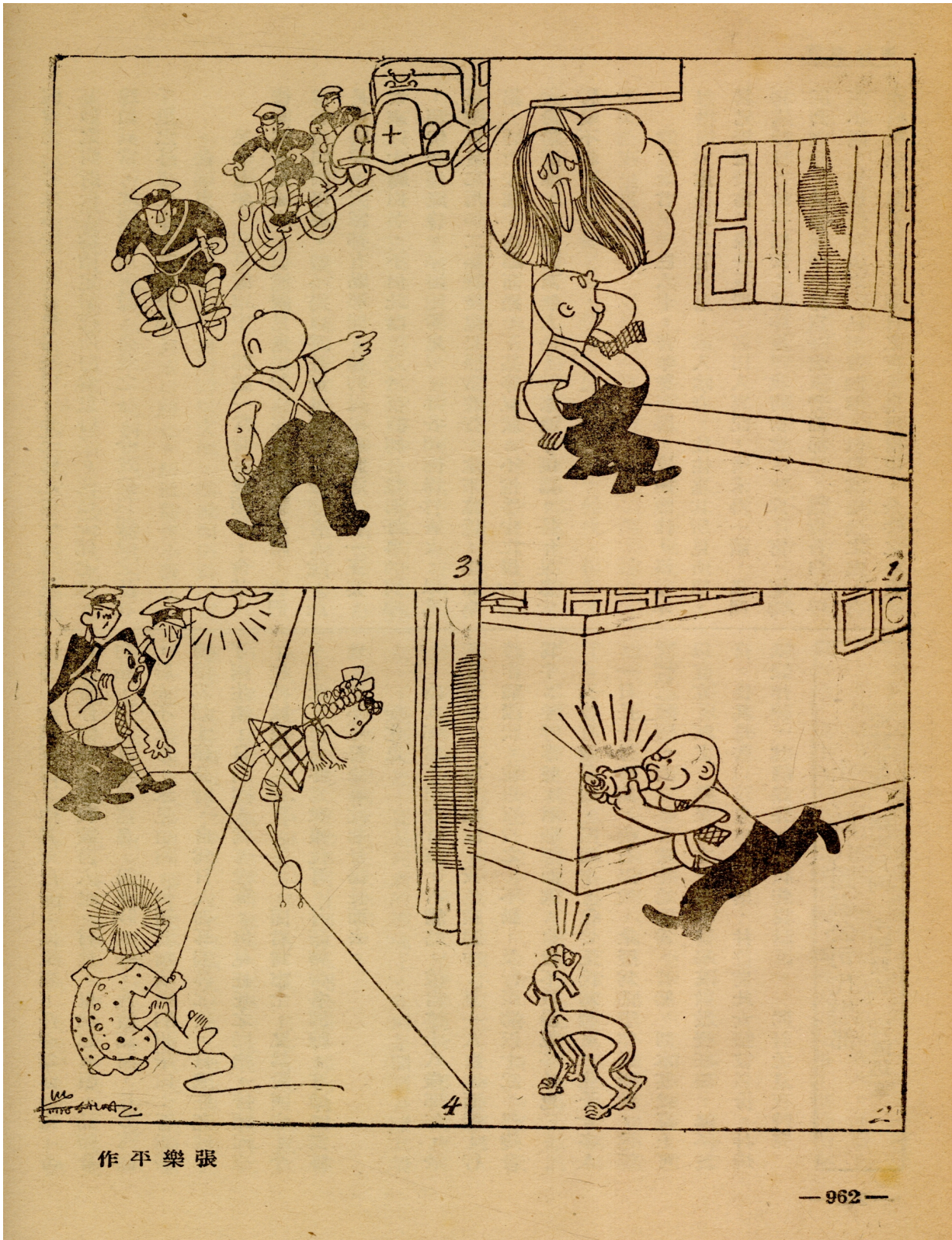
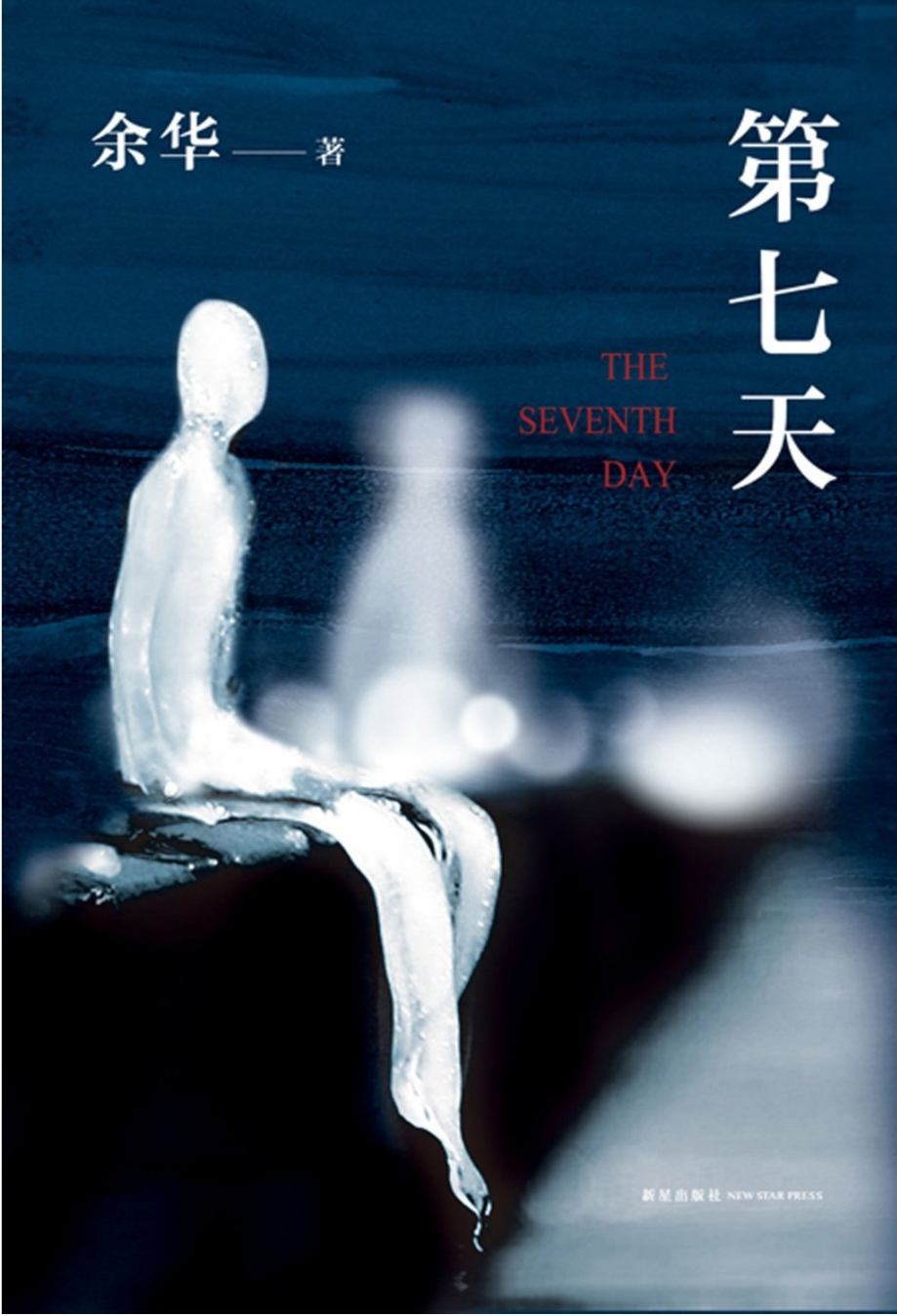


Illustration 6: Book cover of “The Seventh Day” by Yu Hua



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